of objective assessment and developmental editing process or processes.

A further very important issue is the question of what editing is being applied or should be applied to ebooks. There are various sites online that purport to offer ebook publishing, and which also offer editing among other things. Although there are a few Australian-based sites, by far the greater number are American. Let's take Victory eSolutions. "Publish your ideas with Victory eSolutions today," it shouts. Their ebook editing service meanwhile consists of this: "When you submit your manuscript, it will be proofread and vetted for grammatical and spelling accuracy…" This means they will use the standard form of the American sentence, subject, verb, object, run the US spellcheck, and that will be it.

> Editors need to spell out the value they add to authors' work, to publishers' fortunes, and the contribution they make to our literary culture.

The eBook Kit, on the other hand, is a much more expansive operation. It has ten steps to author one ebook. And it also has much rhetoric about solutions and remarkable ease and affordability, and so on. "Writing is a powerful tool when we're doing fast thinking…" After a big lecture about all that, we get to Step 6: "[Step 6] is a step we all associate with authoring an ebook – The Writing! In reality this step is merely 1 of the 10 … Although this step may be the most enjoyable it does require a myriad of decisions by you,

the author. You must consider such things as font size and style. [There are] header and footer considerations. Your software, the length of the eBook, the research that needs to be done, the links that you are going to use."

And then there's Step 7, the editing, which is we are told: "By far the most time consuming as any of you may have written before will attest. When you walk in to be published you want it to be as perfect as possible in so many ways, not just spelling and grammar. Such things as visual appeal and use of white space on the page. Make sure you have plenty of friends to help you with this step."

As the editing is "the most time consuming step in the entire process," this ebook site suggests you use your friends to get around the problem. This online ebook editing facility promotes itself as saving you money and how outsourcing your ebook – even the writing of it – can save you money… "The fact that you're trusting your ebook to a skilled writer can save you money. It's confusing to many people. Most people, when you employ an individual to complete work for you is automatically detracting from your profit margin."

So this "service" appears to be about using a paid-for system to produce money for anyone who wants to cash in on 'writing' under the banner of ebooks.

Let's not mince words: preying on the gullible like this represents a kind of racketeering. And we do have local examples that I'm not at liberty to name. Such operations need to be exposed. Furthermore, I'm convinced that qualified, professional Australian editors need to advocate much more on their own behalf. Whatever else editors do, I would argue they need to spell out at every opportunity the value they add to authors' work, to publishers' fortunes, and the tremendous contribution they make in the maintenance of our literary and broader culture.

writers online
by Jon Jeremy

One ebook forum to rule them all

With the growth of interest in – and revenue from – ebooks which is currently occurring, it's hard for novices to know where to begin. How do you find out what you need to know about ebook formats, reading hardware, distributors, publishers, legal actions and contract options?

Luckily, the free TeleRead blog is around to answer your questions. Founded by David Rothman in 1992, TeleRead has been reporting the big issues in the epublishing industry since almost before there was one. David himself is a tireless crusader for 'well-stocked national digital library systems' and left the blog in 2010 to explore other ways to achieve his goal, but his successors, Paul Biba and Chris Meadows, and their troop of contributors, keep the TeleRead pot boiling.

TeleRead rarely publishes original articles – though when it does they are always worth reading. But it collects and comments on material from across the electronic and traditional publishing industries, as well as related items. Right now, for instance, there are TeleRead posts up about: the copyright troll company Righthaven; Wattpad, 'the world's most popular ebook community'; the economics of ereaders; an article about royalties in The Bookseller; and a new searchable archive of eighteenth-century ebooks from the University of Michigan Library.

You can also sign up to complete a short survey, and download an 8-page White Paper on digital publishing. Everything on TeleRead is archived and searchable by date, by topic and by author, and related posts are linked under each current post, so you can track back through the history of an issue. Writers with an interest in understanding ebooks and how the industry works should keep an eye on TeleRead; the address is www.teleread.com.

Among other forums, the Yahoo ebook-community group has been around since 1999 as a more personal platform where people can thrash out questions and argue their cases. Traffic is fairly light, averaging one or two messages a day, but there are occasional fire-fights about contentious issues like copyright restrictions. All postings made since 1999 are searchable via the site, though there is no topic tagging. The major posters are knowledgeable and articulate, and now and again they get a scoop on TeleRead: groups.yahoo.com/group/ebook-community.

For a more personal take on the ebook scene from a writer and practitioner, try Liz Castro's blog, 'Pigs, Gourds and Wikis' (www.pigsgourdsandwikis.com). Liz spends a lot of time on technical details such as embedding fonts and reporting on conferences, and – unlike some others – she keeps her blog up to date.

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Linux and the indexer – a note

Jonathan Jermey

Jon Jermey explains what Linux is, why it is generating so much interest, and what it can and cannot do for indexers, his conclusion being that if indexers want Linux-based indexing software then the best way to get it is to make a lot of noise.

'Linux' is a generic name for a large, diverse and ever-growing family of computer operating systems based around a common core or 'kernel' of code. The basic Linux kernel was created in the early 1990s by Linus Torvalds in Finland, and he has been responsible for its development ever since, now assisted by a team of programmers. Meanwhile, volunteers and in-house developers all over the world have used Linux as a basis for developing their own applications and systems. Although originally intended for 'back-end' use by web hosts or number-crunching database systems, over the last few years Linux has acquired a user-friendly front end and begun to appear on increasing numbers of desktop computers, plus other devices like mobile phones and PDAs.

The most popular current version of Linux, Ubuntu, is directly comparable in power and ease of use with both Windows Vista and the Macintosh operating system. Non-technical users will notice very little difference in shifting from Windows to Ubuntu. The main difference between Linux and Windows is a philosophical one: nearly all Linux software is developed and improved by volunteers and released for free, for anyone to copy and modify if they want to. There are a small number of specialized technical programs which require payment, but ordinary users will find they can do everything they need on their PCs – word processing, spreadsheets, graphics and multimedia manipulation – with a standard free package downloaded from the Ubuntu website. And the openness of Linux development means that its capabilities grow and improve at a phenomenal rate. This rapid development, and particularly the arrival of 'Live' Linux CDs, which allow users to try Linux out without making potentially risky changes to their hard disk, is generating a tremendous amount of interest around the world.

Unfortunately – as far as I can tell – there is no native Linux indexing software. Linux users like myself who want to produce A–Z indexes are not yet numerous and vocal enough to demand developer attention; so until that happens we have to find other ways to work. Here are some of the options available to indexers who want to use Linux:

- Use a spreadsheet program like OpenOffice Calc – an Excel 'clone' which comes as part of the free standard package in Ubuntu and many other Linux variants. (OpenOffice is available for Windows too).
- Use a database package. OpenOffice has its own database system called Base, but I prefer the more user-friendly Glom system. Both are available as free downloads.
- Some programs designed for Windows can be run on Linux systems using intermediary software like the free Wine program or the slightly more powerful $US40 CrossOver package. I have had some success running SKY Index like this but I was unable to use keyboard macros, and the screen display was unstable. The CINDEX demo program had similar problems.
- Any Windows program can be run on a Linux system by installing a 'virtualized' copy of Windows that runs in its own self-contained environment. Windows then 'thinks' it has a computer to itself, but it is actually running in a window inside Linux. This requires a (free) Linux virtualization program like Qemu or VirtualBox; and of course the user will also need a (non-free) copy of Windows to install in the virtual environment. I have successfully run many Windows programs, including SKY Index, in this way. Modern virtualization software allows Windows and Linux to communicate via a network or shared directory, and the only drawback – apart from a slight loss of speed – is that the user needs to jump out of the Windows environment from time to time in order to do backups, check mail or print. This transition only takes a couple of keystrokes, however. One can also reverse the procedure, and have a virtualized copy of Linux running within Windows.
- As a last resort, the user who needs a 'real' installation of Windows can still have access to Linux by setting up a dual-boot system, where the computer starts up in one or the other depending on a menu that appears at boot time. In the past this usually required the hard disk to be divided up between the two systems, but it is now possible to run Linux from an external hard drive or even a USB stick, making it easy to carry your whole operating system around in your pocket. And because Linux software is free and not copy-protected, you can legally make one copy for work and one for home, or give a complete copy of your system to a friend or neighbour as a backup.

Finally, new Linux programs get written when enough people demand them. If indexers want Linux-based indexing software, then the best way to get it is to make a lot of noise. Badger your programming friends. Nag indexers' mailing lists. Join your local Linux Users' Group. Volunteer for beta testing. If even one good programmer decides it's a worthwhile challenge, then everyone can benefit from the results. Linux is always a Work in Progress.

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misses something critical about authors: that they sacrifice or forego so as to make a valuable investment, and that investment is in themselves.

Other individuals, of course, can and do subsidise themselves, commonly for a period of training, such as the time it takes to do a degree. During that time they accept less regular or lower pay so they can prepare themselves for their working futures. But an author's 'development phase' continues through their working life. It is through this commitment to a personal investment and reinvestment that authors not only uphold cultural, intellectual and a host of other values, but also deliver particular benefits to the broader community.

Authors' efforts are generally rewarded after periods of research and preparation, the rewards typically reflected as 'spikes' in their earnings when they achieve publication. But the non-earning periods are, as we know too well, often very difficult to deal with. It does not help to think of these as 'loss' periods or periods of idleness.

It is past time that Australia paid attention and embarked on serious reform of the tax system as it affects authors and other artists. If two pre-conditions for a 'clever' or 'smart' country are an education system that works and a culture that values creativity, an enabling tax system must be considered a third. There are some immediate and useful steps that could be taken, such as exempting literary awards, prizes and grants from taxation. The ASA has campaigned for this and continues to do so. But greater benefits will come through a more imaginative approach to authors and artists' earnings and taxation in Commonwealth tax policy.

Why not, for example, a tax-free, 'cultural investment' measure, with a payback system attached? One perhaps where the author pays no tax on and during the research and writing of a designated, accepted project as a component part of their overall income – even where the project has drawn income by way of an advance – then later pays some minimal tax proportion if a publication advance is earned out.

Another more general tool, also canvassed by Ken Henry, is that of 'a much higher tax-free threshold and a flat or rising rate scale. This would make the system easier to understand by removing the need for a number of tax offsets…' There are various other ideas and possibilities in relation to tax, but not the space to raise or explore them here. What we can say, however, is that the ASA will be reinvigorating its campaign for tax relief for authors and illustrators, and will be working with other interested parties and organisations to carry the case to Canberra. In the meantime, we are interested to hear your views.

writers|online

CATCHING SOME ZS: ONLINE COLLABORATION TOOLS

Jon Jermey

Writing collaborations can involve any number of authors from two to ten thousand, and an online component can range from emailing documents back and forth up to establishing sophisticated project-management websites. Here are some tools to make collaboration a little easier.

Cloud storage: Zumodrive and friends. Zumodrive (www. zumodrive.com) is one of many applications that allow documents to be stored 'in the cloud' – i.e. on the Internet – quickly and easily. Install Zumodrive on your computer, supply a password and a username, and a new 'disk' will appear in your file manager. Any files saved to that disk are copied to the web while you work. When your collaborators set up Zumodrive on their computers with the same account details, they link to the same files. All users of that account see pop-up messages when new files are added or existing files are modified. Unlike some of its rivals, Zumodrive is free for basic accounts, simple, and user-friendly. It works on Windows, Macintosh and Linux systems.

Working online: Zoho and Google Docs. These sites store your original documents online and manage access to them – preventing the accidents which can occur when two people work on the same document at the same time. Both Zoho (www.zoho.com) and Google Docs (docs.google.com) support collaboration in online word processing, spreadsheets and presentations, so you can calculate royalties and plan your Booker acceptance speech together while you're writing the masterpiece. Having set up accounts on either site, collaborators can specify which documents are to be shared, and who with, so there's no risk of collaborator A stumbling on the tell-all biography that you're working on with collaborator B. Both sites allow you to restrict some users to read-only access, so you can invite editors or reviewers to preview your work. Zoho and Google Docs can both send backup copies to your PC, and both offer free basic accounts. Google Docs is slicker, but Zoho is a friendlier and more versatile, with many other services available.

Works in progress: the blog book. Using a blog for your joint project means formatting is easy, there is no limit on contributors, and you can get immediate feedback on the work in progress. Many free blog hosting sites exist; the best-known is probably WordPress (www.wordpress.com). Writers who want more control can set up and customise blogging software on their own websites. WordPress is available for this too, but other popular choices are the CMS (content management system) applications Joomla! (yes, it has an exclamation mark in the name) and Drupal.

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in mind Malcolm Gladwell's '10,000-Hour Rule' – if you want to become an expert in something, you'll need to invest around 10,000 hours... This rule applies both to your writing and (if you are self-publishing) to production, marketing, promotion and running a small business.

It's also important to ask yourself – do you want to see your book sold in traditional bookshops? Or is it more important to simply have your writing available – in whatever format readers want? It is perfectly fine to still love printed books!

For books with a very limited or specific audience (such as a memoir or family history), print-on-demand technology makes small runs affordable for the self-publisher. For the thriller writer digital self-publishing might be a good option – lowering the bar for entry into a highly competitive market. For the short story writer, a genre not much favoured by commercial print publishers, there may also be advantages in going digital.

Either way, the self-publishing challenge is twofold: *bringing the product to market* (i.e. printing the book or creating the ebook) and *bringing the market to the product* (i.e. telling people about it – and selling it). Research is important to any author – research as reading and understanding the work of other authors, of your genre or form. It is doubly important when entering the digital arena to do your own research and work out what is best for you in addressing these challenges.

There is little doubt that the digital platform for the delivery of books to readers is starting to work and that it will continue to be improved to the benefit of many of the more adaptive publishers, retailers and readers. What effect ebook technology and retailing will ultimately have on authors' incomes is unknown,

but there are already some visible hints and clues of the potentialities. For authors whose ebooks are taken to market by print book publishers, however, these are not entirely promising.

Nearly all the interesting remunerative models that have begun to appear are coalescing around the 'author as vertically integrated business', as a producer/distributor rather than a piece worker or 'parts supplier' to others. Continuing the effort towards the further professionalisation of Australian authorship – including a push to encourage authors to see themselves as part of 'commerce' as much as 'culture' – therefore make sense on many fronts.

As the need for print book publisher intermediaries declines in favour of more digital-only publishers, authors are in a theoretically advantageous position. However, the ease of digital publishing does not mean being visible to potential customers, let alone dictate any particular level of projected income.

Authors today are free to make their own electronic books. They are also able to enter into sales arrangements for their ebooks directly with the etailers, through Amazon and others, or indirectly through a facility such as Smashwords. But right now, while we have some spectacular individual success stories out of the US, we do not have any sales graphs or patterns to be able to say what 'typical' Australian authors are likely to be earning from their ebooks in the days ahead.

We are in a new area of risk in our activity as authors, risk which for now might be weighed up in terms of the potentialities as well as current realities. The ASA's position on digital self-publishing is to offer encouragement and caution – and also ask that you inform yourself as fully as possible before acting.

Google Earth

Most of us have seen old US TV 'specials' filmed in other countries, which feature every major tourist site, no matter how far apart they are. A US crime show filmed in Australia, for instance, might begin with a shootout at the Opera House, followed by a surfboat chase off Bondi Beach and a helicopter pursuit across the Blue Mountains. The villain gets captured on horseback at Uluru, and the hero is back in Sydney in time for dinner at Centrepoint Tower. But it's hard to imagine any screenwriter or novelist trying to get away with this in 2011. Audiences are more widely travelled these days; and they have access to Google Earth.

Google Earth (www.googleearth.com) is a free Google internet program which connects your PC to a planet-wide database of satellite images. Everywhere is included, and major cities and sites of interest are shown in detail. Google Earth connects up with Google Street View where this is available, so a user can touch down and take a visual stroll along the Via Veneto or the Eyre Highway. Tourist photographs and 3D panoramas are also linked, so a travel writer setting out her experiences of, say, Paris, can retrace her steps on a house-by-house (or restaurant-by-restaurant) basis.

The independent Google Lit Trip website (www.googlelittrips.org) collects and stores literary journeys for display on Google Earth. For instance, a user can download a Google Earth file for Mem Fox's *Possum Magic*, and track the protagonists' gastronomical tour of Australian capital cities. Classical scholars can follow the wanderings of Ulysses in the *Odyssey*, or Aenas in the *Aenid* – although Google Earth's coverage doesn't yet extend to Hell. Google Lit Trip is currently dominated by US fiction, but anyone can join and submit details for their own favourite books, including those they have written.

Period fiction writers shouldn't feel left out. Google Earth includes many historical maps and reconstructions; Ancient Rome, for instance, has been re-created in loving detail. An *archive system* allows users to backtrack to earlier satellite photos, so writers with an interest in recent history can observe the changes in Central Sydney, for instance, between its earliest images in 2000 and the most recent ones from 2011. Even science fiction writers can benefit: Google Earth also allows users to turn their view upwards instead of downwards and navigate through the stars!

Google Earth is a work in progress, and new material is pouring into it from the community all the time. Your readers will be using it to check on you, so why not beat them to it?

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