

Heather Hedden.
Indexing Specialties: Web Sites Information Today, Inc.
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176 p.



One could easily classify indexers reading this review into three groups in regard to the subject matter of this book: 1) those with a burning need or calling to go out and index websites, 2) those who think that they might want to do that if they knew more about it, and 3) those who never really want to do that but want to be better informed about that decision. I probably belong to the third group. After reading Heather's book, I am convinced that all three groups do need to at least become acquainted with what is in this book. After reading this review, I hope that you will understand to a greater degree how I came to this conclusion.

The Foreword to this book, which was written by *Seth Maislin*, contains an excellent brief review of the book. I will only steal a few main points from Seth. If you do purchase the book or just have the chance to take a look at it somewhere, read the Foreword. Unlike me, Seth belongs to the first group mentioned above. He understands the need for the indexing of websites and all sorts of other advanced methods of indexing. He likens this book to an indexer's Rosetta Stone, which will lead book indexers toward other information management topics like taxonomies, information architecture, and search tools. He also presents this book as a "unified place of reference," describing tools that are otherwise "...almost completely unknown to indexers..."

Heather Hedden states in her Introduction that the audience for the book is both experienced and novice indexers. The focus of the book is "on hyperlinked back-of-the-book style indexes for websites, intranets, or sub-sites." Heather does stick to this focus. She also discusses choice of content and term

development specific to website indexes. She also includes information on the freelance market for website indexing. I would also agree with her introductory statement that she uses a "how-to" approach. The book is written entirely by Heather in contrast to most books published for indexers by Information Today.

Just in case you are not sure exactly what a website index is, the book begins with a definition. Heather does not stray beyond this definition:

"An index is a tool to help people find specific desired information within a document or set of documents. Although originally designed for printed material, the same type of index used in books or periodicals can be applied to electronic documents or Web pages, and it can be similarly effective."

I hope that everyone reading this review already knows that there is an actual alphabetical index to the ASI website. I always thought this was specially done for just us, because we are indexers. I have had the experience of finding topics quickly through that index that I just couldn't find otherwise. If you are not familiar with that index, take a look at it. What Heather and other website indexers are proposing is that many other websites should have similar indexes, and in fact many already do, often under a label other than "index."

Heather defines up front in Chapter 1 what she means by a main entry and subentry and how those concepts differ on the Web. Chapter 1 concludes with a brief but comprehensive history of Web indexing.

In order to understand indexing on the Web, one must have a grasp of the concepts of HTML as presented in Chapter 2 of this book. Concepts include tags, metadata, and links. There is a short but extremely useful section on HTML editing software with specific details on prices and capabilities.

Chapter 3 explores HTML as it specifically relates to indexing such as the coding behind website indexes. This information is presented methodically and clearly. For instance, indenting for subentries is a known challenge in HTML because the tab feature to indent does not exist in HTML. Heather explains sev-

eral different ways to overcome this challenge including alternative formats. Chapter 3 concludes with a description of existing Web indexing software, again giving details on specific capabilities.

Chapter 4 discusses the approach of using back-of-the-book indexing software such as CINDEX, Macrex, or SKY to create Web indexes. Again she uses specific examples to show how Web indexes can actually be generated using these software packages. She also discusses the use of conversion utilities.

Chapter 5 is entirely devoted to XRefHT (pronounced “shreff”), a freeware, stand-alone Web indexing software package. This software is a little mind bending for me in that it generates an index which the indexer then modifies. I cannot admit to fully understanding all the material in this chapter. There appears to be sufficient information presented to allow an indexer new to XRefHT to fully ramp up to speed very quickly.

Chapter 6 is entirely devoted to HTML Indexer, another software package dedicated to Web indexing. Instead of being freeware, HTML Indexer is commercial software.

Chapter 7 is composed of issues peculiar to the indexing of websites.

In Chapter 8 you will find all kinds of useful advice on how to actually prepare a website index. This chapter emphasizes entry style and index format. I was fascinated by the constant contrasts in the practices of book indexing compared to website indexing. For instance, you will find six pages on creating subentries. I would disagree with Heather’s point on page 123 that one would need “to take a different approach when indexing Web sites compared to books” in regard to the initial specificity of locators. I learned a long time ago from Nancy Mulvany to always include subentries along with every main entry in a book index. The extra ones can be taken out later during editing. This practice precludes the problem of having too many undifferentiated locators at the end. Heather advocates the practice of writing entries for website indexes as specifically as possible “right from the start.” I think that is also a good practice in book indexing as well. But I wonder if this practice might vary for different subject areas.

Chapter 9 concludes the book with a realistic assessment of the market for Web indexes.

In summary, how does this book meet the

needs of my three hypothetical groups of indexers? Clearly group 1) with its “burning need” to go out and index the Web needs this book. There is simply no other comprehensive source plus the “how-to” and how to get you started. Those of you in group 2), which may well be the majority reading this review, also need to read this book since there again is no other source to assist you in learning how to index the Web. Or, more importantly for this group, there is no other source of evaluative criteria to help you determine when to jump into Web indexing.

I feel very confident in stating that even those of us in the last group who will probably never index a website need to become familiar with the information in this book. Here we can learn how to define more precisely our reasons for not seeking to venture forth into this brave new frontier. Being informed is much better than just having a vague feeling of misgiving about a particular career direction. This book will take an honored place in my rather small bookshelf of indexing reference books.

— Review by Richard Shroust 

Disclaimer:

Richard Shroust is the current Treasurer of ASI, which makes a small amount of money in the form of royalties each time this book is purchased. He has also served on the ASI Board for six years. He is now a business partner with **Seth Maislin**, who wrote the Foreword to this book. Richard has met **Heather Hedden** at ASI conferences but has unfortunately never had the chance to take any of her classes or work side by side with her.

Browne, Glenda and Jermei, Jonathan. *The Indexing Companion*. (Melbourne, Cambridge University Press, 2007) ISBN 978-0-521-68988-5, 240 p.

The Desert Island Indexing Reference

Glenda Browne and Jon Jermei’s *The Indexing Companion* is companionable indeed, if what you require in a companion is

