

USING IXGEN TO MANAGE MARKERS

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IXgen is an indexing and marker management tool that makes creating, viewing, editing, translating, and managing FrameMaker markers—index markers, custom markers, and so on—easier and more efficient. Typically, writers use IXgen for indexing. However, there are also several special uses for IXgen.

Managing markers without IXgen

In FrameMaker, you insert markers (such as index markers) manually page-by-page, typing the text for each entry that you want to include. To view and edit the markers, you must find each marker, open it, and make your changes.

Frame does have some helpful built-in functions, such as automatically adding selected text when you create a marker and letting you use Find/Change to search for markers that you want to edit. However, creating and maintaining any list of markers this way can be a time-consuming and tedious task.

What IXgen can do

When I started using IXgen (with a deadline looming, of course), I used the following two features almost exclusively:

- ◆ *Generate editable marker list*—Create a single file, called the marker list, that references all of your markers. The marker list lets you make changes, do searches, check spelling, and so on, in one place.

- ◆ *Apply edited marker list*—Apply the changes you made in the marker list to all of your documents. When you apply your changes, IXgen can automatically split multiple index entries into separate markers or rotate the entries (so *iced tea* is also indexed as *tea, iced*).

IXgen paid for itself the first time I used it to generate, edit, and apply the marker list. However, it wasn't until the next project I started working on that I discovered the following features and really started to appreciate what this tool could do for me:

- ◆ *Apply capitalization*—Apply capitalization rules (as-is, initial capital on first word, initial capital on all words, all lowercase, or all uppercase) to index entries. You can treat each level of index entries, up to four levels, the same or differently. For example, *animals:dogs:mutts* could be changed to: *ANIMALS:Dogs:mutts* or vice versa.
- ◆ *Expand and collapse markers*—Show or hide marker text in the current text flow so markers can be seen, and even edited, in context.
- ◆ *Create markers from keywords*—Create a list of words or phrases that IXgen uses to generate markers automatically wherever each word or phrase is used. IXgen can use the word or phrase itself as the marker text or prompt you to choose from a list of alternatives.

This option is so easy to use, it can actually get you into trouble. If you create a list of very general words, you can end up with an index that isn't useful. For example, if I used the keyword *marker* for the *IXgen User's Guide*, I would end up with an index entry that referenced almost every page in the book. However, if I used a very specific keyword,

such as the template file *keyctrl.fm*, IXgen would generate useful marker tags very quickly. (You can create keyword lists from scratch or from existing indexes.)

- ◆ *Create markers from paragraph tags*—Identify particular paragraph tags that IXgen uses to generate a marker automatically for each paragraph that uses one of the tags you specified. For example, if you have a special paragraph tag to introduce procedures, you could easily add index entries for all of your procedures. Because IXgen enters the paragraph text as the marker text, I use this feature with the editable marker list feature to generate and edit my initial list of index markers.
- ◆ *Create markers from character tags (5.5 only)*—Identify particular character tags that IXgen uses to generate a marker automatically for each word or phrase that uses one of the tags you specified. For example, I have a character style called *NewTerm* that I use when I introduce new concepts. Using this feature, I can easily index all of my terms where they are defined without having to identify any of the terms explicitly.
- ◆ *Convert markers*—Convert one marker type to another. When you add markers manually, FrameMaker “remembers” the last marker type you entered or viewed. For example, if you are trying to open an index marker and you accidentally open a cross-reference marker next to the index marker, FrameMaker makes your next new marker a cross-reference marker. If you are in a hurry, it’s easy to miss the fact that instead of creating index markers,

you are now creating cross-reference markers. By generating a single list of all your markers, you can make sure that all of your markers are the appropriate types and convert any that aren’t.

- ◆ *Delete redundant markers*—Delete duplicate back-to-back markers, which makes maintenance easier.
- ◆ *Delete all markers*—By generating an editable marker list, deleting all the entries, and applying the list, you can delete all index markers (or any other types of markers) from all of your documents at once. I use this feature when I want to rework an index from scratch. (To tell you the truth, I used it several times when I was first using IXgen. I tried to cut corners by generating a list of keywords and letting IXgen create markers for them. However, I ended up with an index that wasn’t useful at all—some of the entries had over fifty page references! Rather than remove the markers one-by-one, I stripped them all out and began again.)
- ◆ *Control what text is indexed*—You can use IXgen to add markers to a selected area of text, an entire file, some of the files in a book, or all of the files in a book.

What IXgen can’t do

Can IXgen read your mind? Will IXgen produce perfect indexes with no effort on your part? No, of course not. Indexing still requires planning, structuring, and editing. To quote the *IXgen User’s Guide*, “Indexing... is an art. Creating a good index

takes practice, typically several iterations, and a broad knowledge of the subject matter.” However, if you are wondering whether IXgen makes creating and managing markers easier, the answer is: Absolutely.

Special uses for IXgen

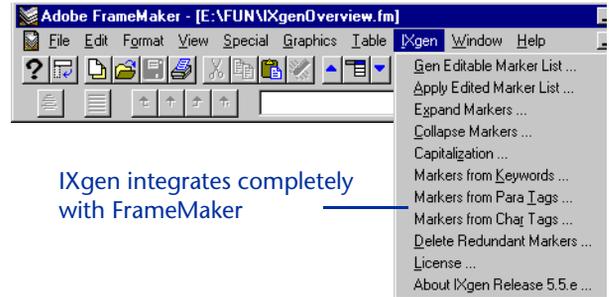
While IXgen is most often used for traditional indexes, the following list shows that you can get pretty creative with it. You can create and manage:

- ◆ Concordances (alphabetical lists of keywords found in a document)
- ◆ Special types of indexes, such as indexes of commands or authors
- ◆ Custom markers used by other applications (such as markers that alias topics in FrameMaker files to IDs used by context-sensitive help calls)
- ◆ Indexes for translated documents
- ◆ Hypertext pop-ups and hypertext links for FrameViewer documents

IXgen's ease-of-use

IXgen is easy to install and use. It integrates completely with FrameMaker, so you do all of your tasks from an IXgen menu in FrameMaker itself.

The IXgen Menu



IXgen integrates completely
with FrameMaker

I experienced an occasional awkward pause because of some look-and-feel issues that could use a bit more polish, but I can honestly say that I never got stumped while using IXgen. The documentation is complete and structured logically—I've always been able to find the information I needed. Of course, a good index helped. (You can download the *IXgen User's Guide* from the Web to preview before you buy.)

Most of the problems I did have were solved by learning more about indexing, rather than by becoming more skilled with IXgen. Does that mean you have to be an expert indexer to use IXgen? No, but learning the fundamentals of good indexing will help you. Several books and style guides discuss indexing. Also, organizations (the Society for Technical Communication, for example) have published articles and offered classes and workshops on indexing. The Framers Forum (see <http://www.frameusers.com> for details) has many expert indexers and IXgen users who will share their experience with you. Also, there are several organizations and mailing lists that focus exclusively on indexing. I encourage you to explore some of these resources.

IXgen and FrameMaker

IXgen doesn't introduce any proprietary tags or code. In other words, files processed by IXgen can always be opened by FrameMaker, with or without IXgen. Also, having IXgen installed doesn't mean that you always have to use IXgen for every task related to markers. Because IXgen uses FrameMaker's own marker technology, you can mix using FrameMaker to add individual markers by hand with using IXgen to create and manage entire lists of markers.

Many tools, utilities, and applications that work with FrameMaker exist—I've tried several and am always looking for more. I have to say that IXgen has been one of the most useful tools I've purchased. As I mentioned, it paid for itself on the first project (it's inexpensive, so it doesn't take much to pay for itself). Since then, IXgen has repeatedly saved me time as I continue to find new uses for it.

For more information

IXgen is available for FrameMaker 4, 5.0/5.1, and 5.5 on Windows and Solaris. For more information about the tool, prices, licensing, and so on, visit Frank Stearns Associates at <http://www.pacifier.com/~franks>. You can also contact Frank Stearns Associates by sending an e-mail message to franks@fsatools.com or by calling 360-892-3970.

At the June FUN meeting, I'm going to demonstrate how to use IXgen to create an index as well as to manage custom markers used by WebWorks Publisher to convert FrameMaker files to context-sensitive help. If you want to find out more about IXgen or if you want to share some of the things you are doing with IXgen, please join

us. (We will also be giving away a copy of IXgen, thanks to Frank Stearns Associates!) For details about the meeting time, see [June Meeting](#).

About the author

Alexia Prendergast is the manager of information development for Seagate Software in Durham. Seagate Software, soon to be merged with VERITAS Software, develops tools and applications for information and infrastructure management, including network, systems, and storage products. Alexia has been writing system administration guides, user guides, and other information products for more than ten years. Her experience includes documenting network and storage management applications, client/server business applications, application development software, and three-tiered automated manufacturing systems for UNIX, MVS, and Windows NT enterprise environments. Alexia has also contributed to two commercial technical books, *Upgrading and Repairing Networks* and *Client/Server Programming with RPC and DCE*. You can contact her at alexiap@pobox.com.

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