cyberText Newsletter

Making technical information understandable

Welcome!

Welcome to the 15th issue of the CyberText Newsletter - at four a year, that's nearly four years!

We have more than 250 subscribers from all corners of the globe. If you know someone who could benefit from the tips in this Newsletter, email them your copy, or get them to view the archived copies on the CyberText website then sign up to be notified when the next issue is released.

Thanks to all who have contributed their tips, idea, and stories so generously.

Happy reading!

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Keep the pedants happy!

Here's one way to keep the pedantic editing-types like me happy... (seen on a report I received)

"If you find any errors in this report, they're there for a purpose. Some people actually like looking for them and we strive to please as many people as possible. If you find any typos or grammatical errors, please send the details to me. I will reward you with a small gift – unless you find so many that I feel you deserve a large gift!"

Need to find an ABN?

If your business is in Australia and you deal with Australian companies, one of the GST rules is the need for your suppliers and customers to have an ABN. So how do you find out a company's ABN if you don't have any documentation from them that tells you?

You search the Australian Business Register website! All companies with an ABN or ACN are in their database, so it's very easy to get the details you need for invoicing. The ABR website is: http://www.abr.business.gov.au

Windows Explorer hints

Hint 1: Do you use a column (Details) view in Windows Explorer? Did you know that you can tell Windows which columns to show, and that you can rearrange the order of those columns to suit how you work? To specify which columns to display, right-click on a column heading then either choose a heading from the list, or click **More** to open the Choose Details window. This window lists all available headings, and allows you to move headings up and down (equivalent to left to right display). You can also set the width of each column.

Hint 2: When a folder in Windows Explorer is open, you can press the Backspace key to open the folder one level higher.

A "WOW!" website

These days not much on the web makes me go "Wow!" (sad, isn't it?), but I came across a site a few weeks ago that is not only impressive in its simplicity, but equally as impressive in what it does.

In essence, you can create and save a very good looking graph just by entering some of your own data. The site is part of the US National Center for Education Statistics, and here's an example graph I created in less than one minute.

Where? http://nces.ed.gov/nceskids/Graphing/
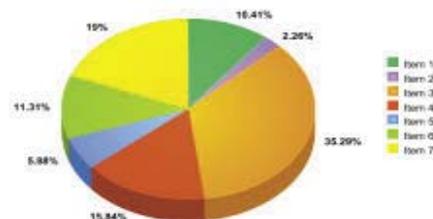
Book Recommendations

- Some friends of mine decided to write a cookbook because they were sick of seeing cookbooks by so-called 'celebrities'. They believed that some of the best cooks they knew were friends and family. So they asked us to contribute a recipe or two.

  Some months later their book, "Reality Cooks", was published - and what a great cookbook it is! In addition to some terrific (and simple) recipes, there are wine recommendations for each dish, as well as information about the contributors. And every dish has a real photo - no special lighting or glazes to change the appearance of the food. The overall layout, design, presentation, paper quality, and binding are a credit to them.

  The book is available from some bookstores and wineries, or direct from Leanne and Bronwyn for $24.95 AUD + P&P. They accept cash, cheques, and PayPal payments. Contact Lee or Bron at l8invest@bigpond.net.au.

- Yet ANOTHER Bill Bryson book... This time "A walk in the woods", the story of his time walking quite a fair section of the one of the longest walking tracks in the world, the Appalachian Trail. As always, Bryson's books are immensely readable - probably because he writes as though he is chatting to you as a friend. Although he and his friend ultimately walked less than half of the 2000+ mile Trail, it was still a mammoth effort of both mind and body.

Word 2003: Styles Task Pane

To quickly display the Styles and Formatting task pane in Word 2003, click the icon to the left of the style drop-down in the toolbar.

Cool Software!

For many years I taught high school students how to create explosion charts, spider diagrams, or whatever you want to call them. They are a great way to organise ideas, particularly at the start of a project or task. I have seen some software over the years that purports to do this for you, but in my opinion pen and paper still beat any software I'd seen for quickly generating ideas and tasks, and organising them into like categories.

But I've had to change my mind! Recently I trialled a piece of software that adds so much more value to the ideas generation process. As well as being able to add ideas on screen as quickly as with pen and paper, you can print out your diagrams, and best of all, send all the ideas and tasks in your diagram to any of Microsoft's Word (creates a fully-structured outline), Outlook (creates a separate task for each one), PowerPoint (creates slides with bullet points for the sub-tasks), and Project (creates a complete project/task list ready for you to add milestone and other data). You can also save all the information to HTML and a website is created with all links created automatically.

The templates that come with the software will have you thinking much wider than just organising your ideas! At one company I know, they use it in meetings for recording everything - attendances, action items, etc. and then send it to a Word document as Minutes. With everything projected on the screen during the meeting, no-one can argue later about the interpretation of the minute-taker.

So what's this magical piece of software? **MindManager** from MindJet Software (http://www.mindjet.com). You can download and trial it for 21 days; cost for a single user license: $229 US for X5, $349 US for X5 Pro (Note: Only the Pro version sends data to Outlook and Project).

Word: Selecting Text

I think most of us can select text using a mouse, and some of us use **CTRL+** other keys too. But did you know you can get very quick selections of text using the **F8** key? If you press **F8**, "EXT" is displayed in the status bar of your document - this means that the "extend" command is turned on (press **ESC** to turn it off).

Try this in an existing document: Place the cursor within a word in a paragraph, then press **F8** to turn on EXT. Now, press **F8** again. And again. And some more. See what happens? The first press selects the next letter; the next one, the whole word; the next, the whole sentence, then the paragraph, then the section, and by the sixth press you've selected the whole document! To shrink the selection, press **SHIFT+F8**.

PowerPoint: Turn off the Display

If you're giving a PowerPoint presentation and need to turn off the screen to shift the audience's focus to something else, use these keyboard shortcuts:

• Press **B** or a fullstop/period to turn the presentation black

• Press **W** or a comma to display a white screen (great for showing shadow animals! Just kidding...)

In both cases, press the key again to return to your presentation. Note: The letters aren't case-sensitive.

But is it really English?

This one has been around a while, but it's worthwhile repeating as it continually confirms to me that so much of our learning is through pattern recognition and assumptions based on previous patterns:

"Aoccdrnig to a rscheearch at an Elingsh uinervtisy, it deosn't mttaer in waht oredr the ltteers in a wrod are, the olny iprmoetnt tihng is taht frist and lsat ltteer is at the rghit pclae. The rset can be a toatl mses and you can sitll raed it wouthit porbelm. Tihs is bcuseae we do not raed ervey lteter by itslef but the wrod as a wlohe."

Outlook and MSN Messenger

Do you use Outlook for email and MSN Messenger for IM? Well, there are some neat features in Outlook 2003 that nicely integrate the two:

• Add a person who has emailed you to your Messenger contacts list by right-clicking on their name in the email and selecting **Add to Messenger Contacts**.

• Right-click on the sender of an email to see if they are currently online. If they are, you can then IM or phone them.

A bit of fun!

"Did you know that every keystroke you make, each graphic you view, makes your monitor screen 'cloudy'? The electrons inside the monitor move the pixels around to make the images on your screen and, eventually, pixel dust builds up in the space inside your monitor. Routine maintenance can keep the outside surface of the screen sparkling, but what about the inside?

This quick screen cleaner solves the problem, making your monitor more clear and vibrant. I had no idea a screen could be cleaned from the inside too! What a difference!"

http://mypage.bluewin.ch/screenclean/

News

WritersUA and AuthorIT: In March, I travelled to New Zealand, spending 3 days with the AuthorIT team, then flew on to the US to speak at the WritersUA Conference in Las Vegas. My session was on "Time-saving techniques using AuthorIT". It was great to catch up with friends and fellow tech writers from around the world, and to learn about some of the changes happening in our world - not least of which was the apparent 'sunsetting' of RoboHelp, the market-leading Help authoring tool for many years. A week or so after the conference, Adobe announced a buy-out of Macromedia (who currently own RoboHelp), so it will be interesting to see what happens in the Help authoring world over the next 12 months or so.