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## From the editor:

Happy New Millennium to all of you. It's exciting to think we are entering our third year as a special interest group. To celebrate, we have a short article on our group, collated from responses to an e-mail survey. This should give you a picture of your colleagues in this group and what their interests and indexing lives are like.

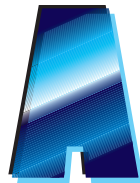
We also have an article detailing the NISO thesaurus workshop and Cisco's need for controlled languages by Ruthanne Lowe. Seth Maislin reviews IXgen for FrameMaker users, and Bill Graham, our events editor, lets you know how you can find out about indexing events in-between issues in this month's Q & A. Bill puts a lot of time into his events listings for us each issue, and does a great job.

News on a new indexing book, the results of the first telephone seminar, and news on upcoming meetings are also inside.

May your indexes always compile!

Jan C. Wright

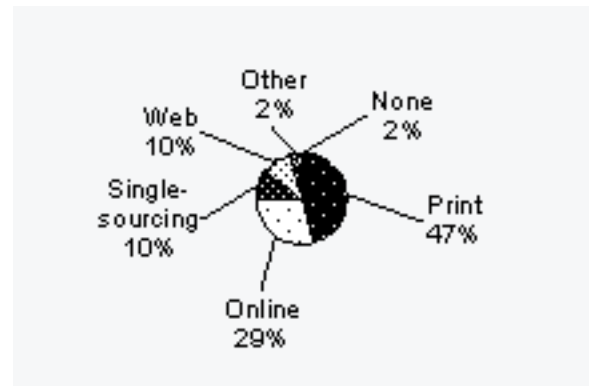
by Jan C. Wright



## snapshot of the Indexing SIG at the millennium

As Y2K was approaching last year, I thought it would be intriguing to get to know more about our SIG members, what they are up to, and what they want to know next. Twenty-eight people responded to the online survey, and thanks to them, we have a snapshot of what our group is like as we turn the century. I should warn you, this was a highly unscientific survey, so we can only draw casual conclusions. But the casual conclusions had some surprises and some very common-sense results.

The surprising results are how many folks are primarily doing print indexing still. Here are the results of what people primarily do:



|                      |                                              |
|----------------------|----------------------------------------------|
| Print Indexing       | 22                                           |
| Online Help Indexing | 14                                           |
| Single-sourcing      | 5                                            |
| Web Indexing         | 5                                            |
| Other                | 1 (online help not based on Microsoft tools) |
| None                 | 1                                            |

So nearly half the people in the group are still focusing on print indexing very heavily, with online help coming in second. Only 10% of the group are worried primarily about single-sourcing, and another 10% about Web-based indexing. I was expecting to see a bit more focus on single-sourcing myself, and a bit more on Web-based indexing.

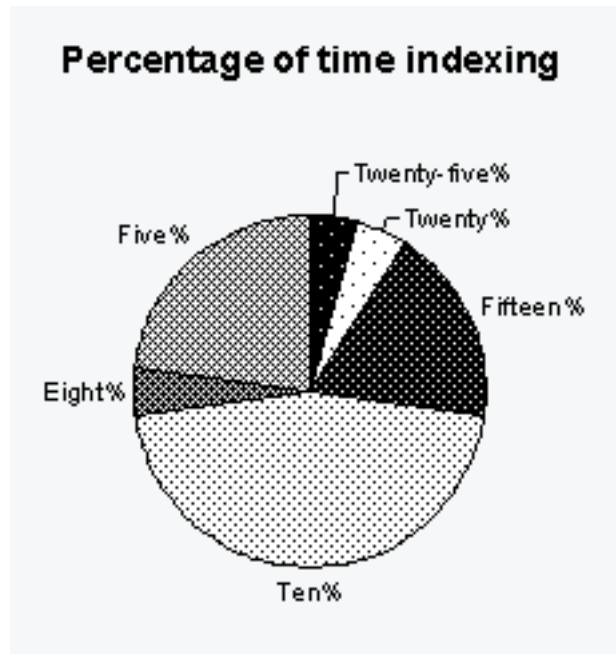
In terms of how much time the group is spending on indexing, we have two types of people in the group, as these time breakdowns show.

| 0-25% | 26-50% | 51-75% | 76-100% |
|-------|--------|--------|---------|
| 23    | 3      | 0      | 4       |

This adds up to more than 28, because one person in the 26–50% group is duplicated in there because he or she is planning to increase to a higher amount of time spent indexing. I think we can safely say the 4 people in the 76–100% group are professional indexers, who do nothing else but index. Subtracting them, most members of the group are spending somewhere between 0–25% of their time indexing, and the average amount of time is 13% of work time. This is an interesting result, when you think that a good print index for a medium-depth manual should run 8–10% of the book, and usually take about 8–10% of the total time of the project to create.

The actual breakdown of time looks like the accompanying chart:

So nearly half the people in the group are spending ten percent of their time indexing, matching the amount of time it usually takes to prepare a good index for a dense-ish manual. (This does NOT mean that people spending less time are not producing good indexes—the amount of time it takes is based on the level of material, the tools and how difficult they are to use, and other constraints, such as single-sourcing.)



Also interesting were the results of what people wanted to learn next to help with indexing:

|                          |   |                            |   |
|--------------------------|---|----------------------------|---|
| Basic course in indexing | 9 | Java or JavaScript         | 2 |
| Web site indexing        | 7 | Search engine technologies | 2 |
| Online help indexing     | 5 | Cindex                     | 1 |
| XML                      | 4 | Converting print to online | 1 |
| IXGen                    | 3 | FrameMaker                 | 1 |
| Adobe Acrobat techniques | 2 | Interleaf techniques       | 1 |
| Embedded indexing        | 2 | Web-based usability        | 1 |
| HTMLHelp                 | 2 | Don't know                 | 1 |
| HTMLIndexer              | 2 |                            |   |

This shows a continuing need for basic indexing courses geared toward technical writing, as well as help with new tools. This is not surprising. It also shows the immense variety of techniques and technologies that technical indexing now calls into play. None of us are masters at all of these techniques and tools, not even the professional indexers on the list. For instance, I marked off XML, Adobe Acrobat techniques, Java, and search engine technologies as things I need to learn more about. How can we keep up with all of these tools and issues? Hopefully, sharing information in the SIG, going to training sessions at the annual meeting, asking questions on the listserv, and keeping usable articles flowing into the newsletter will help us all out. We all can't be masters of these techniques, but through the SIG, we should be able to find a master if we need one.

Overall, we can casually say that even though it is part-time for most of us in the SIG, technical indexing asks for a lot of tool sophistication, usability knowledge, and additional learning to keep us making good indexes for our materials. Thanks to everyone who responded!

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