Buzzword bought by Adobe
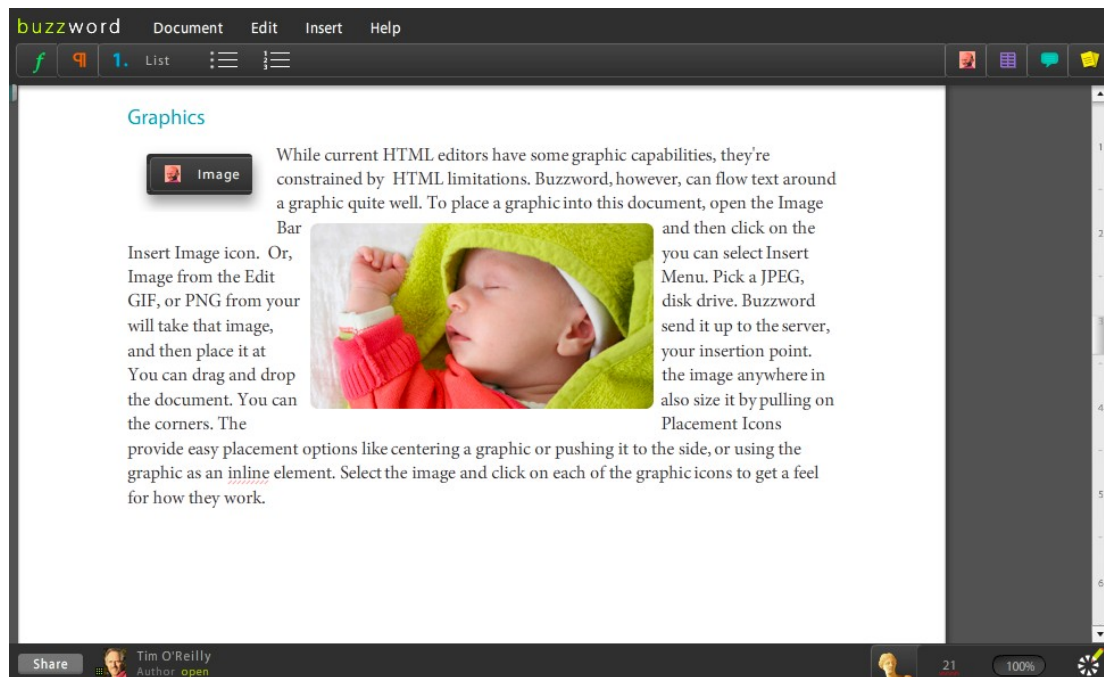
Via Bruce D'Arcus, amongst others (such as Tim O'Reilly) comes news that Adobe has acquired an online word processor called Buzzword. Bruce notes that it has no styles support, but that it will. He's impressed with its beauty.

[Update – should have read Tim O'Reilly's post more carefully – the baby is actually a species of cute error message, but I think my comments below are still valid in general]

I'm not impressed with this screenshot:

The text around the image is unreadable. You try it.

> To place a graphic into this document open the Image Bar <search for the next line> and then click on the you can select <oops – need to go back to the left column> click on the Insert Image Icon. Or <hunt for the the rest of the line> you can select Insert.

This is a really bad example to have picked – the procedure should have been broken into step by step bullets without a sleeping infant.

People are excited about the ability to drag pictures around, but in my experience that's one of the worst things about offline word processors. You drag a picture and then as the text changes it jumps around, sometimes onto the wrong page. For most users most of the time the results are worse than just having images treated as characters. I watched my nine year old try to lay out frog pictures for a school project using Word the other day and it was horrific. Maybe Adobe will do a better job.

What I'd like to see in an online word processor:

1. Good quality HTML, preferably XHTML either natively or via import/export.
2. Atompub support both as a client and a server.

3. Interop with offline word processors.

   My idea for this, which I shared with the Google Docs team is to use an ICE-like stylesheet. If you create an online doc then download it, it would use styles, and provide a toolbar that looks just like the online version with a built-in upload button to send documents back to the online service.

   An online word processor that did this would **infect the offline word processing world with a benign styles virus**. If the toolbar was good enough people would use it for all their documents written offline, with a natural path to the online world.

   (If nobody picks up on this idea we'll do it at USQ by working with the most open online systems we can find as part of our commitment to word processor interoperability. We have already started building such a toolbar, and it will soon be able to talk to ICE services via the web to make blog posts, update websites, post courseware to Moodle and put stuff into institutional repositories. Online word processor people, drop me a line or call me on +61 410 326955)