

IXgen: Taming the Index Editing Process in FrameMaker



Scriptorium Publishing Services, Inc.
P.O. Box 12761, Research Triangle Park, NC 27709
919-481-2701 or sales@scriptorium.com
<http://www.scriptorium.com>

FrameMaker has a convenient indexing feature that lets you create long, complex, and even custom indexes without using a separate indexing program. Indexing in FrameMaker involves inserting index markers into your document; these markers contain the text of the index entry. Once you figure out the sometimes frustrating indexing syntax, writing your index will probably progress fairly quickly. Editing the index, however, is another matter.

In FrameMaker, index markers (and indeed, all markers) are not displayed in the body of your document. To edit a marker's contents, you must select the marker and use the Marker dialog box to make corrections. It may be tempting to edit mistakes directly in the generated index, but any changes are deleted once the index is regenerated. So how do you edit your index? Typically, the process looks like this:

1. Generate index.
2. Note the dozens of mistakes you've made.
3. Slap self in head.
4. Click each entry's hyperlink to its marker and make corrections.
5. Try to figure out where the index file went.
6. Wish there were a faster way to edit the index.
7. Repeat steps 1–6.

Your wish (from Step 6) is granted

IXgen (pronounced I-X-jen) is a FrameMaker plug-in that compiles the contents of your document's index markers (or any other marker type you select) into a FrameMaker table.

NAVI- GATE	MARKER TYPE	SOURCE DOCUMENT	EDIT MARKER TEXT IN THIS COLUMN
	Index	A...\Training\intro.fm	adding:<\$npage><emphasis 2>see also <Default Para Font>creating[adding:aaa]
	Index	A...\ining\bookfile.fm	adding:index;index:adding;book file:index, adding
	Index	A...\ining\bookfile.fm	adding:table of contents;table of contents, adding;book file:table of contents, adding
	Index	A...\ining\pdfhtml.fm	advanced HTML conversion;HTML:advanced conversion;HTML:reference page
	Index	A...\ining\graphics.fm	anchored frame:defining;frame:anchored:defining

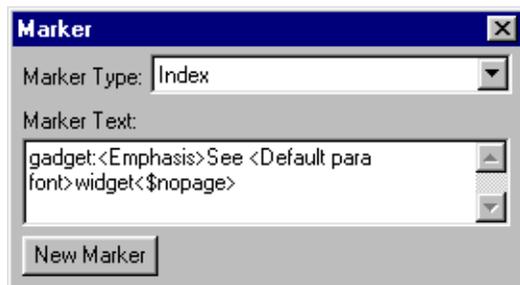
The last column contains the text of markers, which you edit in the table. IXgen repopulates the markers in your FrameMaker files with your changes when you select the **Apply Edited Marker List** command. The Navigate column provides a hyperlink back to the marker tag in case you need to refer to its context, but you shouldn't change the text in the marker itself because IXgen will overwrite your changes with what is in the last column of the table.

When you regenerate your index, you'll see the changes. Here are some FrameMaker features you can use to speed the editing process when you're working in the IXgen table:

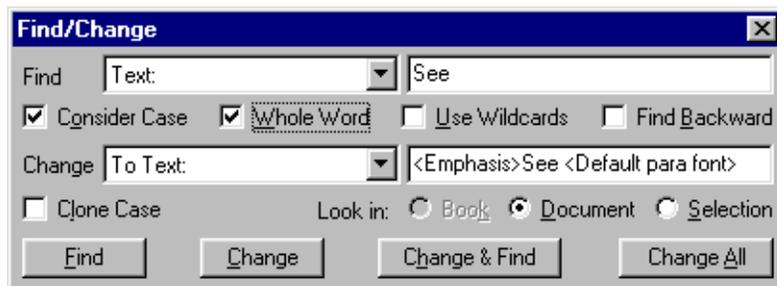
- **Searching and replacing**

Suppose your index contains several references to the Blah widget, but the marketing department decides to change the product's name to the Bleh widget. With IXgen, you can use FrameMaker's Find/Change feature to make a global change.

You can also use the Find/Change feature to save yourself typing time as you index. For example, a typical "see" or "see also" reference in an index looks like this as a FrameMaker tag:



To save typing time as you index, you could eliminate the building blocks that turn the italics on and off (< Emphasis > and < Default Para Font >). When you're working in the table IXgen compiles, you can use Find/Change to add the building blocks:



- **Checking spelling**

If you've ever edited a FrameMaker index, you know how frustrating it is to check spelling—run the spell checker on the index, individually fix each marker, regenerate, rerun the spell checker, and so on. With IXgen, you check the spelling of the table entries once, and you're done.

Some limitations

It is a good idea to print out your generated index and use it as a guide when editing the IXgen table. Here's why:

- **Some table entries may not be in the order you expect**

The IXgen table does alphabetize your index markers, but some individual *entries* may not be alphabetized. For example, IXgen ignores any special alphabetizing rules you placed in brackets. In addition, if a marker contains semicolon-separated entries, the whole marker text will be displayed in the same table cell. You can fix this problem by selecting the **Apply Edited Marker List** option and then selecting **Split multiple index entries into separate markers**. Each entry will now have its own marker and be correctly alphabetized the next time you generate a marker list in IXgen. Note, however, that this process is not reversible.

- **Page numbers are not displayed in the table**

The table does list from which file a marker was extracted, but the page number is not provided. There's no way to tell which entries precede other ones.

- **The table does not “translate” the indexing syntax**

In the IXgen table, a third-level index entry would be displayed as “widgets:opening:manually,” just as you'd find it in the index marker. Without FrameMaker's generated index, it's difficult to visualize the layout and arrangement of entries, especially multileveled ones.

Minor and last-minute changes are usually easier to do from the FrameMaker-generated index. Just be sure not to edit from both the table and the generated index simultaneously—when you apply your changes from IXgen, the other changes will be overwritten. After a few tries, you'll get a feel for balancing your editing tasks between the IXgen table and the generated index.

Hey, can't I use the tool to automatically make an index for me?

Indexing is an art. Sure, no one has ever framed one of my indexes or wept at its profound depth and beauty, but a good index requires that the indexer understand the index's audience and its needs. "Art, smart," you say, "but I have to get this index out today!" Even if you're in a rush, you should avoid relying exclusively on IXgen's marker generations features. Here's a summary of IXgen's index creation features:

- **Markers from keywords**

This feature creates index markers based on a list of keywords you provide. What you'll get when you generate an index from these markers is actually a concordance—a list of every page containing that keyword, no matter how relevant the information is. For example, for an introductory Java programming book, you might provide keywords such as "object," "class," and "method"—all common Java terms. Unfortunately, these words can also be used in other contexts (such as "the object of this chapter"), and "class" will show up in almost every code sample. You might end up with an entry like this:

class 2, 3, 12, 13, 22, 25, 31, 34, 55, 62, 66, 67, 68, 83, 86

You would then need to sort through the many page references to decide which are relevant.

- **Markers from paragraph tags**

This feature uses the paratext from paragraph tags you select (typically heading tags) to create index markers. If we used that feature on this document, the index would look like this:

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In this case, your index is really just an alphabetized table of contents. You could edit these entries to make them more index-friendly, but for a whole book, that could be quite time consuming. In most cases, you'll do a faster and more thorough job directly indexing the document files.

- **Markers from char tags**

Using this feature, you can collect all paratext tagged with a specific character tag. For example, in your document, all new terms are tagged with Emphasis (italics), and you want to index all of these instances. This feature will be useful if you use the Emphasis tag for new terms only, but if you also used the tag for book titles and variables, you'll have several junk entries to sort through.

The marker generation features can help you in certain cases, but resist the urge to rely on them to do your indexing for you.

Other helpful features

Here are some other IXgen features you may find useful:

- **Expand/collapse markers**

The **Expand Markers** command places each marker's text directly into the flow of your document at the site of the marker tag. The marker's contents are tagged with a special IXGenMarker character tag to help you differentiate the marker text from regular text. To return the marker text to its respective markers, use the **Collapse Markers** command. This feature facilitates translation efforts and help indexers who want to see their entries in the context of their document.

- **Permute marker text**

This option, which is part of the **Apply Edited Marker List** command, takes all multiword, first-level entries and rotates their order so that "opening files" is also indexed as "files, opening." Entries with commas or <\$nopage > tags are excluded, and you can use a control list to avoid nonsense rotations (such as "New Jersey" showing up as "Jersey, New"). Even with these safeguards, you should test the function on a relatively short document before trying it on a whole book.

- **Capitalization**

The **Capitalization** command is an easy way to ensure that your index follows specific capitalization standards. Used in conjunction with the IXgen table of index markers, the capitalization command makes each index entry level conform to the capitalization rules you specify.

To save time, use this tool

If you index in FrameMaker, IXgen will almost certainly save you a significant amount of time. And because it can manage any kind of FrameMaker marker, you will find IXgen useful if you have other markers, such as hypertext, to edit. If you're not convinced, download a full-functioning demo and try it on your next project (<http://home.pacifier.com/~franks>).

Contacting us

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Scriptorium Publishing Services, Inc.
P.O. Box 12761
Research Triangle Park, NC 27709
919-481-2701
sales@scriptorium.com
<http://www.scriptorium.com>