

Letters

Letter from a member

Phil Kopriva

Dear Michel, 17 April 1997

Please let me take this opportunity to thank you for your time and effort spent on the behalf of TUG, as a board member, Vice-President and President, for the past 3 years. We all appreciate the effect your presence provided. Your guidance will be missed. Thank you, again.

After reading your “The State of TUG” article in the latest *TUGboat* (Vol.17, No.4 December 1996) I feel compelled to make a few comments. In general, I must agree with your observations, but, as a T_EX novice and 6–7 year member of TUG, I would like to respond to some of your speculations regarding the diminishing membership.

To let you know something about myself, I was introduced to T_EX by Dan Levin, here in Northern California. At that time I was interested in typesetting mathematical statements, for educational purposes. I am now retired from teaching and research (Physiology/Biophysics), so, at this point, my use of T_EX is strictly personal. I’m currently working on a book (using L^AT_EX) dealing with the mathematics of investments, for those people who have forgotten, or never really learned, their mathematics. I have essentially no contact with other T_EX users, so my level of expertise is questionable, if not wholly deficient. Having described myself somewhat, the following comments may be more understandable.

“Computer-type” people seem to speak a language quite different from us “regular” type! My point, since I’ve been receiving *TUGboat*, the over usage of ACRONYMS has greatly lessened my enjoyment and the usefulness of the various articles. Acronyms should *always* be defined when first used in an article. In fact, I recall a macro which does exactly that. An author/editor should never assume that we readers know all the acronyms used. Maybe there could be half of a page, in each *TUGboat* edition, dedicated to commonly used acronyms and their definitions. Philip Taylor, author of the **Survey** article (p.367), in the abovementioned issue of *TUGboat*, dealt with this problem very well.

Several years ago the decision was made to discontinue, or at least, combine the smaller *T_EX and TUG NEWS* (TTN), with the *TUGboat*. I understand the economics of this decision, however, if there were many members of my calibre, I would not

be surprised if that decision was partially responsible for driving some of them away. The statement, at the time, was that columns such as “Typographer’s Inn”, “Hey—it works!” and “L^AT_EX News” would continue, maybe not with the same titles, authors or format, but, something from which we novices could learn. To date, this has occurred only minimally!! *TUGboat* is apparently written for the expert T_EX and L^AT_EX user. I find very little any more which I can understand, let alone use. This is certainly a testimonial to my computerese, but, is also, possibly partially responsible for the decline in some of the membership. The board members and authors must remember that most of the membership probably do not work in University computer centers, nor are we computer and T_EX experts. We are novices, plugging away, at home, on our desktop PC’s.

You address the issue of the impact of electronic communications. My quest is for macros which will help me with my enjoyment and application of T_EX.

Along with *acronyms*, *TUGboat* could list good WEB sites and T_EX User Groups for the readers. A useful publication should not make us “dig” out this information!

My point is this, unless TUG directors begin addressing the great unwashed T_EX/L^AT_EX user, membership will probably continue to decrease. I don’t think membership cost (\$) is terribly important to most of us, but getting something useful from you T_EX-gurus is. There is little to no help, from either the written or electronic press.

If I sound frustrated, I am. I love T_EX and L^AT_EX and will continue to support TUG, but give me something in return. I generally contribute \$ well above and beyond the regular dues. I have all the texts and books, including yours, but have neither the ability, desire or time to “reinvent the wheel”. What I do want is to be able to pick and choose from the minds of others. Sounds selfish and lazy? Maybe, but that’s how I feel at this point. Yes, I do appreciate the work done by the early pioneers, but that ground has already been plowed.

I’ve taken enough of your time. Please consider some of my suggestions and pass them on to whomever might make them happen. Although I spend much of the day in a wheelchair, maybe I’ll see you at the conference this summer.

Thank you,

◇ Phil Kopriva
San Francisco
phil.kopriva@ggcs.org