
Editorial

At the start of Volume 2 of EP-odd we are still not sure how to characterise our readership. Is it computer scientists being sidetracked into the graphic arts, typographers attending crash courses in computer science or an army of lost souls whose one wish in life is to understand SGML and ODA? Whatever the answer may be it is pleasing to report a gratifying level of interest and support for the journal, which is reflected in the number of subscriptions already taken out. In response to many requests we are introducing a personal subscription rate which reflects a 25% discount on the institutional price. Full details are given on the card which is bound in at the back of this issue.

It takes time, of course, for any journal to become established and we have had our fair share of paper-flow problems. There is a traditional way of handling such difficulties and the author list in our first three issues bears witness to the good nature of those editorial board members, and their friends, who were dragooned into writing for us. By one means and another we now have a buffer of accepted papers for future issues but we would still like to see many more being submitted.

In particular, we want to see contributions from the electronic publishing industry as well as from academics. It could be the case that writing a paper for a journal seems a fearsome hurdle in comparison with writing a company report, or an article for a magazine. If this is so then a few words of guidance for all potential authors might help. Firstly, EP-odd tries to encourage its authors to adopt a lively and informal approach and not to hide behind formal language or mathematical notation unless these are essential. Writing a good paper in this style requires patience and care, not the least because the greatest difference between writing for a magazine and for a journal is that, in the latter case, the subject matter must be technical in some sense and yet of wide interest and applicability. The design decisions and the way the project was tackled must be fully justified and explained from a technical standpoint, citing appropriate references to previous work in the area. Papers which re-invent well-known techniques or which present unimplemented 'good ideas' are not likely to find favour with the referees and nor are those which are unedited transcripts of talks, devoid of section headings and references.

However, it is important not to become discouraged if the referees recommend substantial rewriting of your material before publication. All the papers which have appeared so far in EP-odd have been through some form of redrafting and in every case they were the better for it. A proper concern for the feelings of our authors would not normally allow us to describe the progress of a paper through refereeing and redrafting, but in this particular issue the Editor-in-Chief has ventured into print and for him the usual niceties need not apply. A brief account of the reshaping of his paper might help to reassure others that the refereeing process is not so terrible after all.

The two referees on this occasion had to be rather less anonymous than usual but they were chosen for their knowledge of the subject area and their proven fearlessness in the face of irate editors-authors. Both of them agreed that the initial explanation of the 'streams' mechanism was utterly incomprehensible and said so in no uncertain terms.

The ornate writing style, so carefully acquired from the novels of Sir Walter Scott and Henry James, did not go unremarked either. One of the referees, solidly grounded in the Minimalist School of Technical Writing, ringed just about every adverb in green ink, with a marginal note saying ‘Too many adverbs and qualifiers—get rid of this verbal fat’. He was quite right. The paper is better organised now, the arguments are easier to follow and the introductory sections on parallel processing have been condensed.

The eclectic nature of electronic publishing has prompted a policy of encouraging some authors to include background material in the revised form of their papers to help those readers not familiar with the issues involved. The description of parallel processing in the Brailsford and Evans paper is a case in point. Indeed, there are certain areas where a full-scale review of a topic is called for, in order to set the scene for more specialised papers in future issues. The article from David Barron, in this issue, fits nicely into the scene-setting mould. Readers in the ‘lost soul’ category alluded to in our first paragraph will be delighted by the paper’s dispassionate analysis of the merits and drawbacks of SGML, while philologists will note that the author’s use of the Scottish word ‘outwith’ was sanctioned at editorial level as being a compact and elegant way of signifying ‘outside of’ (which is what ‘without’ used to mean).

The final paper, by Duan and Morris, has some fascinating illustrations in Figure 1 which resemble X-ray diffraction spectra from crystals, but with the difference that the basic units are now typographic characters rather than atoms or molecules. This paper is an extended and rewritten version of the talk given by Bob Morris at EP88 in Nice. It is the first we have published in the area of typography and needs some mathematical knowledge for a full appreciation of its contents, but non-technical readers will soon absorb the message that it is the *position*, rather than the magnitude, of serifs, bowls, stems and so on which affects how easily different characters can be discriminated.

Finally, we would like to place on record our thanks to Sun Microsystems of Mountain View, California for the donation of one of their 3/160 systems for the editorial support of EP-odd. The machine resides at Nottingham and will be used for the archiving and retrieval of papers, previewing of PostScript output, e-mail communications with referees, dissemination of sets of macros and so on. One of its major tasks for this issue has been to calculate the percentage of adverbs in this editorial. We shall close now, quickly, quietly and discreetly, while the answer is still in single figures.