blue pencil

Your E-mails and the I-R-S / Many Happy Returns

By Al Borowski

Email is quickly becoming one of the bigger drains on corporate productivity and profitability.

More specifically, the ineffective, improper, and incorrect use of employee email on company computers exposes organizations to wasted time, bad press, and the possibility of legal action from seemingly innocent forms of electronic communication.

The following set of questions can help you determine your awareness of critical email issues.

1. How much time do your managers and executives waste reading or deleting email messages they don't want, need, or ask for?

2. How much time do your employees waste trying to create, understand, or respond to emails that are unclear, don't get to the point, and are poorly written?

3. How much time do employees waste reading or forwarding non-business items?

4. Is your company at risk because you do not publish or enforce a company policy or

Minutes of April Meeting

By Nancy Carpenter, Chapter Secretary

The April meeting was a joint event with the Pittsburgh Markup Language Users Group (Pittmark). Two speakers, Jeff Beal from ANSYS and Bill LeRoy from USAirways discussed why and how they use XML to create, maintain, and publish their technical documentation. Both firms maintain huge document sets and need to publish in both printed and online format. They faced the problems of cost, consistency, long-term maintenance, and timeliness and found XML to be the solution. They also acknowledge that there is a lot to learn when you use XML, which can add an order of magnitude of difficulty to good grammar and sentence structure. But for these two firms, the result has been worth the effort. Details of these talks are contained in separate articles in this issue of *Blue Pencil*.

A few definitions will aid you in understanding Jeff and Bill as you read these articles.

- SGML, or standard generalized markup language, is the parent of HTML and XML.
- HTML, or hypertext markup language, is used in most web pages to provide basic formatting. The fancier elements like navigation buttons and independent frames are written using Java script.
- XML, or extensible markup language, is developed from SGML. Its purpose is to support database management, web applications, and document publication in printed and electronic formats. It is being developed by the Worldwide Web Consortium and is reaching maturity, that is, a stage of completion like a standard software release. Many web developers predict that it will replace HTML.
- DTD, or document type definition, identifies the structure rules. Both SGML and XML allow you to maintain document structure in a DTD.
- XSL, or extensible style language, transforms XML into the format you require for your final output.
- XSL-FO, or XSL formatting object, is used to convert the text for printing.

Pittmark is dedicated to the development of XML. Membership is informal, no dues are charged. Meetings are held monthly. For more information, please contact

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company standards for employee use of your computers?

5. How many of your employees send emails to co-workers in the next cubicle or take 30 minutes to compose a message they could convey easier and more effectively in a five-minute phone call?

6. Do you know how companies can discriminate against you based on the emails you send?

7. What do you know about "Internet addiction?"

The title of this article - *Your Emails and the I-R-S / Many Happy Returns* describes what employees and employers need to know about managing and using email on company machines. I-R-S stands for Image - Results - Security.

Image
People form an image of you or your company by how well you communicate in person, on the phone, and in writing. That now includes your email messages.

Communicating via email is not the same as communicating in a chat room. It is also not the same as composing a 10-page term paper in school.

Email messages still require careful attention to spelling, punctuation, grammar, format, and tone. The tone of the message needs to be positive, personal, and professional. If you wouldn't use chat room smiley faces and abbreviations in a letter to a customer, don't use them in your emails.

How well you communicate in an e-mail tells a lot about your judgment, attitudes, and skills. If hearing your email message read on local or national news broadcasts scares you, don't hit the Send button.

Results
Most people don't get results from their emails because they do not understand one basic fact. Most people don't read emails.

Business people scan or skim through email.

For this reason, creating successful emails demands the correct approach along with specific techniques and strategies.

Three simple techniques will help you get better results from your emails.

First, use paragraphs to separate main thoughts. Avoid email messages that run on for 10 sentences, all contained in one paragraph.

To really impress your audience, keep paragraphs short. No paragraph should ever exceed five sentences. You should really strive for three-sentence paragraphs.

Second, average 15 words per sentence. Typical business writing averages between 20 and 24 words per sentence. Shorter sentences help people scan or skim emails ei-

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ther on the screen or on paper, if they choose to print them.

Third, use a powerful Subject Line and first paragraph to grab your reader's attention and keep it. The Subject Line and the email address of the person sending the message are the first two things people notice when they receive an email.

The Subject Line needs to be descriptive enough to allow readers to relate to the subject matter and distinctive enough to be found quickly and easily at a later time.

Your first paragraph, unlike the paragraphs in the body of the document, should never exceed two sentences. Think of your opening paragraph as the Executive Summary of your message. Executive Summaries usually precede a long report and give readers the purpose and scope of the report.

Your first paragraph may be all your audience ever reads. So you need to make it specific, interesting, and focused on the needs of your audience.

Security
Security becomes an issue to both employers and employees.

Employers need to understand that employee emails can become a legal nightmare. Casual statements contained in emails can become legally binding contracts. Viruses unknowingly forwarded to your clients by your employees can result in huge damage claims.

Sexist, racist, or pornographic material circulated on your company computers can result in expensive and embarrassing law suits.

Employees need to understand that emails they create belong to and are immediately available to everyone and anyone, including people outside your organization. You need to protect your security and maybe your careers.

Careers and promotions are at stake because employers can now using employee emails as a form of discrimination. Employers maintain the right and responsibility for the information created and sent on their computers. Thus, they have information immediately available to them in a way previously unavailable.

Employers can now use company e-mails to analyze the skills, attitudes and work habits of employees. The content, style, and timeliness of your emails give employers a much better picture of your communicating style, interpersonal skills, problem-solving skills, and your attitudes and approaches to co-workers, managers, and clients.

To protect yourself, never send sensitive, confidential, or personal information via email. If you do, you run the risk of having your information forwarded to people whom you may not want to see the information.

The proper, effective, and safe use of email can save time, get fantastic results, and help grow businesses and careers. To get those Happy Returns, your emails should always reflect careful attention to your I-R-S, your Image, Results, and Security.

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Author of How To Get It Right When You Write *and a new book,* Beyond E-mail Netiquette - Setting Standards For Success

People News

April

Current Chapter
158

Total STC
17,951

New Members

No new members to report

ANSYS and XML Publishing

Speaker Jeff Beal, Documentation Tool Specialist
Minutes of April STC/Pittmark Meeting

By Nancy Carpenter, Chapter Secretary

ANSYS produces simulation software for the mechanical engineering industry. The firm has a huge document set – over 8,000 printed pages in 25 books. Portions are updated and released with each new software release in both printed and online versions.

Recently ANSYS had to decide whether to conduct a massive conversion to an upgrade of their publishing tool or lose their documentation. They switched to ArborText's Epic, but to avoid having to face this decision again, they converted the text to XML. The writers still use Epic in editing, but the document set is maintained in XML.

Benefits
ANSYS has found many benefits in using XML. First, a key benefit is the separation of content from layout. Writers are free to concentrate on content.

Second, customizaton of the document is the central objective, and XML facilitates customization of document structure. The writers tag each element (such as heading, text, list, glossary term, and definition) according to its meaning. Then they define the format in the DTD. XML contains some nice flexibility that allows you to customize content. For instance, an "entity" is similar to a FrameMaker variable or a Word macro. You define a variable, such as Customer Name. Instead of typing the actual customer name in a document that will go to many customers, you use the variable Customer Name. Then for customer X, you give Customer Name the value Customer X. Another feature, "profiling," is similar to conditional text. A paragraph that is profiled can be shown in one manuscript and not shown in another.

Third, XML allows true portability, which ANSYS has achieved. In most conversions, you lose something; not in XML. Documents can be edited in any editor that can export in XML. They can be sent to be trans-

lated or printed without loss, although ANSYS has not yet been able to take advantage of this feature.

Fourth, XML makes a database of a document and describes segments with a rich variety of information. For instance, you can search for a word or phrase based on the format in which it is used (such as list or paragraph), the words that are around it, and the tags that it uses. During a recent software update, this allowed ANSYS to easily change descriptions of menu paths.

Finally, more and more software is now supporting XML. You can write in a generic editor like Notepad, but many word processing packages now produce acceptable XML. Best, however, is the stand-alone editor, since this type is the best developed and most usable. Many stand-alone editors have a preview feature so you can see the actual output and a good user interface so the writing does not feel like programming. There are good style sheets (DTDs) available for conversion to final output. ANSYS uses DocBook as their DTD. They can produce Oracle Help, JavaHelp, UNIX

ANSYS and XML Publishing

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Help, Windows Help, and HTML. They use HTML for the web-based documents. Because the documentation requires a team of writers, ANSYS uses a content management program. And some of the good support software is free or inexpensive.

Drawbacks
There are a few drawbacks to XML, foremost of which is the steep learning curve. The editing packages are not user-friendly and are fairly costly. XML is a paradigm shift from WYSIWYG (what you see is what you get) to WYSIWYM (what you see is what you mean). It requires a different way of seeing a manuscript, and here is where the learning can be difficult. The writer must learn the syntax, which involves the purpose of the tags and the context in which a tag can be used, must learn the attributes that can be applied to a tag to affect format and content, and must learn ANSYS internal usage guidelines. And because XML is not what-you-see-is-what-you-get, you cannot see what you are getting. ANSYS writers do, however, have the compiling tools on their computers so that they can check the final output periodically.

(Another possible drawback in a small company is that the editors need programming support to run the conversions and to adjust the DTD and other publishing support software. – Editor.)

Two minor difficulties are that the editors must enter the review changes, and print production is still difficult, although when XSL-FO is refined, this should become easy.

Jeff Beal is a recent graduate of Carnegie Mellon University in Computer Science. He processes all the XML documentation for ANSYS. This involves conversion to a format that the printer can accept, conversion to online format, and programming to enhance the publishing tools. He can be contacted at:

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USAirways and XML Publishing

Speaker Bill LeRoy, Manager of Flight Manual Services, Flight Technical Operations, USAirways

Minutes of April STC/Pittmark Meeting

By Nancy Carpenter, Chapter Secretary

The Flight Bag
All airlines maintain a huge set of operations manuals called the Flight Bag that has an urgent need to be timely, accurate, and easy to use. It contains all the operating instructions for the aircraft as well as information on the landing approaches and situations that could occur during the flight. Every flight crew takes the entire document set on the flight and must be able to access the correct information quickly. In addition, non-pilot users such as office workers need these manuals.

Until now, the flight bag was maintained in printed form at great expense. To give you an idea of the scope of the flight bag, USAirways maintains 12,000 sheets of information, and updates it yearly.

The airline industry has struggled with its documentation problem for years. In 1996, the Digital Display Working Group was founded with the objective of introducing electronic information technology into the cockpit. In addition, the Volpe Research Institute of the US DOT researched the human factors that affect use of digital displays in flight. Their yardstick for evaluating an electronic flight bag will be released soon.

A few airlines now use electronic flight bags on laptop computers. United plans to be paperless across the company in 5 years, and they plan to accomplish this using XML.

The Flight Operations Working Group is proposing an SGML specification for data interchange. This will coordinate well with documentation efforts.

Self Assembly of Information
The future of aviation information is self assembly of information – object oriented retrieval that produces a brief operating procedure geared specifically to the situation and predicts other information that could be needed. When the flight crew consults the flight bag, they need information on the current task and on how it affects the rest of the tasks through to landing. USAirways is evaluating classic and XML database applications to fill this need.

XML and the Electronic Flight Bag
USAirways is the first in the industry to deploy an electronic library for flight operations and, like United, will soon make it XML-based. Eventually, their flight bag will be web-based. KD Van Drie of Electra Training Systems spearheaded a task analysis for training programs that has been a key element in the success of this program and gives a robust starting point for development of self assembly of information.

USAirways and XML Publishing

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There have been several steps in USAirways' path toward XML. First, they studied the human factors research that compared the efficiency of a pilot's use of paper versus electronic versus web-based information and have decided that their final objective is to become web-based.

Next, Flight Manual Services built an interactive PDF library. They needed the documentation to be similar to the printed set so that the readers would find the new medium acceptable. Because of the keyword search and hypertext cross-references a PDF can provide, this first step made the flight bag much easier to use.

To reduce costs, they provided some of the non-pilot users with CDs. The library is now available on the Company intranet.

Next, they converted to SGML using FrameMaker+SGML. In doing so, they had to retype some old data and vowed never to do this again. They are now converting to XML using FrameMaker.

To move toward XML, Flight Manual Services did a task analysis of all tasks that are performed during a flight. They tagged the information related to each task and developed a data structure to access this information. Finally, they split the information into objects that can be maintained centrally. This reduces expensive duplication in writing and increases the consistency of structure, making the documentation easier for pilots to understand.

When the flight bag becomes web-based, USAirways plans to put a server on each airplane to ensure reliable access.

Bill LeRoy is Manager of Flight Manual Services for USAirways. He has been working on the electronic flight bag since its inception in 1996. Bill can be contacted at:

bill_leroy@usairways.com

Darlene Mullenix, Treasurer

Darlene Mullenix has volunteered to serve as Chapter Treasurer. Congratulations, Darlene, and thank you.
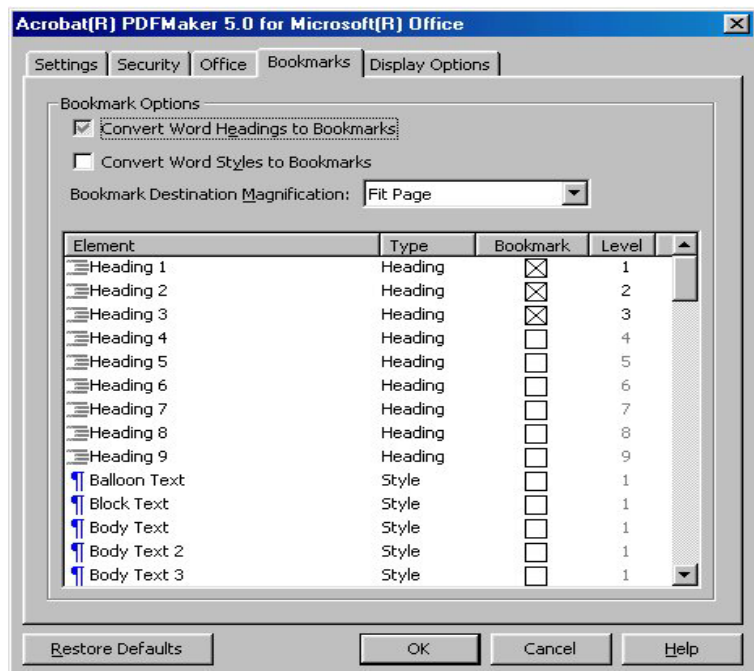
Tools and Tips: PDF Primer

By Robert P. Mohr

Turning your Word documents into PDF (Portable Document Format) files is an excellent way to share your documents with readers across a wide spectrum of operating systems and hardware platforms. Adobe's free Acrobat Reader makes it possible to read PDF files on machines running Windows, UNIX, and Apple OS. A version of the Reader is also available for handheld computers. So, how do you turn those beautifully crafted Word documents into PDF files?

The process boils down to printing the Word document to a postscript file and then "distilling" it to a PDF. Although there are a few shareware utilities and third-party services that can create PDF files for you, I prefer to use Adobe Acrobat for all of my PDF work. It automates the distillation process, integrates well with Microsoft Office, and is the best way to customize a PDF file. More information is available at www.pdfzone.com.

After you install Acrobat, you'll notice when you open Word that a 2-icon toolbar has been added. There is also an Acrobat menu option on the main menu bar. Both of these are supported by the PDFMaker suite of macros that are installed with Acrobat. (A similar toolbar and menu option is also installed in PowerPoint and Excel.) The Acrobat menu option allows you to configure the PDF output based on attributes in your Word document. For example, selecting the Change Conversion Settings option on the drop-down menu displays the Settings dialog box. Figure 1 shows the Bookmark options.


Figure 1: Bookmark options

Tools and Tips: PDF Primer

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The term Bookmark here is different from a Word bookmark. PDF bookmarks appear as dynamic table of contents entries when viewed in Acrobat Reader. They can be based on your document's heading or style structure. Clicking the Display Options tab (Figure 2) lets you control how links and bookmarks are displayed when the PDF file is opened.
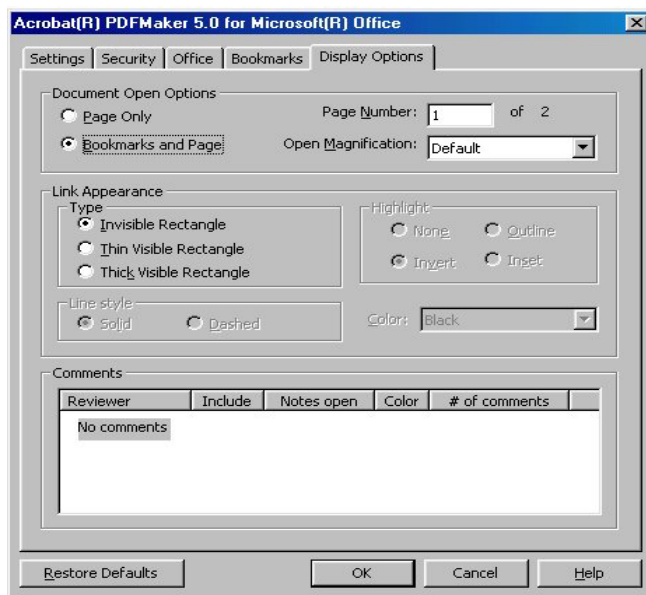
Figure 2: Display options

Once saved, the settings remain in effect until you change them. You may find a need to make changes to these on a document-by-document basis. The Settings, Security, and Office tab settings are a bit more global in scope. I set them once and haven't had a need to change them since. To generate a PDF from a Word document, simply click the Convert to Adobe PDF icon on the toolbar. PDFMaker prompts you for the PDF file's name and creates the file. If you've selected the View Result in Acrobat option from the Acrobat drop-down menu, then Acrobat is automatically called by PDFMaker and displays the new PDF.

Once the file is in Acrobat, there are a myriad of tools with which you can put the finishing touches on your PDF file. Here are just a few:

- Select File > Document Security from the main menu to protect the finished file from tampering. Using password protection, you can prevent readers from printing, copying, or altering the contents.
- Select File > Document Options to add document summary information and specify the appearance of the PDF when it is opened.
- Select one of the Insert, Delete, Extract, or Replace pages under the Document menu option to perform those operations on one or more pages. These are especially useful when compiling a single PDF file (such as a book) from several (chapter) PDF files. Use the Crop and Rotate options to alter a page's appearance.
- Add a bookmark to the Bookmarks window at any time by selecting text from the document (using the Text Select Tool icon) and pressing Ctrl+B. The bookmark entry can be further modified by right-clicking on it and altering its properties.
- Delete a bookmark by right-clicking on it and selecting Delete from the shortcut menu.

Educational Opportunities

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· Rearrange the bookmarks and change their hierarchy by clicking on a bookmark and dragging it to the new location.

You can also add several dynamic and custom effects to a PDF file:

· Pop-up notes	· Hyperlinks	· Input forms
· Graphics	· Video clips	· Javascripts
· Highlighted text		

If you want to create a PDF from an existing paper document, you'll have to scan it:

Select File > Import > Scan

When scanned, the resulting PDF is stored as an "image" rather than text. You can save the PDF as is, but it will not be searchable. In order to convert the scanned file into one that is text-based and searchable using Adobe Acrobat 5.0, you'll need to download and install the Paper Capture utility. You can obtain it at:

http://www.adobe.com/products/acrobat/pluginreg.html

After installation, a Paper Capture option appears on the Tools drop-down menu. Selecting the paper capture option invokes an optical character recognition engine that scans through the file and creates words and numbers from the image. Graphics are ignored. The accuracy of the conversion is usually very good, but you should review the contents before distributing the file.

Regardless of how you create your PDF files, or the modifications you make to them, PDF is an ideal way to distribute documents to a diverse audience.

Bob Mohr is a senior member of STC and can be reached at:
rpmohr@writemohr.com.

Spring Fling, May 31

The date is set for May 31. All we need is you.

Join us to celebrate the end of the 2001-2002 season with eating, drinking,

networking, and socializing. Details will be announced on the Pittsburgh STC Web site at:

http:www.stcpgh.org

or you can contact Darlene Mullenix at 412-288-8676.

WHEN: Friday, May 31, 2002, 6:30-8:30 pm.
WHERE: To be announced.