

InDesign for Scripture Typesetting

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After seeing the beautiful job that InDesign's paragraph composer can do I was curious to see how it would work with Scripture typesetting. This June I had the Giryama Trial New Testament to typeset so I downloaded the trial version of InDesign 2.01 and gave it a try. This review is based on about 40 hours of using ID and about 20 hours of using VP10. The publication I typeset with ID was a complete New Testament with about 450 footnotes and no pictures. Here is a list of the challenges I faced and how I worked around them. Please note that VP stands for Ventura Publisher 10.397 and ID stands for InDesign 2.01.

Chapter Numbers

ID can't control the breaks before & after a paragraph like VP can. Drop chapter numbers were done with a 1 and 2 character drop cap paragraph tag. My cc table would tag the paragraph according to the number of chapter digits. I had a "Par Chp 1" tag for chapters 1-9 and a "Par Chp 2" tag for 10 and above.

Hyphenation

Language set to "[no language]" will allow only discretionary hyphens (0x00AD). The font used must have the same glyph at 0x00AD (soft hyphen), 0x2010 (hyphen) and 0x2011 (no break hyphen) otherwise it will substitute glyphs and the optical kerning gets messed up when printing to a postscript printer. This was very strange until I finally figured it out.

Headers

ID can't reference a paragraph tag in the page header like VP. To do headers with chapter numbers I set up a master page for each book and then put in the chapter numbers manually before printing out the final copy. This may seem like an incredibly time-consuming job but it only took me an hour to do a 400 page book. ID can put a marker in the header but it must be inserted manually. It can't be embedded in the imported text file. I used this for the book name. I should mention that VP isn't entirely reliable at headers so being forced to do it manually with ID isn't too bad.

Footnotes

ID can't do automatic footnotes. I had to place all the footnotes manually. To place threaded frames in InDesign I had to click on the red + sign on the previous frame and then click where I want the next frame to begin. InDesign would then draw a new frame at the click point the full column width, similar to VP. I had to turn on wrapping for each new frame. Italic superscript letters collide with quote marks when optical kerning is enabled. A possible solution would be to insert a one-unit space inbetween. I should also mention that Ventura can do automatic footnotes but it is not reliable.

Speed

Overall, ID is very slow compared to VP. But, it didn't crash on me once either.

- Optical kerning really slows it down (turn this on at print time)
- Anti-aliasing slows it down a bit
- Paragraph composer slows it down a bit

Special characters - Unicode

The language I was working in had one special character: a v with macron underneath. First I tried to accomplish this with a v and 0x0331 (COMBINING MACRON BELOW) but the macron was not centered for the uppercase V. Neither MS Word 2002, UltraXML 3.2, nor WorldPad 1.5 could center the macron nicely. I ended up making a custom font to overcome this problem. Big whoopee for unicode!

Text

Importing tagged text works fine as long as the tag is minimally defined in the text file and the tag name matches the document's tag name. My cc table added a header to the text file that named all the paragraph tags.

InDesign breaks text at : (colon) which was annoying. I fixed this by inserting a <cNobreak:1> around the colon.

Tagging text with + or - tags can only be done with ctrl, shift or alt variations of the keypad. This was a bit more inconvenient than VP.

Optical kerning generally looks very nice. But there was one instance where the optical kerning didn't look good (between o and l). Kerning can be applied with a cc table and imported with the text. ID doesn't offer customized pair kerning within the application like VP.

Paragraph tags can be forced to the baseline without having to calculate leadings, margins, before and after spacing and all that.

ID's vertical justification works better than VP's. ID will apply the same amount of justification to each paragraph tag in the column (as long as the tag allows it).

Reliability

I had a few problems at first with importing text and printing. But once I overcame those in the first week ID didn't crash at all after that. Not once! Every page printed just like expected. I did not notice any abnormal or quirky behaviour other than the hyphen issue listed above.

VP on the other hand, crashes once in awhile. VP likes to spit out blank pages in the middle of documents for no reason at all. VP doesn't always refresh the screen properly when things change. With VP8 there were numerous other quirks but I haven't tested for them yet in VP 10. I'm using VP 10.397.

Book Setup

With ID you can create an ID book file that contains ID documents, similar to VP4. I tried this first but was soon annoyed with the inconveniences. With each book of the NT as a separate ID document I had to open, synchronize style sheets and save the books manually. This means clicking "OK" twenty seven times every time I wanted to save. I realized I was spending most of my time clicking "OK" and so abandoned this technique.

I then changed the NT into one big file but this was a bit difficult to navigate at first. I overcame this by creating master pages for each book. ID has a navigator window that shows a small icon for each page spread. The icon displays the master page that is assigned to it. With this I could identify books in the navigator window and easily jump to where I wanted to go.

Autoflow only works when you import text. If you add pictures or footnotes and push text further back it doesn't make more frames and add pages at the end of the book.

Screen

Anti aliased text looks much better than VP but it slows down the application a bit. The anti aliasing is very similar to what Acrobat offers.

ID's toolbars are intuitive, customizable and economical on screen space. I found myself wanting to dock the toolbars like VP but ID can't do this.

Printing

ID can do basic printing but nothing compared to VP's powerful impositioning tools. We use FinePrint to do simple booklet impositioning and it worked fine. Both ID and VP can output directly to PDF.

Summary: Things I like better about InDesign 2.01

- Paragraph composer works beautifully
- Anti alias text looks better
- Baseline can be viewed on screen
- Glyph scaling
- Optical kerning generally look nice
- Force paragraph tags to align to baseline without having to do all the math
- Vertical justification applies the same amount to all tags on a page
- InDesign can lock column guides
- SMALL CAPS works like MS Word
- Selective linking and updating of externally referenced files
- Paragraph tags and Master Pages are linked (changing one changes them all)
- More stable than Ventura 10.
- Support for unicode, though I wasn't impressed with the combining diacritic that I needed.

Summary: Things I like better about Ventura Publisher 10

- Select and edit multiple paragraph tags
- Customized toolbars
- Automatic running headers (though not very reliable)
- Automatic footnotes (though not very reliable)
- Customized pair kerning
- Control over paragraph breaks
- Copy editor, viewing hidden codes
- Document can be divided into chapters and navigated easily
- Underlying page makes adding text and frames easy
- Copy and paste to insert threaded frames for footnotes
- Faster at everything
- Paragraph styles that span multiple columns
- Superior print engine with powerful impositioning features
- Context sensitive help

Conclusion

- InDesign is more stable than Ventura.
- The multi-line composer, glyph scaling and optical kerning of InDesign is superior to VP and gives paragraphs a more uniform spacing, making it easier to read.
- Ventura is a faster application than InDesign.
- Ventura has slightly more convenient features that are suited for long documents.

Recommendation

I would switch to InDesign for Scripture typesetting only if I had a faster computer with more RAM. While InDesign is slightly more cumbersome to use, the resulting document looks nicer and is easier to read.

My test computer was:

- Windows 2000 sp3
- 1.6ghz Athlon XP
- 256mb ECC DDR RAM
- 20gb 7200 rpm hard drive 2mb cache