WinGARB: a user's view

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A user describes WinGARB from her point of view, identifying its strengths as she sees them, but also ways in which it might be improved for wider use.

Introduction

As Henk Revier has explained, WinGARB is a software programme designed with a view to the indexing of loose-leaf publications and with the needs of VOF Sewalt & Revier and their freelancers very much in mind. The new version, to go on the market within the next year or so, is likely to take some account of wider needs. In the meantime it may be helpful to have the views of somebody who has been using GARB for the last three years and WinGARB since the beginning of this year.

Technical considerations

A major attraction of the programme is that it allows several indexers to work on the same index, an important consideration in loose-leaf indexing. This is achieved by having two server bases working in tandem, the 'server database' and the 'local database'. These may be in two distinct locations (e.g. publisher and freelancer) or could both be installed on an individual PC. It is also possible to work just on the server database, as the local database is essentially a back-up for security reasons and to permit continued working should there be a problem, for example, with an Internet connection. The indexer, on opening up an index, will normally be offered the latest version of the index to work on, and will be prevented from working on an index which is already open.

The program operates under Microsoft's .NET Framework 2 and has the following installation requirements:

- fast internet connection (ADSL or cable)
- .NET Framework 2.0 with standard options
- SQL Server 2005 Express Edition with standard options
- Adobe Acrobat reader

Creating the index

When an index is opened, the programme offers the indexer six areas to choose from:

- information regarding the publication, such as name, volume number, number of supplements being modified
- number of locators (three maximum)
- format of cross-references
- level of capitalization in headings and subheadings
- names of indexer and editor
- sorting order of locators, by means of a device called a 'locator filter'.

The range of options, which reflects the particular requirements of VOF Sewalt & Revier, is somewhat limited (for example on the number of subheadings allowed). This could be a serious drawback in the wider market.

The programme can create three sorts of index, two alphabetical and one chronological. The alphabetical indexes make it possible to create multiple indexes or to index electronic material. The chronological index is particularly useful for creating tables of cases, legislation and treaties.

There is a useful filter which makes it possible to group on locators, main heading, subheading, sub-subheading, description of chronological index item, date or reference. Using the locator filter can be particularly helpful when working on complex paragraph numbering systems as it helps to ensure consistency – it is all too easy for the author or indexer to lose sight of the overall structure.

It is also possible, as one would expect, to sort by locator. The one disadvantage at present is that, if one sorts by locator in one index, this choice carries through to all other indexes, which is not necessarily what one wants. It is possible, helpfully, also to sort on changes and deletions.

Particularly useful, as in other indexing programmes, are the macros (or quick keys) for repeated words or phrases, and the possibilities for cutting and pasting, using either the search and copy function or 'manage main headings' and 'manage locators', either within the current index or from another.

Finalizing the index

A 'check index' option opens up a PDF file, showing how the index might look on paper, and displaying all changes and deletions in colour. There is also an extensive and powerful tool for managing export profiles. Output can be delivered in SGML, XML, Ascii/.txt, Word, RTF or Excel. But again, this is tailored to Sewalt & Revier's needs; it offers no scope, for example, for changing the layout. This could be a serious drawback for indexers working for other publishers.

Conclusion

Overall, WinGARB has a lot of excellent features of particular interest to the indexer who specializes in loose-leaf indexing. To meet the needs of such indexers working for companies other than Sewalt & Revier, however, I would suggest that a number of these features need to be developed further so as to offer greater flexibility.