The future of indexes in e-books

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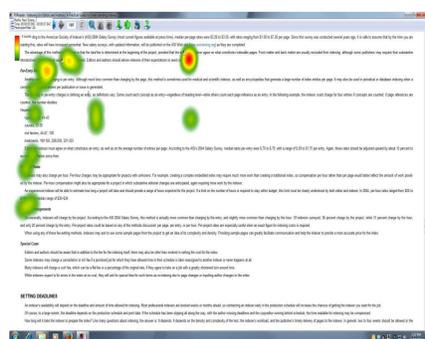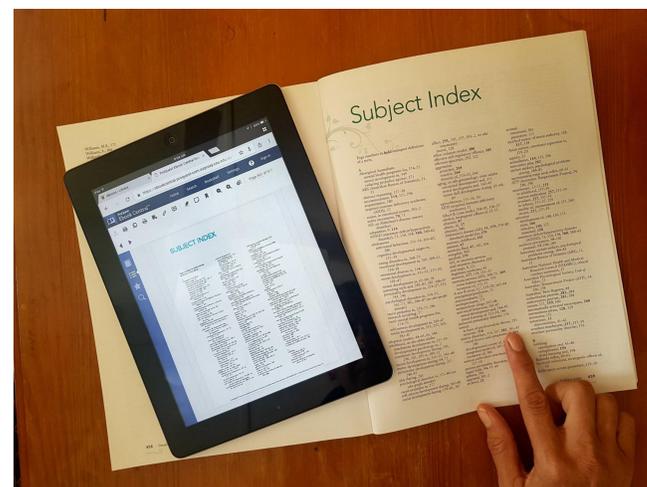Charles Sturt University

Introduction

Indexes are evolving to fit the e-book format – and they are moving beyond the page. For example, book indexes have traditionally used page numbers, but in e-books, indexes can be hyperlinked to other places in the text.
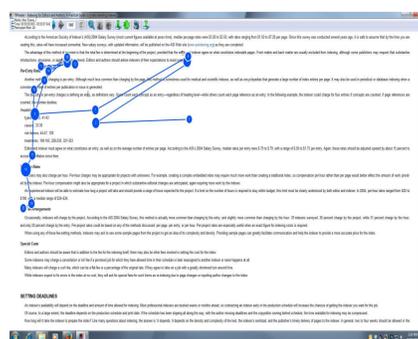

My research

My PhD research is focused on new ways of creating and presenting e-book indexes. It is firmly grounded in my professional practice as an indexer.

I am creating prototypes of e-book indexes with hyperlinked indexes and investigating how readers respond to them. My research is conducted using eye tracking equipment and interviews in the Digital Library Usability Lab at Charles Sturt University in Wagga Wagga.

The e-book prototypes contain indexes that are linked to various levels in the text, such as the page, paragraph or line level. While participants are using the e-book indexes, the eye tracking equipment records where they are looking in the index and in the text of the book. I then playback the recording for participants and ask them to describe what they were doing and thinking while using the indexes. My aim is to investigate how readers make sense of these hyperlinked indexes and discover how they would like to use indexes in e-books.

Heat map collected with eye tracking equipment

Gaze plot collected with eye tracking equipment

I am recruiting staff and students at Charles Sturt University. This population is likely to be using e-books because of the university library's e-preferred collection policy, which encourages purchase of electronic versions of material (including e-books) in preference to print or hard copy. They are also likely to use nonfiction books and academic textbooks, which contain indexes. I recently completed a pilot study with a small number of participants, so results are limited at this stage. Data collection with up to 30 participants will commence shortly and full results will be reported within the next few years.

What does this mean for editors?

Editors should be aware that in the future e-book indexes may look and act differently. Professional indexers have the tools and expertise to create them. Indexing societies, such as the Australian and New Zealand Society of Indexers, can provide further information. You can also find more indexing research in *The Indexer: The International Journal of Indexing*.

Want to learn more?

Join the guided poster presentation at 1:15 on Friday or come to my presentation on Friday at 2:30 in Ballroom 3.

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