

General Delivery

Opening words

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As we head into the summer months of holidays and hot weather, no-one wants to read a long column — much less write one! So I'll keep it short.

In my previous column I mentioned a big four-way meeting planned for Darmstadt in April — RIDT'94 and EP'94, along with workshops from two other organisations (PODP'94 and TEP'94. Lucky for us, Michel Goossens, TUG's vice-president, was able to attend, and he's written up a nice report you might find interesting.

And something that's been moving in slow stages over the past several months — ISO recognition of de facto standards. That is, the ISO people are willing to discuss the fact of there being standards in areas where ISO has none, standards which have arisen out of common consent, and where the full specification is published or publicly available. Examples include TCP/IP, PostScript — and T_EX. Nothing definite has been set down yet — at this stage, all that's being examined is the structure and procedure for recognising such de facto standards. The issue will be on the board agenda this summer, and we will probably come up with an official TUG statement at that time. In the interim, a number of people have come forward, saying they too support this potential procedure regarding de facto standards, and that it would be most appropriate to consider T_EX a good candidate for this status.

I believe it will be of long-term benefit to T_EX, which often must be left behind when companies or research institutes are required to submit documentation prepared according to recognised standards. If T_EX can become a recognised formatter for electronic documentation, then we are taking a major step forward in ensuring its long life and widespread use.

It's an exciting prospect. If anyone is interested in hearing more, please contact myself, or Barbara Beeton, editor of this publication.

So that's it. Short and sweet. Enjoy your summer. I hope to see many of you at the meeting in Santa Barbara. If not, then we shall meet again in the fall.

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Editorial Comments

Barbara Beeton

1 “L^AT_EX 2_ε” is now just “L^AT_EX”

The L^AT_EX 3 project team has announced the release of “the new standard version of L^AT_EX”. This is the version that, until now, was referred to as “L^AT_EX 2_ε”. From now on the “old L^AT_EX” will be referred to as “L^AT_EX 209”.

From the announcement:

[The new L^AT_EX] is upwardly compatible with existing L^AT_EX documents, and contains new features including the long-awaited graphics extensions.

Over the years many extensions of L^AT_EX have been developed. This is, of course, a welcome development, since it shows that the L^AT_EX system is in a healthy state. It has, however, had one unfortunate consequence: there were several incompatible systems all claiming to be L^AT_EX.

The new L^AT_EX puts an end to this unsatisfactory situation — it gives access to all extensions such as S_LT_EX, A_MS-L^AT_EX, and P_SL^AT_EX, based on a single format. This will end the proliferation of mutually incompatible dialects of L^AT_EX.

We have also introduced a small number of often-requested features (such as more control over float placement) and an improved interface for writers of document classes and packages.

The new L^AT_EX is described in a new edition of *L^AT_EX: A Document Preparation System* by Leslie Lamport (to appear during 1994) and *The L^AT_EX Companion* by Goossens, Mittelbach and Samarin, both published by Addison-Wesley.

From now on, a completely updated release will be made twice a year, in June and December. In between scheduled releases, bugs will be fixed using a patch technique that has been built into the L^AT_EX system. Users should read the documentation included in the package and check periodically for patch updates. A formal procedure, also described in the documentation, is provided for reporting bugs.

The new L^AT_EX can be retrieved by anonymous ftp from the CTAN archives; see below for addresses. At all the major sites, the distribution can be found in the area

`/tex-archive/macros/latex/base`

The files in these directories require a somewhat long unpacking process. For those who prefer to skip this step, a second distribution is provided in unpacked format in

`/tex-archive/macros/latex/unpacked`

The L^AT_EX 3 group is now returning to work on L^AT_EX 3. They will continue to consider suggestions for future work; the announcement also pointed out that a number of suggestions already received could be developed into useful L^AT_EX packages — by you!

Thanks to all the workers on the project:

Johannes Braams
David Carlisle
Michael Downes
Alan Jeffrey
Frank Mittelbach
Chris Rowley
Rainer Schöpf

2 New CTAN features

Just as a reminder, CTAN is the Comprehensive T_EX Archive Network, with primary nodes at

`ftp.dante.de` (129.206.100.192)
`ftp.tex.ac.uk` (128.232.1.87)
`ftp.shsu.edu` (192.92.115.10)

2.1 Where are the CTAN sites?

For anyone who has an Internet connection, it is now possible to get a listing of CTAN sites and mirrors along with their root CTAN directories. For those who can use the finger utility:

```
finger ctan_us@ftp.SHSU.edu
```

For those who can't use finger, but have access to Gopher, use the Gopher link information (available in the T_EX area on the Gopher server at Niord.SHSU.edu):

```
Name=Listing of CTAN sites and mirrors
Type=0
Port=70
Path=exec::gopher_root:[000000]_CTAN.SCRIPT
Host=Niord.SHSU.edu
```

or the URL (this should be all on one line with no spaces):

```
gopher://Niord.SHSU.edu:70/0exec%3a%
3agopher_root%3a%5b000000%5d_CTAN.SCRIPT
```

or (depending on your World Wide Web viewer; again, one line):

```
gopher://Niord.SHSU.edu:70/0exec::
gopher_root:[000000]_CTAN.SCRIPT
```

There is also a file, `CTAN.sites`, at the root level of the CTAN hosts which contains this information.

As listings of participating sites change, this file will be updated accordingly.

Another helpful tool compliments of George Greenwade. Thanks, George!

2.2 What's new on CTAN?

A new e-mail list, `CTAN-Ann@SHSU.edu` has been created for the purpose of disseminating announcements to and from the coordinators of CTAN and other interested parties regarding product and utility announcements related to T_EX. It is fully archived, completely public for subscription purposes, and is open to posts from anyone. The overriding concern of this list is to ensure an efficient, identifiable, and authoritative single source of information about the evolution of the CTAN collection to its worldwide base of users. This is *not* a discussion list.

To subscribe to the list, send e-mail to

`LISTSERV@SHSU.edu`

with the following request in the body:

SUBSCRIBE CTAN-Ann "Your Name, in Quotes"

2.3 Posting new files to CTAN

If you have a package that should be shared with other T_EX users, posting it on CTAN is an excellent way to make it available.

Ftp to `ftp.shsu.edu` and connect to `incoming`. If multiple files are involved, use `mkdir` to create a subdirectory for them. After posting, send a message to `CTAN-Mgr@shsu.edu` asking that it be installed on CTAN; it is always helpful if you can be specific about the location.

Generally, posts to `CTAN-Mgr` should get a response within 72 hours, including weekends. When you learn that your package has been installed, announce it! `info-tex@shsu.edu` has its own list of subscribers and feeds into `comp.text.tex`, and the new list `CTAN-Ann@shsu.edu` (see above) is tailor-made for such announcements.

Please don't send files just to `comp.text.tex` — many people don't have access to it. A package posted on CTAN will get promulgated all over the world, included on CDs, and made available in many more ways than you can even think of.

3 Northwest Computing Support Center closed

A message from Pierre MacKay has announced that the Northwest Computing Support Center was closed by order of the University of Washington as of June 14, 1994. Pierre and Elizabeth Tachikawa will try unofficially to provide some limited services for a few months, but there is no longer a phone connection and support of UNIX T_EX from that site has ceased.

The \TeX community will miss this support greatly. Belatedly, we would like to extend our thanks to Pierre and Elizabeth for their superb service over the years.

4 \TeX output in audible form

I spent a few days in May in Princeton, at the offices of Recordings for the Blind, attending a math and sciences working symposium. The goal was to set directions for making available math and science texts in electronic form for the blind and others with reading disabilities. The centerpiece was work by Raman, chair of the TUG Technical Working Group on \TeX for the Disabled.

One of the workshop recommendations was to bring Raman's system from its status as a research project on some pretty high-powered (and -priced) equipment to a widely-portable (in the \TeX sense) system that can be used by a much wider audience.

RFB's charter is to provide texts for students and other "serious" users (current novels and other popular material for recreational reading are provided by other organizations) and they are supposed to produce "accessible" versions of any book that is requested. These audio or electronic versions are supposed to be identical in all ways to the ordinary printed versions, since they are mostly textbooks and other assigned material on which the students will be tested, and an important objective is to put the disabled student on an equal footing with all other students in the same program.

There are special challenges, of course, with math notation, and anyone who attended the 1992 meeting in Portland or read Raman's paper in the Proceedings may remember the difference between the vocalization generated by his system for a complicated equation by Faa de Bruno and the result of its being read by a trained RFB reader. Although both were rendered in linear form, Raman's captured more of the mathematical structure in a more concise form than did the human reader's — and Raman's system has been extended since then to allow different "views" interactively, with the user permitted to ask for the general structure, then for the details of various parts of the expression. The challenge that the RFB organizers of this symposium set is for all producers of tools and data to work toward the same goal — accurate and economical delivery of mathematical material in a form most easily used by those who have no other option. Raman's system is a very promising start on this path.

There will be challenges for the authors of math books and journals as well. For the system to work, the math must be input uniformly, with a minimum of "tinkering" with spacing, positioning, and the

like; the matter of user-defined macros created to shorten the keying of complex notation, or to ensure uniform notation, has yet to be addressed. But the principle is important — that a little effort and good tools can make this material much more usable by someone who can't read it on paper.

Raman's system is called "ASTeR", "Audio System for Technical Reading". Anyone who attended the Portland TUG meeting will remember a bright-eyed, energetic black labrador retriever, Raman's guide dog, the eponymous Aster after whom the reading system is named and to whom Raman's dissertation is dedicated. She was there at the symposium too, along with quite a few others of her kind, a most devoted group of working partners; I was glad to renew our acquaintance.

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