

Chapter 1

Index Ignorance—A Sorry Fact

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Lots of literate people don't know or care about good indexing. You can probably confirm this from your own experience. How many times have you played a reluctant role in this scenario:

Making conversation, showing interest while looking toward the tray of hors d'oeuvres: "And what do you do for a living?"

Guardedly, tinged with apology: "I'm a freelance indexer."

Long, mini-epiphanic pause and then: "I never realized somebody actually wrote those! I always thought a computer probably did it."

Or have you ever discussed an index with a publisher and heard, "Can you have it ready by the weekend?" or "Can't you do it for less?" or worse, "We can't afford an index."

Or have you ever asked an editor of a newspaper's book review section why they never review the indexes as well as the books? I have been told, "Because we assume every serious book has one."

Or have you ever discussed indexing with a writer and heard, "I'll just run a computer program to do the index," or, "I have an office assistant, and he can do it from a list of words I'll give him."

UNINFORMED ATTITUDES

I believe most indexers would agree that we would benefit from an improved public perception of our profession. The writers of books, the producers of books, and the users of books sometimes demonstrate an uninformed or dismissive attitude toward the index. Some publishers and authors believe that anybody can index. This is borne out by the number of publishing houses and companies producing technical manuals that assign indexing to existing production personnel, who are qualified neither by training nor aptitude for the work. Authors will often do their own indexes thinking they know the material better than anyone,

although they have no instruction or experience in how to create cross-references or structure an index.

The general public is not sufficiently aware of the value of a good index to non-fiction reading pleasure. If readers don't value a good index, they won't demand it. Book reviewers won't comment on indexes when reviewing books. If neither the book-buying reader nor reviewers demand good indexes, neither will publishers. And if publishers continue to cut budgetary corners, indexers will inevitably lose. As an example, *Going Rogue* by Sarah Palin was published in 2009 without an index. Here is the first Republican woman candidate for vice-president writing about her experiences. This work has historical value for the future, yet research in it will be sorely impeded by the lack of an index. And what were the reasons given by the publisher for not including an index? Time. It would hold up the book's publication to wait for an index. Yet a creditable index could have been completed in three days while the book was being proofread or while the final pages were being checked for release. This non-excuse has to be exposed—or is the publisher just trying to save money on a book that is destined to sell in the millions of dollars?

If the industry does not respect indexing, it won't respect its academic professionals who teach, research, and write on the subject.

Does anybody doubt that we need some PR?

WHAT IS PR?

Let's reiterate what public relations, or "PR," is supposed to achieve: creation of favorable public opinion.

How does PR work? PR activities presuppose either that the public has an attitude that needs changing or that it has no attitude, but that either way, the public's attitude can be altered in ways that favor the subject and that altering attitudes will alter behavior. It's been proven many times that attitudes can be altered through favorable publicity.

Specifically, PR-minded indexers believe that the attitude of the public (i.e., readers, writers, publishers) toward indexing and indexers is frequently uninformed and dismissive; that if they knew better they would insist on better indexes; that if they did so, we would have more and better-paid work. Seems quite simple and straightforward—and a goal worth pursuing.

ASI INTO THE BREACH

What have we been doing in pursuit of this goal? The American Society for Indexing (ASI) works to bring the attention of the reading/writing/publishing public to our role. It offers information about the organization itself, indexing, how to find indexers, what a good index is, and indexing software. Its mission? To enhance

the image of indexing and of indexers; to promote a desire for good indexes on the part of the reading public, writers, and publishers; and to make clear how a good index adds to the usability and continued value of a publication.

ASI has accomplished a lot despite its small size, through the volunteer efforts of its members.

WANT TO HELP?

ASI encourages you to get involved in the campaign. Here are some ideas that you can use in your area, on your own behalf, to spread the awareness of ASI and of the value of professional indexing:

- Write an article for a writers' or publishers' magazine.
- Write a grant that will get ASI funding for public awareness of an indexing campaign in the nation's schools and libraries.
- Think up a nifty topic for a panel discussion on indexing at some other society's convention.
- Perhaps your local newspaper will welcome the idea of writing about you and your business. Remember how unique indexers are! There are probably not more than 1,500 of us in all of the U.S. It is likely that you may be the only one in your town. Recently the *Cape Gazette* in Rehoboth Beach, Delaware, published an article on an indexer living there, and the reaction the indexer received was astonishing. Many inquiries asked for more information on indexing, about purchasing ASI/ITI publications, or about indexing books at their local library.

Following are a few organizations that can be targeted. They're mainly publishers and groups that harbor writers. These organizations have newsletters you could write for, national conventions you could attend with your business card and ASI brochures, or local chapter meetings where you could offer to speak:

- American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS; www.aaas.org)
- American Association for State and Local History (AASLH; www.aaslh.org)
- American Medical Writers Association (AMWA; www.amwa.org)
- American Society for Information Science & Technology (ASIS&T; www.asis.org)

- ASIS&T Special Interest Group/Classification Research (ASIS&T SIG/CR; www.asis.org/SIG/cr.html)
- Association of American Publishers (AAP; www.publishers.org)
- Association of American University Presses (AAUP; www.aaupnet.org)
- Association for Computing Machinery's Special Interest Group on Design of Communication (ACM-SIGDOC; www.sigdoc.org)
- Bookbuilders West (www.bookbuilders.org/wordpress)
- *Chronicle of Higher Education* (chronicle.com)
- Editorial Freelancers Association (EFA; www.the-efa.org)
- Education Writers Association (EWA; www.ewa.org)
- Independent Book Publishers Association (IBPA; www.ibpa-online.org)
- National Federation of Advanced Information Services (NFAIS; www.nfaiss.org)
- Society of Scholarly Publishing (SSP; www.sspnet.org)
- Society for Technical Communication (STC; www.stc.org)
- Special Libraries Association (SLA; www.sla.org)
- Text and Academic Authors Association (TAA; www.taaonline.net)
- Women in Scholarly Publishing (WISP; www.womeninscholarlypublishing.org)
- Women's National Book Association (WNBA; www.wnba-books.org)
- *Writer's Digest* (www.writersdigest.com)

It's easy to find more organizations. At your local library, ask the reference librarian to get you their copy of the *Encyclopedia of Associations*. In Google, search for book publisher associations or information organizations.

In newsletters of many organizations, you'll see an example of the sort of opportunity that could be promising: calls for participation or papers to be submitted for consideration for presentation at their annual meetings. (Any volunteers to design a panel discussion on what makes a good index?)

If you are a member of any of these groups, or know someone who is, and would be interested in finding a way for ASI to break in with some benign PR for little

money, please contact the president of ASI, care of info@asindexing.org. Ideal vehicles are articles for the association newsletters or offers of speakers at local meetings (program chairpersons are always hungry for speakers). It's fun and worthwhile for ASI and for the individual who promotes the value of good indexing.

