More on Buzzword

Two people have recently reminded me about Adobe's online word processor, Buzzword. Coincidence? Groundswell of popularity? Probably not as they are married to each other.

Anyway, it has improved a bit since I first looked at it. At least it has HTML export now (it handles lists wrongly, nesting lists inside lists instead of inside list items, but that's a common mistake). Still no styles or headings and I fear that it is trying to get people to lock up their documents in some kind of proprietary Flash and/or PDF format.

Adobe are asking for feedback so I gave some over at the Acrobat.com blogs.

I think that there's an opportunity to Adobe to do what I Google should have done with Google Docs (used to be Writely). I suggested this:

> What could be done differently over at Writely so they can reliably import documents and get the lists right, and better still, let people start off in Writely online and produce word processing docs to send out to others?

> The Writely / Google people could design a well thought out, freely available generic word processing template that works more or less equally well in various different word processing environments (hint - you'll need some clean-up code to help the poor word processors keep their lists straight).

> http://ptsefton.com/blog/2006/03/21/writely,__meet_the_ice_template/

I think Buzzword should not only use styles, it should get a well designed set of generic styles as a basis and the Adobe folks should build templates which are Buzzword compatible – the online service that does this first has the best chance of bridging the gap from the offline to the online world.

If I create a document in Buzzword why not make the default export to Word use some Adobe-defined styles and give the user a buzzword-like toolbar to play with them, post the doc back to Buzzword etc? In all the online word processors I have tried import and export is appalling and I'm sure this must slow adoption.

At the moment all the online word processors are far behind on features that are needed for some documents, you couldn't write a thesis in Buzzword (not if you wanted tables of contents and figures and numbering and reference management) but you could draft some stuff in there or collaborate on papers then export into Word, or FrameMaker or something to finish the job. Here a well thought out style set would really help with interop.

Adobe – if you want any advice on word processing templates drop me a line. (Someone from Google did, but the conversation didn't go anywhere). The ICE project has some templates you might like to look at.