Some questions about EPUB, WordPress, tools

[This is a repost from the jiscPUB project – please comment, but do so over there]

I have a couple of questions for discussion in this jiscPUB project, please any and all of you, use the comments!

If you publish EPUBs now, what tools do you use?

I asked jiscPUB team member Liza Daly via email what she uses to make EPUBs, and she said asciidoc.

 Asciidoc lets you create documents in your text editor of choice using one of a family of lightweight wiki-style text formatting languages. Unlike Wiki formats, though, asciidoc is designed to create richly structured documents, as discussed on this page. This post from an O'Reilly author explains how it works to create multiple output files. I'll do a post on how these tools work with EPUB.

Now, I am interested in who uses what?

- Anyone else use asciidoc?
- Are there pandoc users reading this? Bruce D'Arcus , have you made EPUB? I tried, but it does not support intra-document links.
- Are some of you hand-crafting HTML like Mark Pligrim then feeding through something like Calibre?
- Anyone use their word processor to make HTML and get EPUB from that?

(And just on the off chance, has anyone done a pandoc/markdown to asciidoc converter?)

What's considered best practice for EPUBs?

I have been making EPUBs by feeding things through various processors. Different tools are using different levels of styling by default.

What's best practice, in terms of what level of CSS styling to put in and so on? The top hit I got on Google for this was an Adobe page from 2008 that didn't actually tell me anything useful.

I think that when we're talking about word processing documents being transformed for the web what often works best is to have consistent styling for headings and plain paragraphs but authors do need some control over what goes on in tables, for example. This will require some figuring out for EPUB – I know the team at USQ had problems with large and complex tables in their testing with USQ courseware, mainly using iOS devices.

JISC project people: What do you have to do to get your reports up in JISCPress?

JISCPress is a site where a variety of project output documents can be annotated by the community. It uses the digress.it comment system to allow paragraph-level annotation. It says on the site: "We are currently

operating JISCPress on a trial basis, with a view to making it a fully fledged JISC service if the trial goes well."

I wondered if anyone reading this has used it, and what the experience of contributing to it is like. This is both relevant to this project and to potential future explorations of how something like JISCPress might work in an environment where some people might be commenting on documents using ebook reader software and some using the plain-old web – with some way of aggregating both.

When I called for sample documents for this project, Owen Stephens (@ostephens) sent me a test document, I am still working on making a nice EPUB out of it, fiddling with the tool as I go. He tells me it was 'converted by hand' to go on this site, which is not quite like jiscPress but does allow comments.

Anyway, I am wondering:

- How much effort are people putting in to getting JISC project outcome documents on the web?

- I know there are templates for JISC reports, which seem pretty light and simple but what about JISC deliverables, like toolkit documents etc?

- Assuming most of this kind of output is written in Word or other word processors, would people be interested in a template (and tools) that had:

  - Embedded metadata that could be used by machines to process documents.

  - A way to preview your work quickly and easily to make sure that the final output is going to be OK?

  - Enough styling cues to create good web pages, maybe ebooks via automated uploads.

    There's a trade-off here between having something that's easy for authors to use, like treating the word processor like a typewriter (which is usually more costly in the long run) and getting people to invest in learning tools.

Comments?

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