

Benefits of eIndexes

Digital publications need indexes just like print publications. These digital indexes (eIndexes) should include headings and subheadings, whose locators should link directly to the appropriate content within the text.

Embedded indexes have index codes inserted into the text of the indexed document at their appropriate location. Index entries therefore appear in the compiled index and also link to anchors within the indexed text. The index entry in the index list is linked directly to the exact relevant location in the main text.

A key benefit of an eIndex is that it aids in efficient and accurate information discovery. A Ctrl-F or global search is not good enough on its own. Just searching on a term may result in a lot of “hits” for the reader to look through, many of which may contain irrelevant information. With a properly embedded and linked index, the reader can be taken to the exact location in the text where the relevant information is located.

eIndexes provide the following advantages over search

1. eIndexes are **written by information specialists** who analyze content and develop lists of terms representing topics, breakdown and relationships. An index is a **crystallization of access paths** to names, topics, and concepts covered in the document.
2. eIndexes take the reader to **substantive coverage of a topic, not passing mentions**. With search, the reader will be directed to every instance of a word regardless of the value of the information located there.
3. Search requires a kind of “seek to find” activity of readers. Often a reader must hazard a guess as to which search term will yield the desired result, and search success can be a matter of luck. Given the inexact nature of keyword searches, much relevant information can remain untapped. An eIndex **eliminates search guesswork** and takes the reader directly to the needle in the haystack!
4. eIndexes allow readers to **connect to specific narrow topics under broader topics** quickly and easily. For example, a reader might require information on grooming or training dogs, to which useful index subheadings can directly link. A search would produce many undifferentiated hits for “dog,” all needing to be checked for relevance. Having an eIndex means that search results will also bring up sections from the index itself, so that the reader can then access and browse related terms.
5. eIndexes include terms that **direct the reader to passages of interest when that exact term is not used in the text**. For example, a paragraph on nutrition may not contain the words “diet” or “food” but the index can cover this, with double-postings under alternative terms or cross-references.
6. With the use of cross-references, eIndexes **direct readers to the correct or preferred term** if the first term entered isn’t where the information is located.
7. eIndexes allow readers to see **an overview of the relevant information and the extent of that information** within the document. With search, the readers have nothing to let them know what concepts are available, how extensively they are discussed, nor where their major coverage occurs.
8. eIndexes **distinguish homographs** (words that look the same but have different meanings). For example, searching for “trade” could return hits on trade publications, occupation or import/export.
9. eIndexes are print indexes with all of those benefits, technologically adapted to digital publications. eIndexes **take the reader to exact locations in digital publications**. Because they are indexes, an access method familiar to users, they are **easy to understand and use**.
10. *eIndexes therefore provide the potential for **active, linked indexes** in ebooks for an **enhanced navigational experience** for the reader.*

For more information, see:

- ASI Digital Publications Indexing Special Interest Group: www.digital-publications-indexing.org
- SI Publishing Technology Group: www.ptg-indexers.org.uk