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The Indexer Wishlist or, What Indexers Wish Their Clients Knew About Indexing

1. Yes, indexers really do read the entire text when they index a book. Indexes are not written by a keyword software program but by indexers who read the text and select appropriate terms to write an index that accurately reflects the author's concepts, themes, and message.
2. Indexers prefer receiving .pdf with single pages instead of 2-page spreads. The 2-page spreads result in a very small font making it difficult for the indexer to read either the screen display, or page proof if the indexer works from printed out page proofs.
3. Another issue related to the .pdf is making sure that the Adobe Reader display of the .pdf matches the actual page number of the page. When an indexer is working from the .pdf screen display, not having accurate page references displayed may impact the accuracy of the index.
4. Indexers want clients to know how important keeping to the schedule is to indexers. It is not unusual for indexers to be scheduled for several different indexing projects during the same month. When the indexing schedule slips (a delay in the delivery of the .pdf to the indexer) it can cause a domino effect impacting the indexer's ability to fulfill their other indexing project obligations. In addition, there are times when an indexer has turned down a second project that would have overlapped the schedule of the first project. If the first project is delayed, that may leave the indexer with no work for a significant amount of time. Either way, keeping to the schedule is an important aspect of the indexing project.
5. Indexers often wish that authors had a better understanding of how cross-references function. Editors usually do have an understanding of cross-references but that is not always the case for authors. Indexers have reported being asked to either delete necessary cross-references or to add cross-references that are either unnecessary or even incorrect. For example, adding a

cross-reference between two main headings when one of the main headings already includes the second main heading information as a subheading making a cross-reference redundant.

6. Indexers also wish that both editors and authors had a better understanding of what indexing software can and cannot do. Indexing software can work miracles but there are limitations. Take the repagination of an index as an example of one such limitation. Indexing software can be configured to accommodate a reflow of complete pages, to automatically increase or decrease the corresponding index page references to pages that have been either added or deleted from the text. However, if the reflow is a partial page shift, instead of a complete page shift, then an index repagination becomes a considerably more complicated and time-consuming task. Even a complete page reflow will require some extra work on the part of the indexer, but a partial-page reflow will likely result in additional time and work and may even significantly delay the delivery of the index. It is helpful if the client understands the possible consequences of a reflow and tries to avoid or at least minimize them as much as possible. Repagination is also the reason that indexers prefer to wait on the second pass .pdf if there is any possibility of a reflow of the first pass .pdf.
7. Understand how an author's word list is best used by the indexer. A word list can help the indexer to know what is important to the author, and using it as a guide can be helpful. However, being asked to follow the word list exactly or, even worse, just to supply the page references to the terms instead of indexing the text, can quickly become a barrier to delivering a high-quality index to the client. Not every word or phrase in a word list is equally appropriate to use in an index. As just one example, I've had clients ask me to use adverbs as main headings instead of nouns, noun phrases, or gerunds as a main heading. Along with that, adding page references to an existing index, whether it be one provided by the author or updating an existing index, can easily be four or five times the work as just writing a new index would take. Surprisingly, I've had editors and authors assume that just supplying page references is a much easier task than writing a new index. I've even been asked to give a discount "because it will be easier than writing an index," not realizing that, on the contrary, it will be significantly more work instead of being easier.
8. Realize that the indexer needs to know if there is a limited number of pages available for the index. Writing an index to fit a specified space is much easier than delivering the index to the client and only then being told that the index will have to be cut down. A good index is an integrated piece of work in which all the parts are interlinked so it is not just a question of

chopping out a few entries or reducing the number of locators. Having to cut an index after the fact can easily impact the quality of the index and is to be avoided whenever possible.

9. Understand what is, and what is not, a realistic index due date. There are times when there will be an unavoidable rush schedule and the indexer is free to either accept or decline the project. But making an arrangement for one schedule, and then drastically shortening the turnaround time, creates a difficult situation for everyone. Offering a rush fee for a very tight indexing schedule is always appreciated by the indexer.
10. Indexers like to receive the preliminary pages ("prelims"), also called front matter, as well as the back matter in addition to the body of the text. Having the entire book, even those sections not usually included in the index, can provide the indexer with valuable insights into the author's message and that will facilitate the indexer's ability to write a better index.
11. Know what sections of the book are, and are not, customarily included in the index. The list of what is traditionally excluded from the index includes the glossary, appendices, reference pages, the author and title citations from the footnotes and endnotes (though the conceptual information from both are included in the index), and the Roman numeral page references..

It is true that indexers are sometimes asked to include the Roman enumerated preface in the index. Some editors won't care one way or the other, However, I've observed a number of different reactions among editors who are familiar with the convention of not including Roman numeral page references in the index. Some of these editors will try to talk the author out of including the Roman numeral page references in the index. Other editors will be unhappy with the request but reluctantly tell me to go ahead and include the Roman enumerated preface in the index. I've even had a few editors decide to have the entire book repaginated in order to change the preface Roman numeral page numbers into Arabic page numbers just to avoid the issue and still accommodate the author's request.

In addition, understand how important it is to have "a meeting of the minds" not only on what is to be included in the index but also what the indexing specifications of the project are. Indexers aren't mind readers so they appreciate hearing what the client expectations are in order to write and deliver an index that meets those expectations. Don't tell an indexer to "Follow Chicago" because Chicago lists multiple format options, making such an instruction meaningless. Indexers want to provide the client with an index they will be happy to receive. So help indexers to do that by providing them with all the information they need instead of making them guess.

12. Last, but certainly not least, indexers appreciate a client who acknowledges the receipt of an index file. Confirmation that the index file and invoice have been received signals the successful conclusion of the project. This is the kind of consideration that should be practiced by both the indexer and client. Mutual courtesy is never out of place and contributes to a positive experience for everyone.