

Greetings from TUG*

Christina Thiele

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This is the 5th anniversary of the Nederlandstalige T_EX Gebruikersgroep, better known to me as ‘the NTG’.

‘History’ sounds so . . . dramatic

Five years, in some ways, seems like such a short time, when we think of it as ‘history’. And yet, when you live through each moment of it, five years seems like such a long time. So much has happened, so many things have appeared and disappeared, have changed, have been talked about but never appeared . . .

But no matter how long or short ‘five years’ may seem, it is a good point at which to stop for a moment, look back at how things began, and also look forward to areas where things can continue to evolve.

Your chairman, Kees van der Laan (who has so kindly agreed to read these few words of greeting from me, and from TUG), will be presenting the details of just this sort of historical review of the past, and potential view of the future. I do not need to repeat what he has to say — and indeed, it is not for me to describe the NTG to the NTG! But I have seen his text, and it is indeed impressive what the NTG has done for and with its members over the years.

Instead, in my role as president of another user group, the T_EX Users Group, which is now in its 14th year, I would like to simply convey our congratulations to your user group, your board, and your members, on your 5th year, your ‘lustrum’, and express our hopes that we shall continue to see the type of co-operation and support which has characterised the relationship between TUG and NTG for these past years.

When TUG was 5 years old, I was not a member! TUG, at age 5, had settled into its routine of an annual meeting in the summer, and a journal called *TUGboat*. It had members around the world, although most were in North America — well, let’s face it: in the United States. And as T_EX spread, membership numbers went up everywhere, and eventually national or language-specific user groups were needed to deal with the specific concerns of T_EX users. Enter the NTG, amongst others.

And here you are, five years down the road, with two

meetings per year as *your* routine, with the MAPs issues coming out twice a year, and a membership which is healthy and active and dynamic. Each year there are NTG members who present papers at TUG meetings; each issue of *TUGboat*, it seems, has some NTG representation. The exchange has indeed been going on for many years.

The ‘Future’ sounds so intimidating

All of our efforts, our work, our knowledge, our energies, are focussed on T_EX: that it continues to exist is of vital importance and interest to us all.

Challenges which face TUG are also those which face all user groups: the question of where T_EX will lead us in the next several years, as new programs are developed, many with T_EX or T_EX-like elements behind more user-friendly front ends. What T_EX has been doing and has allowed us, as users, to do for many years, is now slowly becoming possible in other software. Where will pure T_EX be in the future? Will we still be able to use it? What will happen to us?

In short, the same questions which anyone asks, when they stop to think of their position in society today. What will happen to us, to our knowledge and skills, to our means of making a living?

We know that T_EX has been portable and stable since 1982, more or less. We know that our files from many years ago will still work today. We know that our skills and expertise can only grow and expand and deepen every year that we use T_EX. But still . . . there are the doubts, the concerns, when we hear talk of L^AT_EX3, of NTS, of entirely new operating systems like Windows NT. Where will T_EX fit into all of this? Will *we* still fit into all of this?

One could raise many more questions, more uncertainties, more doubts. And we could argue ourselves into a corner, incapable of action, afraid to move forward, fearful of being forced to switch to some other program. Caught like a rabbit in the lights of a car at night.

But that’s not useful. Not productive. And not really the sense I have of the T_EX community’s behaviour patterns; -) We don’t tend to sit still!

*This text to be read by Kees van der Laan, on my behalf, at the 5th anniversary meeting of the Dutch-speaking TeX User Group meeting, June 10th, 1993.

We must encourage those who are passionately concerned with these future directions. We must support improvements and changes which do not hinder or go against the main guiding principles behind T_EX: that it be portable, and that it produce beautiful documents.

And for everyone else involved with T_EX — users like us — we must continue to improve our own skills, our own knowledge in the use of T_EX, in order to be proud producers of these beautiful documents.

Because it is not T_EX alone which will do this. No program will produce beautiful documents all by itself. It is the *users* of those programs who produce beautiful documents. T_EX is merely a tool — an extraordinary tool, certainly — but we are the craftsmen who must learn to use it to its full potential.

And to accomplish that, we have no time to sit in corners, to stand frozen in the lights of a car at night. We have work to do!

User groups are the future

Our user groups can help in teaching us how to refine our use, show us ways of improving our knowledge and skills. Our user groups are there to bind T_EX users together, to bring them into contact with these better methods and improved skills.

And it is our users who are ultimately the source of that information: the user group is merely the means by which that information can be distributed widely and thoroughly.

And that is our challenge as user groups: to be the highway for this information interchange. To provide the means by which those with wide-ranging knowledge and skills can pass their expertise along to others. And to provide the means by which all of us, as users, can learn to adapt to, and benefit from, the changes and refinements which those who do development work are labouring over so intensely.

The near future

I hope that many of you will be able to come to Aston in July, to attend our user group's annual meeting. For those who cannot, there will be NTG members who will bring back reports and comments on what they find, and what they have seen and learned. And thus, the exchange will continue between our user groups.

I wish you good luck and prosperity in your next 5-year cycle, and many years beyond that.

With kind regards,

Christina Thiele
President, T_EX Users Group