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Book-writing by computer I

As one who in 1984 had a thousand-page textbook published which was 'written' entirely on a microcomputer over three years, I would like to comment on John Trevitt's article 'The First Byte' - I hope for the benefit of fellow-authors.

First, it is obvious the article was written by a publisher. The whole slant is from the publisher's angle. An author using a micro needs to stand up to his publisher from the start.

Second, an author should have nothing to do with inserting printing codes. It is not his job, and from his viewpoint is a tedious, time-consuming chore. He is better employed getting on with his next book.

Third, an author should insist on an extra payment so as to steer in his direction some of the cost savings effected by the publisher. I demanded, and got, a special payment of several thousand pounds for my large textbook.

Finally, an author should insist that the printer of the book saves him time and trouble in connection with printouts. These are troublesome, expensive, and time-consuming for the author to prepare, but a simple matter for the printer. I am astonished to see that John Trevitt's 'workflow' provides for no less than *three* successive printouts to be produced by the author. This is an unwarrantable imposition.

In the case of my textbook I provided no printouts. The printer came with his 'milking machine' and took the data straight from my micro. From this he produced a printout, which was the first I or anyone else saw of the book. I marked on it the relatively few corrections and returned it to the publishers. The next thing I saw was the page proofs. Since there were no rekeying errors, these required even fewer corrections. That is a principal advantage of so-called single keying.

The book I am now 'writing' will follow the same procedure. Though the publishers are this time different, they too have willingly acceded to my suggestions as outlined above. It can be done if the author is firm and knows exactly what he wants and what he is prepared to put up with.