

Letters

Response to A.G.W. Cameron

As organizer and editor of the proceedings of the colloquium "DeskTop Publishing in Astronomy and Space Sciences" organized at Strasbourg Astronomical Observatory in October 1991, I feel I must restate some facts and complete what has been written on the proceedings by A.G.W. Cameron in *TUGboat* 13, no. 4 (1992), pp. 489–490, even if the general conclusions are positive towards the volume and even if it is not my usual policy to react to reviews.

A review worthy of the name should have indicated the real purpose of meeting and give at least a brief description of its main organizational features (sessions).

It should have been made clear that this was not a \TeX -meeting and definitely not intended to discuss \TeX -niceties. The main aim of the colloquium was to review the situation of desktop and electronic publishing in astronomy and space sciences, with the participation of publishers and scientific editors, and to initiate strategies for the future.

Since attendees were persons using potentially all kinds of systems, only broad guidelines were given for their camera-ready copy (CRC) contributions. I have been pleased that most contributors stuck as much as possible to the indications and I can only praise the publisher, World Scientific, for achieving an outstanding top quality volume compare to what is often found on astronomy library shelves and compare to what I had sometimes to put together in my editorial activities.

Not a word is said about a survey carried out beforehand on the use of packages in our community. The results of this survey are now quoted in the physical and other communities. \TeX is indeed leading, but it would be a mistake to ignore the significant amount of people using other systems. If, since the colloquium, there have been more journals pushing for the use of \TeX , meetings of editors and publishers are shaping procedures allowing input from other systems than \TeX , be it only by designing policies accommodating SGML, ODA, not to speak of the HyTime hypertext standard just approved by ISO.

No word is said either on the special sessions centered on publishers, editors, as well as on information retrieval, the ultimate aim of EP. A paper by an author from the same institution as the reviewer is criticized at length and one could wonder whether there are not personal accounts being settled there.

The reviewer seems impressed by the publishing speed. What should we think then of the proceedings of the "Astronomy from Large Databases-II" conference held in September 1992 (more than 500 pages) which were already in our hands in December 1992, with the classical CRC technique (as was the case for the DTP colloquium in question here).

This is where one starts asking oneself serious questions about EP since another conference on the Space Telescope, organized in May 1992 through the same channels, has not seen its proceedings volume completed yet, using EP techniques. But of course, EP is not the only factor to be considered in a publishing venture: the toughness of the editors is also important.

And, once more, DTP/EP techniques have not their own justifications per se, but through what they allow afterwards with the substance of the information they are carrying. For the ALD-II conference, an ftp account was already set up at the end of September (the week after the meeting) with the contributions. This was a premiere in astronomy accommodating a whole spectrum of input types, including \TeX / \LaTeX of course, and in spite of the fact that CRC documents were the basic material for the proceedings (machine-readable files were also delivered in most cases).

Those who know my activities are aware that I have been pushing DTP/EP techniques on both sides of the Atlantic. One must however always keep in mind the respective advantages and limitations of each system.

André Heck
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