

## *Accessibility from scratch*

The **European Accessible Information Network (EUAIN)** brings together the different actors in the content creation and publishing industries around a common set of objectives relating to the provision of accessible information. Accessibility for print impaired people can be an increasingly integrated component of the document management and publishing process and should not be a specialised, additional service.

## **Response to the Public Consultation**

The EUAIN network would like to provide a brief response to the Commission Staff Paper on Strengthening the Competitiveness of the EU Publishing Sector. By working closely with the Federation of European Publishers, it has been possible actively to address emerging issues regarding accessible content processing, a matter of key importance for the coming decade.

We are all familiar with the word ‘accessibility’, but what does it actually mean? When we talk about accessible content, for whom are we providing this content? Are we talking about a small percentage of users who are blind (about 1%) or do we include people with dyslexia (about 10%), or do we mean the 40% of users who use some kind of assistive technology on their computers?

Accessibility is changing from being an afterthought which was considered at the end of the information provision process, to a catalyst for change. The technology is emerging which allows content providers to structure their information in such a way that it complies with existing accessibility legislation and in so doing opens up new markets for that content. By integrating existing technologies within processing systems, it is possible actively to include the changing needs of end-users, and in so doing open new opportunities. And by structuring content more clearly, powerful new navigational possibilities emerge which are of benefit to all users.

**Q2. Are there any further issues you would add in respect of publishing, notably with regard to the policy approaches set out in the Commission's recent i2010 communication?**

The EUAIN network wishes to underline to the Commission that it is essential for the European publishing industry to focus on accessible content processing as this brings significant economic and social benefits to all stakeholders. EUAIN aims to promote e-Inclusion as a core horizontal building block in the establishment of the Information Society by creating a network to bring together the different actors in the content creation and publishing industries around a common set of objectives relating to the provision of accessible information. EUAIN takes the broadest definition of content creators and aims to provide the support, tools and expertise to enable them to provide accessible information. From a technical perspective, it is now possible to address the key con-

cerns of content creators and providers and coherently to address issues such as: automation of document structuring, adherence to emerging standards, workflow support, digital rights management and secure distribution platforms.

The i2010 communication relies heavily on the digitization of all existing documents that are relevant to European citizens. Libraries are, therefore, seen as the main repositories of these source documents. Publishers could help in the digitisation process by providing access against payment to their archives of source material in digital formats. Equally, the publishing industry could be seen as the main source of digital material of works published in the last 10-20 years and those to be published in the future. A legal deposit of digital materials (even of those subsequently published in paper format) guarantees preservation of all publications within the EU. It is important that any subsequent access be ruled through contractual agreements between libraries and rights holders.

Preferably all the materials archived in libraries should be stored using the same standards, which provide access to people with print impairments. In order to avoid imposing any single format, it is preferable that there is consistency between the storage format and the medium, and that this should not hinder the use of multiple output formats based on the central content. In this way all people can be served by consistent accessible content processing, delivered to the end user in their preferred format through non-destructive filtering. The provision of accessible material can thus be integrated into existing and emerging supply chains.

There are already existing standards that contribute to this need, and a recent (November 2005) analysis of standards for accessible information processing has been completed by the EUAIN network. One such standard is DAISY ([www.daisy.org](http://www.daisy.org)), based on XML and already accepted for the print-impaired community all around the world. XML is also a standard widely used by the publishing industry. A subset of the XML used within this standard (NIMAS) has recently been adopted by publishers in the United States of America as the National File Format to be used to provide primary students with alternate format versions of the educational materials they publish.

**Q3. Are current industry structures across all segments likely to survive the transition to electronic value chains? What are the major barriers and threats to publishers during the transition? What are the opportunities for publishers arising from new information and communication technologies?**

The adoption of open and accessible standards to produce digital content needs to be a high-priority objective for all publishers. One of the major threats may be the adoption of closed, inaccessible formats that cannot be re-used in the future.

There exists a need for access to cultural, educational and scholarly content for all EU citizens in member and candidate states. It is our belief that this activity can only be successful when addressed at a European level and when fully integrated with existing technologies in all branches of content creation, learning and standardisation processes.

The role of the publishing industry will therefore be central to this endeavour over the coming ten years.

There is also a need to broaden the definitions of accessibility to represent “the ability to access” which in itself begins with “the ability to perceive”, and this needs to be embedded within European cultural preservation and presentation strategies. With this “intelligent” multimodal content, we need to provide suitable frameworks and environments that can take the key criteria required for (accessible) content management and create preservation of this content for the future.

We also need to provide technologies that provide functionality for content representation and can link with suitable infrastructures that allow for the creation, representation and preservation of content to occur at a higher level of complexity. In this way, content providers can also provide context and semantics to end users with the intention of meeting the needs of generic accessibility. In this way we can raise awareness of the concepts behind information rich content and provide clear methods, means and guidelines which allow consumers of this technology to appreciate the benefits of these innovations.