
Editorial

This is the first full issue of our journal (which has already been nicknamed ‘EP-odd’) and if you are seeing it for the first time we hope you soon pass beyond the eye-catching blue and grey cover to enjoy the four papers inside. Many of you will already know of our 24-page Pilot Issue where we set out our aims and intentions for the journal and announced that we were happy to accept papers in traditional typescript form but intended to encourage the use of *troff*, T_EX and Ventura Publisher as our three recommended authoring systems.

The Pilot Issue, as we expected, proved invaluable in sorting out many problems connected with content, typography and production methods. Some of you gleefully pointed out that the visual impact of coal-black lettering on a cobalt-blue background, as seen on the Pilot Issue front cover, could only be fully appreciated under a strong arc light. A host of other details have been corrected as well, ranging from missing grave and acute accents to completely garbled paragraphs on the copyright agreement; hawk-eyed readers will be disappointed to find that one of our Board members has had his “Electronic Receipt Book” taken away and no longer works for a “Co-operation” in downtown Palo Alto.

The contents of this first issue range very widely over the field of electronic publishing. The paper from Jon Bentley and Brian Kernighan relates to the familiar problem of producing indexes for books. Their solution, not surprisingly, is discernibly from the UNIX/software tools/*troff* viewpoint but it illustrates how well this chore can be automated by using a set of small software tools written in the *awk* language. Other attempts to tackle this problem, including the authors’ own previous experiences, tend to emerge as monolithic programs which grow ever larger and more inflexible as time wears on.

It has been remarked that many existing ‘wysiwyg’ systems are something of an evolutionary dead-end and their internal knowledge of what has been done to the document tends to be either non-existent or totally tied to some particular computer architecture. The paper by Richard Furuta, Vincent Quint and Jacques André draws on their experiences of designing structured editors to examine the problems of interactively creating a structured document and of making sure that ‘what you see’ is faithfully shadowed, behind the scenes, by a powerful abstract notion of the document’s true structure.

Those of you who have ever thought how wonderful it would be to browse around a document on your computer workstation, with the software being intelligent enough to give helpful guidance and annotations to the various sections of the document, will be intrigued by Peter Brown’s paper. In it you will find an introductory section on hypertext and hyperdocuments, for those unfamiliar with these terms, and an examination of some of the problems—not the least of which is the danger of getting utterly lost in the labyrinth of internal links.

To round things off we asked Brian Reid to write a paper for us on a topic which many people would regard as being true ‘electronic publishing’. For some time now he has

edited, and incrementally published, a cookbook of recipes, which is distributed via electronic mail and the USENET network. He has obviously enjoyed himself enormously but it is clear that the road to fully electronic dissemination of papers and documents is far from easy. It needs a sophisticated computing environment with automated database and mailer software, a comprehensive set of software support tools and full access to international computer networks—facilities which are, sadly, light-years distant from current desktop publishing capabilities.

Early in the planning of EP-odd we promised ourselves that we would, from time to time include an account of the authoring systems used in a given issue and the production difficulties encountered. We already have a prototype set of *ep* macros, for device-independent *troff*, which were adapted for the EP-odd journal style from a set originally written by Brian Kernighan and Mike Lesk for *Software Practice and Experience*. These macros were used to produce the majority of the Pilot Issue and will soon be in a form suitable for preliminary distribution to intending authors. Appropriate sets of macros and tags are in preparation for L^AT_EX and Ventura, with further details on all of these authoring systems being available from the address shown on the inside back cover.

For the papers in the present issue, the Bentley and Kernighan paper came to us written in *troff* anyway and had already made use of macros that were close to the *ep* set. Peter Brown's paper arrived having been written using *troff* with *ms* macros and needed very few adaptations. (Indeed, the *ep* macros are so superficially similar to the widely available *ms* set, that our advice to authors who urgently want to write papers for us, using *troff*, would be to use the *ms* macros, pending completion and distribution of the *ep* set.) Brian Reid's paper arrived having been authored under his own Scribe system. The task of converting the embedded Scribe commands into suitable *troff* macro calls was done at Nottingham and did not prove too troublesome, apart from the precise positioning of the displayed page seen in Figure 6 which proved a major threat to the remainder of the UK/Europe editor's sanity. To complete the story we are grateful to Richard Furuta and his co-authors for authoring their paper using T_EX and for being our guinea pigs in testing out the initial set of T_EX macros produced at Chichester. These macros are now under further development and Richard has done some useful initial work in adapting them for L^AT_EX use. We have been promised some papers using Ventura Publisher but none have arrived yet so comments on this particular authoring scheme will have to wait for a future issue.

We have now installed a database system on Macintosh machines at Nottingham and Palo Alto to keep track of the refereeing process; most of the refereeing for this issue, and some of the redrafting work, has been conducted over electronic mail. It has been quite extraordinary to see how much it can speed up the production of a paper and we were also helped by the fact that three of the four papers were sent to us in e-mail form after they had negotiated the first stage of refereeing. However, as the number of submitted papers increases we know that we cannot always indulge in the luxury of using only those referees and authors who are reachable by e-mail!

We shall try to ensure that EP-odd continues to have authoritative and stimulating articles, so if you enjoyed this issue please spread the word to your friends and colleagues and encourage them to submit a paper to us. Our next issue is scheduled for October of this year and we intend thereafter to move to a regular schedule of quarterly appearances.