

Chapter events

What do MS Word, Styles, Section 508, XML have in common?

By April Michelle Davis, amd@editorialinspirations.com

Although Microsoft Word is a program that 'most everyone in the editorial world uses, there are so many features within it that there always seems to be more to learn. Members of the EFA's Central Virginia chapter met in March over bagels to hear **Bevi Chagnon** discuss "Get a Grip on Word Files" and came away with handouts, copious notes and a new grasp on using Word better.

Chagnon, founder of PubCom (www.PubCom.com), has worked in publishing since the early 1970s and with digital media since the early 1980s. She fell into the publishing field while

pursuing a degree in architecture; her ability to type 160 words per minute without errors paid her way through school and helped her land her first job—in publishing, when she could not find work in architecture.

Many people know how to type, write or edit with Word, but comparatively few people know how to use "styles" within it to make their files more user-friendly for desktop publishing, Web use and XML coding. Did you know that, within Word, you can tag a file with keywords, which helps with search engine optimization (SEO) and screen readers for the blind?

The goal of the session was to demonstrate how to use Word to better use other technologies. Chagnon began by showing the Really Simple Syndication (RSS) feeds on her iPhone, all tagged with XML coding.

Chagnon explained that being only a writer or editor is not enough these days; many clients now need someone to "tag" content so it can move among the many forms of media. Today's audiences can choose in what format they want to receive content, but the content is all the same.

With this in mind, publishers are looking for how to make the technology work for them. And with Section 508 (readability, especially for the disabled) and XML users both want-

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Business tips for word workers

Eight tips for negotiating contracts

By Amy Rose, rosenwrites1@yahoo.com

This is a regular feature addressing common payment and contract issues we all face as freelance editors and writers. I will address your concerns and questions here if you e-mail them to newsletter@the-efa.org with the subject line Contracts and Payments. In no case will the identity of the member or of other parties be divulged.

If you are a writer who requires one-on-one help with contract negotiation, payment problems or related issues, I urge you to join the National Writers Union (www.nwu.org). One of the chief benefits of NWU membership is the individualized help provided free of charge to members by trained volunteers.

Editor's note: The author of this article is not an attorney, nor is what is offered here to be construed as legal advice.

In the last issue of the EFA's *Freelancer* newsletter, I presented some of the ingredients of a good writing contract. In this one, I offer a few contract negotiation tips. These are especially useful to keep in mind when you are having an in-person or telephone discussion with a publisher, editor or other client.

❑ Remember that all contracts are negotiable.

It is not uncommon these days for a client to present an editorial freelancer with a contract and, when you suggest modifications, to say, "This is our boilerplate contract. We use this with all our writers. It can't be changed."

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Word, continued

ing content tagged, publishers need to figure out how to do this and what to do with the content.

Even though many freelancers work alone in their homes, Chagnon noted, we are still part of teams. The writer creates a “baby”—the content—and it is the job of the other people on the team to raise the baby. One way is by using styles when the baby is still living in Microsoft Word.

When people use Word’s manual formatting tools at the top of their screens (under Home in Word 2007) to indicate things like italics or boldface or different font names and sizes for aspects of a publication, they are creating muck for the designer and Web person, according to Chagnon. Instead, they should be using the styles palette. Styles make laying out a file in a layout program such as InDesign much easier; the designer no longer has to guess whether something is a heading 2 or a heading 3.

Chagnon’s Rule Number 1 is to show all hidden characters; no blank returns are allowed. The author or editor of a document may insert one paragraph return to move to the next line, but may not insert several more to create a larger white space. We should use styles and adjust the space before and after the paragraph to create the desired white space. Why? Because each paragraph return is a character of white space, and too much white space will cause the bottom of the screen on an iPhone, for instance, to be blank. An average viewer will see this, think it is the end of the RSS feed and not scroll down to see the rest of the content.

Rather, we should use styles and modify those styles so a document will look the way the client wants it to look. When designers receive files that have been created using styles, they can easily modify the styles to fit the new

medium, and so can Web people. Using styles helps to separate the content from the medium and lets it adapt more easily to the various ways that people get access to content in today’s technology-savvy world.

To view styles in Word 2007, click the Office button, select Word Options, scroll down to Display, and set the Style area pane width to 1 inch. To view the styles, use Normal View; styles will not appear in Print Layout.

To show a listing of possible styles, click the arrow in the bottom right corner in the Styles section on the Home tab. Now it is time to prep the file.

Prepping the file includes what many editors already do: eliminating excess spaces between sentences. Next, highlight all of the text (Ctrl + A) and select Clear All from the Style pane—many designers would rather see no styles than the manual styles that many of us insert into our documents.

... using styles may sound like a lot of work at first, (but) once we become used to them, they will be easy to use ...

After editing the content, it is time to look at the big picture of the file and apply styles. Normal should be used for body text, and Heading 1 should be used for the title of the article or chapter—there should be only one Heading 1 per file.

Use “Strong” for bold and “Emphasis” for italics. Why this change in wording? Blind people may not know what bold and italics are, but they do know what “strong” and “emphasis” mean. Screen readers for the blind can see these terms, and blind people can understand them; using them helps

editorial professionals implement Section 508 requirements for access.

If editors have regular clients who use the same styles, the editors can create style templates for each client. This will save the styles so that each project will already have formatted styles, which, in turn, will save editors from having to remember what a Heading 3 is supposed to look like for a particular client.

Chagnon also recommended inserting spaces around em dashes if the content will be repurposed. Many forms of technology, she said, don’t “know” that they can make a line break around an em dash, which is what leads to those excessive white spaces seen at the end of some lines.

Finally, Chagnon demonstrated how to insert keywords into a Word document. We editors and writers are the best people to do this, she said, because we know the content. The keywords can be used by Web people when putting the content online and will be embedded into a PDF if that is the only destination for the document. Those keywords will help with SEO—getting the information seen and found on the Web.

So how do we add keywords? Click the Office button, go to Prepare, Properties. Type in the title of the article exactly as it appears in the document. For subject, type a one-sentence ad-like blurb about the article, and then type in keywords, using commas to separate each one. Chagnon has a blog entry about doing this: http://www.pubcom.com/newsletter/2009_08-22.html.

Although using styles may sound like a lot of work at first, once we become used to them, they will be easy to use and save time when applied.

With the rapid increase in the ways content can be “repurposed,” using styles will not only make the jobs of others who work on the same content easier, but it will also increase the skills we bring to a project. ■