

Word as a book-writing tool (was Re: EndNote)

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John,

The passion of your defense of Word is impressive, but your description of the workflow of writing a book suggests to me that you're talking about long corporate/NGO/government reports or self-published books -- both of which may have the printed size and format of a book, but are not what I and other book-authors mean by the term "book." The missing ingredient in your description is the publisher. Authors write books; publishers handle the copy-editing, design, production, printing, marketing, sales, distribution, publicity, and promotion. Word might be a fine tool for long corporate reports, and it might even be an acceptable tool for a self-published book or for specialized publishers that accept camera-ready copy, if the author does not mind Word's relatively crude output (compared to a real typesetting program like LaTeX). As a tool for authors to write books for trade publishers (Random House, Viking, HarperCollins, etc.) or for university presses which market to a general audience (Oxford, Yale, Wisconsin, etc.), Word sucks! I can honestly say that I do not know a single professional author who writes trade books and does not detest Word.

Why do we detest it? Because an author writing for a trade or university press is not trying to produce a finished book. He or she is writing a manuscript. The publisher will strip out any formatting when the manuscript is input into their editing and design software. Indeed, most publisher submission guidelines actually tell an author to not gussy up the headings, subheadings, chapter titles, or other details -- since it will all be stripped out. So, what the author wants is a tool that will transparently and easily allow the combination of chapter-files into a complete manuscript; that will produce a complete table of contents that adjusts itself to inserted chapters and changes; that for non-fiction will produce properly punctuated endnotes or footnotes; and most importantly, that will not "hassle" the author who is trying to focus on content, not on addressing the quirks of the program. Read our long exchange in this newsgroup on getting Word to accept chapter files as links and the inability of Word to do something as simple as adding the endnotes section into the table of contents and you'll understand why book authors hate Word.

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Why do we use it? I resisted for a long time, writing book manuscripts for Random House, HarperCollins, St. Martins, and other trade press