March’s program features Barbara Immel, President of Immel Resources, a consulting firm providing services in regulatory compliance, quality assurance, and training for the pharmaceutical, biotechnology, and medical device industries. Barbara has prepared a special program for the joint STC Berkeley and Biotech/Medical SIG on March 8 to bring us up to date on the biotech industry.

Barbara has eighteen years of biotech industry experience, working for Syva Company, Syntex Corporation, and Chiron Corporation for over twelve years before starting her own firm. She teaches biotechnology and drug development courses for UC Berkeley Extension, and is a columnist for the trade journal BioPharm.

Barbara got her start as a technical editor and writer, attending many STC and AMWA meetings along the way, and published one of her first articles in an STC chapter newsletter.

Barbara will cover the following topics in her special presentation to STC members:

- an overview of the biotechnology and pharmaceutical industry
- a thumbnail sketch of the product development process
- current trends in regulatory compliance and other issues affecting the industry
- what sets the industry apart
- how a biologic or therapeutic product differs from a drug or medical device
- types of writing in this business
- tips on breaking into the industry

**Important:** There will be no Biotech/Medical SIG meeting on March 2 in the Chiron Cafe. The combined meeting on March 8 will be held in its place.

**PREVIOUS PROGRAM SUMMARY**

**What Makes a Web Site Usable**

**By Xanna Schweickhardt**

The following is a summary of January’s chapter meeting.

The evening’s speaker was Meryl Natchez, CEO of TechProse. TechProse has been in operation in Lafayette since 1983, based on the firm’s core competencies: technical writing and training. Later the firm moved into Web development and online training.

Natchez has taught computer documentation at San Francisco State University and California State Sacramento, and is past President of the San Francisco STC chapter. She discussed Web and online document usability, and started with a memorable quote.

“Writing about music is like dancing about architecture.”—Thelonious Monk

In an ironic twist of fate, Meryl was unable to get power to her laptop to show the group the visuals. Meryl said, “I’ll just change that to say that talking about the Web with no visuals is like dancing about architecture. So tonight, I’m going to dance about architecture.”
TECHNICAL COMMUNICATION is the bridge between those who create ideas and those who use them. Conveying scientific and technical information clearly, precisely, and accurately is an essential occupation in all sectors of business and government.

STC has more than 20,000 members and 144 chapters worldwide. Its members include writers, editors, artists, illustrators, photographers, audiovisual specialists, managers, supervisors, educators, students, employees, and consultants.

STC strives to:
• Advance the theory and practice of technical communication.
• Promote awareness of trends and technology in technical communication.
• Aid the educational and professional development of its members.

Membership
Membership is open to everyone. Regular membership is $110/year, with an additional $15 enrollment fee the first year. Student membership is $45/year.

To receive additional information and an application form, via mail or email: employment@stc-berkeley.org

Advertising Rates
Page $70, 2/3 page $50, 1/2 page $40, 1/3 page $30, 1/6 page $20, business card $10. STC members receive 20% off. Ad deadline is the fifteenth of the month prior to publication.

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Deadline for unsolicited submissions is the fifteenth of the month preceding publication.

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Why So Many Bad Sites?

Many programmers don’t think like users, Meryl says. They want to do what works, what’s fun for them, what will get their job done. They don’t consider the viewpoint of the user, who may know nothing about the system they’re using.

Web design is still a new field. The internet “explosion” only took place in the last three or four years, and the oldest, most experienced Web developer can’t have more than twelve years under his or her belt.

A screen is not a book. We understand books very well, and after centuries of making books we are good at making them usable. We’re still “thinking like books” when we sit down to make and use Web sites.

Poor online systems are harder to use than poor paper. Where even the worst book or manual has a table of contents and an index that you can get to any time, it’s harder to find what you need in a Web site that doesn’t let you navigate where you want.

Sizing and budgeting. Programmers and developers may understand very well what would work best, and simply not be able to afford it.

What Works?

E-commerce works. Sites like Amazon.com do a good job of making it easy to find what you want and buy it. They provide easy-to-find information on products and prices, and one-click ordering lets anyone who has ordered from them before do it again with one mouse click as long as shipping and payment information are the same.

Downloading software from the web, or references and dictionaries. “Reference books are going to be extinct,” Meryl asserted. “Who here has downloaded software from the Web?” she asked the group, and 30 percent raised hands in response. The test question, she pointed out, used to be, “Who here has email?” as a measure of how fast we’re moving into the online age, but now email use is almost 100%.

We’re still “thinking like books” when we sit down to make and use Web sites.

Metaphors and graphics that match the information you are talking about. An example of a good match is BART’s Web site www.bart.gov, designed by TechProse. This site’s home page features a picture of the BART system five-color map. The five main information areas that the user can visit are cued to the same five colors, similar to the way the map locates a rider in the system.

A graphic that doesn’t work, Meryl pointed out, would be the annual report from your bank that shows a bunch of CEOs sitting around an empty conference table. “Shows you they’re working hard for your money!” she added.

What Doesn’t Work?

The number one problem with Web sites that don’t work can be summed up in three words: Too Much Text. Tests show that the amount of information online that is not retained is 30 to 60 percent. This is too high to be effective.

Tables and complex documents also don’t belong on the web. Abstract stuff doesn’t come across well.

Anything requiring personal context such as facial, physical or vocal cues.

Too much fun. A common problem for poor Web sites is too much animation, too much color, or too many distractions from the information the user is there for.

“It’s hard to resist the lure of the cute,” Meryl says. “Dare to be dull.” Why would a designer include so much that isn’t needed? Sarah Lee Hauslinger called it the “because you can” syndrome, and likened it to “the days of early desktop publishing, where every document had 78 fonts” and borders and boxes made of dingbats. It’s important for designers to ask themselves, “Is this necessary?”

Stuff that doesn’t work for low-end users. Programmers and developers are testing the products on the same state-of-the-art systems they did the original work on. Most of us have computers considerably behind the cutting edge in terms of modem speed, processing power, and screen size. Testing needs to include the equipment—and the people—who will actually be using the product.

Elements of Usable Design

“Wide rather than deep.” The user is not there to go deeply into the subject, but to find the basic information quickly and move on. There needs to be an index, showing where to find everything you need.

Multiple paths to information. Not all users have the same goal in mind in coming to your site. If you’re running a theater, some customers want to research show dates and prices for future plans, some want directions to the theater or parking lots for the same
night, and others might want refund information. Each piece of information on the site needs to be linked, so you can get to it in more than one way.

Clear, consistent site design and navigation techniques.

Common tools used in the expected manner. “If it looks clickable,” Meryl said, “make it clickable!”

Make the user feel smart and in control.

Once you’ve created your site, how do you know if it works?

Testing Your Web Design

**Stage 1** Standard software unit test. How does it perform on different platforms, monitor sizes, etc.?

**Stage 2** Integration testing. The parts work, now put them together; does the whole thing work?

**Stage 3** Usability test. How many clicks does it take to get to the first information? How many times do they hit a dead end? How often do they start over? If they have a paper guide, when do they turn to it?

The first three stages are standard to any software. Web testing adds one more stage.

**Stage 4** Tracking, or follow-the-money: How many users visit your site? How far into the site do they go when they visit? How many buy? How many research but don’t buy? Do they come back again?

Things to remember for Web site designers:

*Define your objectives.* Are you giving information, selling something, offering software for download, or what?

*Define your audience.*

*Create a plan for site design*—and keep your objectives in sight when working.

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**Bayer Writer Shares Tips**

Ben Schwartz, a Senior Technical Writer in the Manufacturing Documentation Department at Bayer Laboratory in Berkeley, gave the Biotech/Medical SIG members a fascinating presentation on technical writing at Bayer Pharmaceutical in Berkeley. The Berkeley Bayer facility, which covers several city blocks, is primarily a manufacturing plant for pharmaceutical products.

In order to meet FDA regulations regarding the production of pharmaceutical products, each step in the manufacturing process must be documented as the product is produced.

As covered in Ben’s presentation, the Bayer documents used to record every aspect of drug manufacturing fall into one of two categories:

*Batch Product Records,* or BPRs, are used to document the production of a product. These documents are filled in by the production staff while the work is completed while performing a process. A BPR documents information such as the amount used in the “drug recipe,” temperatures during production, procedures to follow when collecting test samples and lot samples.

*Standard Operating Procedures,* or SOPs, are used to document other tasks related to drug production, such as Equipment Cleaning and Maintenance. These documents present step-by-step procedures for checking the status of the equipment and assuring the equipment is clean and functioning properly.

The Berkeley Bayer site maintains approximately 1,600 of these document masters, which are used in the departments during the manufacturing process.

All documents can be audited by FDA agencies at any point of their being effective, in the process of being used to document a process, or after completed and filed as a record for a product lot.

It is very important that each document reflects exactly the process being carried out in the manufacturing procedure. This is where expertise as a technical writer and document specialist comes into play. The specialist receives change requests from staff members in the field and must review the submission for accuracy and completeness, rewriting and editing the revision as necessary with the staff member requesting the change.

The document specialist coordinates review of the revision and often arranges meetings where the changes can be discussed and agreed upon. These meetings may involve production managers who must approve the changes, scientists or engineers who can evaluate how the proposed revision might effect the product, and Quality Assurance and Regulatory Affairs, who determine that FDA requirements are being complied with.

**Coordination the Key**

According to Ben, the most important task for a technical writer at Bayer is coordinating this review of document revisions and maintaining change control.

“Change Control is the most important part of the biotech field,” Ben said. “Any change request must be reviewed by the scientists or engineers familiar with the subject, and approved by Quality Assurance, and all change, review, and approval tracked and documented.”

Ben emphasized that writing, in itself, is not a large part of being a technical writer at Bayer, or at other companies where he has worked. Most documents used in production environments are formatted and written from templates.
For a technical writer, the skills for working easily with people and organizational skills are as important as writing or grammar. A technical writer is always more a synthesizer and facilitator than a creator, he insisted. Ben even suggested that his training as an actor and performer was as useful to him in his work as a technical writer as his skills as a writer and editor.

Guidelines for Biotech Writing

Some guidelines to follow, Ben suggested, when actually writing and editing basic biotech procedures:

- When working with scientists and engineers, ask them to divide any process into not more than four to seven major steps in a logical sequence. The technical writer, or the writer and scientist together, can then refine the steps and add needed details.

- When creating a SOP or BPR, write one line for each step in the procedure.

- Do not combine two tasks in one step, or write in paragraph form. It is very difficult for a production staff person who is carrying a document around while they perform a task to grasp long, dense paragraphs.

- Complete each procedure using internal logic. For instance, if at the beginning of a procedure you instruct the production staff person to open a sterilizer door, be sure to instruct the production staff member to close the sterilizer door at the appropriate time.

- Tailor your document to the end user: the person who will be using it. If you are writing a document for a manager whose interest is only to understand the flow of a process, simplify the document by removing extraneous technical detail. If you are writing a procedure for a production person who will be preparing a solution, make sure steps as detailed as water temperature and mix times are provided in an easy-to-follow, step-by-step logical manner.

In addition to his discussion of documents, Ben gave us vivid descriptions of production staff, gowned and working in an aseptic area, who must still complete data entry and follow written instructions. He demonstrated how a step-by-step procedure might be written for instructing the staff on how to use a sterilizer that is clean on one side and “not clean” on the other, and the detail required to ensure the separation.

Getting a Job in Biotech

He closed his remarks with a few suggestions on how to improve a technical writer’s chances of getting a job in biotech writing:

- Become familiar with the information and requirements defined in the FDA guideline booklet, available from the FDA, describing the cGMPs (current Good Manufacturing Procedures) for pharmaceuticals.

- Learn the requirements; learn the language used in them. If you are interviewed for a position in biotech, you will be expected to know the lingo.

- Use creativity in contacting directly the person who is hiring the writer or editor. Call the company’s main number and ask for the documentation manager’s, or engineering manager’s, or project manager’s name. Make the direct contact if you can, although the contact may tell you to route your resume and cover letter to Human Resources.

- If unable to obtain a manager’s name, dial a different extension from the primary company telephone number by one or two numbers. Ask the person who answers, if he or she is friendly, who hires the technical writers in the company, or if they know the person you are trying to contact. Sometimes you succeed; people are generally friendly.

Use national job search agencies that are on the web, as well as local agencies when looking for temporary work or employment. Network, network, network.

Get Involved with The Biotech/Medical SIG

Next Meeting: Wednesday, April 5, 7:00 P.M.

The Biotech/Medical special interest group (SIG) meets on the first Wednesday of each month. The goals of our meetings are to (1) network with other writers in the Biotech/Medical field, (2) learn more about our profession, and (3) improve ourselves professionally.

The SIG plays several roles: it serves as a place to build community, to educate, and to mentor. If you would like your name to be put on our mailing list for meeting announcements and minutes, please send email (with some alternative form of contact—phone number or mailing address—to the “Membership Guy” at doug_montalbano@yahoo.com.
Resources

Free for Freelancers
Some resources for would-be entrepreneurs and freelancers.

Alumni Resources in San Francisco A non-profit organization with workshops, coaching, support groups and library for career development.
www.ar.org or phone 415-274-4747.


American Society of Journalists and Authors Features a service which lets authors know about the contract terms for most popular magazines, asja.org/cw/cwpage.htm

East Bay Editor’s Guild A support and information group. Email to kristin@baremedit.com.

Help for Med Writers
Web sites for medical writing opportunities and information:
genomejobs.com
biospace.com
fda.gov
bioview.com

More Web Resources
The following Web sites have aided many tech communicators in need and are worthy of a visit.

Merriam-Webster Online
A great site for quickly checking the spelling of words.
www.m-w.com

The American Society of Indexers ASI is the only professional organization in the United States solely devoted to the advancement of indexing, abstracting, and database building
www.asindexing.org

The Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers (IEEE) Professional Communication Society (PCS) helps engineers and technical communicators develop skills in written presentation.
www.ieeepcs.org

Coolnerds.com offers “random stuff for aspiring nerd-brains” via easy-to-use search forms. A good place for those new to Web authoring.
www.coolnerds.com

Usability Sites
These sites focus on usability issues.

Georgia Tech’s Graphics, Visualization & Usability Center, according to their mission statement, “invents and teaches principles and technologies which, by making computers ubiquitous, more useful, and obvious to use, make individuals and organizations more effective in many important professional, scholarly, and private activities.”

Okay, so, they need help writing mission statements. Their site, however, carries plenty of new stuff in interface design studies.
www.cc.gatech.edu/gvu

Jakob Nielsen’s Web site carries lots of this usability guru’s presentations, archives of five years of his bi-weekly column on Web usability. Recent feature topics included: “How People Read on the Web,” and “Top Ten Mistakes of Web Design.” If you are new to Web design or have an interest in usability studies, you'll find some interesting things here.
www.useit.com

STC’s Information Design Special Interest Group (SIG) is a good place to start if you are interested in how information is organized, distributed, and presented. There are lots of links to international groups involved in this important (and hot) field.
www.stc.org/pics/idsig/resources.html

Washington, DC STC Chapter Web Resources Page offers plenty of links to technical communication issues. Here you’ll find links to tutorials on Web production, design, creating help, lots of CGI and Perl scripts for forms and databases, free graphics, clip art, shareware, and more.

Send Us Your Site
If you have a Web resource site that you think will benefit technical communicators, send email to newsletter@stc-berkeley.org.
Bay Area Meetings of Interest

AMERICAN MEDICAL WRITERS ASSOCIATION (AMWA) OF NORTHERN CALIFORNIA Meets periodically at various Bay Area locations. Contact Maggie George, 650-326-4636 or maggie@amwancal.org.


AMERICAN SOCIETY OF INDEXERS, GOLDEN GATE CHAPTER Meetings provide tips, pointers, basic information about indexing. Contact Karen Apland, 408-847-8234, andrea621@aol.com, or www.well.com/user/asi.

ASSOCIATION FOR WOMEN IN COMPUTING (AWC) First Wednesdays, 5:30 P.M., location in transition. Contact AWC at 415-979-8450.

EAST BAY STC Second Thursdays, 5:30 P.M. Reserve meal choice by noon the Tuesday prior to the meeting. At Tony Rama’s in Danville, $18 with reservation—ph. 925-443-4514—or $22 at the door.

EAST BAY STC CONSULTANTS AND INDEPENDENT CONTRACTORS PIC Fourth Wednesdays, 6:30 P.M. The group has been meeting at the Pleasanton library but plans to move its location soon. Contact Lori Cooke, 925-426-9755, for information.

EAST BAY STC ONLINE Fourth week of month. Contact Melody Brumis, 925-464-5944, for dates and location.

HIGH TECHNOLOGY ENTREPRENEURIAL COUNCIL Second Wednesdays, 6:30 P.M., at the Lakeview Club, 300 Lakeside Drive, Oakland. Call 510-339-3895.

NATIONAL WRITERS UNION (UAW) A labor union for freelance writers of all genres. Contact Mike Bradley, 510-482-1712, or the NWU Tech Writers Job Hotline, 415-979-5522.

NORTH BAY STC Third Thursdays, 6:30 P.M., at Parker Compumotor, 5500 Labath Drive, Rohnert Park. Contact Whitney Parker at WhitneyP@aol.com.

NORTHERN CALIFORNIA SGML USERS GROUP Meets quarterly at various Bay Area locations, generally on Wednesdays 9:00 am to 12:30 P.M. (breakfast provided). Contact 415-522-9769.

PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATION OF COMPUTER EDUCATORS (PACE) Serves the technical training community in the Bay Area. Most meetings are the morning of the second Thursday in San Francisco. See www.pacenetwork.org.

SACRAMENTO STC First Wednesdays, 6:30 P.M., at Coca’s Restaurant at Madison & Sunrise. Contact 916-658-9602.

SAN FRANCISCO STC Third Wednesdays, 6:00 P.M., at the London Wine Bar, 415 Sansome. Contact 415-561-9204, or stc.org/region8/sfc/www/.

SILICON VALLEY STC Fourth Thursdays, at Four Points Hotel, Sunnyvale. Contact Gwen Johnson, gwenejohn@aol.com, for reservations and details.

SILICON VALLEY STC CONSULTING AND INDEPENDENT CONTRACTING SIG First Tuesdays, 6:00 P.M., at Vessuvio’s, 3044 El Camino Real, Santa Clara. Contact Roger Steciak, 408-280-7136, or Jim Bowman, 510-657-7961. No meetings January or July.

SILICON VALLEY STC GRAFiSIG A resource for STC members who have an interest in visual communications. Meets monthly; date and time vary. Contact Marek Buckiewicz, 408-395-2957, or marek@mxb.com.

SILICON VALLEY STC ONLINE AND INTERACTIVE INFORMATION SIG Third Tuesdays, 6:30 P.M., at Software Publishing Corporation, Bldg. 3, 3165 Kifer Road, Sunnyvale. Contact Charlie Rhoades, 408-379-7000, x1414, or charly@hal.com.


SILICON VALLEY STC STUDENT SIG Fourth Tuesdays. Contact Pali Bain, 408-286-1100. Does not meet during the summer.

SILICON VALLEY STC WRITING/EDITING SIG Last Mondays, 6:00 P.M., at Wyse Technology, 3471 N. First Street, Bldg. 3, San Jose. Contact Stephen Peliotis at stevep@synopsys.com.
Next Meeting:

Wednesday

March 8

Writing in the Biotech and Pharmaceutical Industry
With Barbara Immel

Meal reservations required by Monday, March 6.
See page 2 for costs and meeting details. Please do not call the restaurant!

Café de la Paz: 1600 Shattuck Avenue (at Cedar)
Buffet and No-Host Bar 6:30 - 7:30
Announcements and Program 7:30 - 9:00

STC-Berkeley Meeting Location and Directions

By BART: Exit the Berkeley station (Richmond line) at Center and proceed north six blocks up Shattuck Ave. to 1600 Shattuck at Cedar.

From north of Berkeley: From I-80, take the University Avenue exit. Go east (towards UCal) to Shattuck Ave. Turn left (north) on Shattuck and go seven blocks to 1600 Shattuck. Turn left on Cedar for parking.

From south of Berkeley: Take I-880 north from San Jose through Oakland. Follow the highway as it curves sharply to the right (where traffic merges) and becomes I-980. Continue on I-980 to Highway 24 (toward Berkeley/Walnut Creek). Take the first exit from 24 (Martin Luther King Jr./51st). Turn right on 51st St. and make first left onto Shattuck Ave. Proceed north on Shattuck to downtown Berkeley. Turn left on University Ave., then right again at first light (north) onto Shattuck. Go seven blocks to 1600 Shattuck. Turn left on Cedar for parking.

From San Francisco: Take the Bay Bridge towards Oakland (I-80 East). At the end of the bridge, stay in the left-hand lanes and head towards Berkeley and Sacramento. Proceed two miles and exit onto University Avenue (on the exit ramp, stay in left lane of split). Go east (towards UCal) to Shattuck Ave. Turn left (north) on Shattuck and go seven blocks to 1600 Shattuck. Turn left on Cedar for parking.

From far East Bay: Take Highway 24 west through Caldecott Tunnel, exit Ashby Avenue. West on Ashby to Shattuck Ave. Right on Shattuck to downtown Berkeley. Turn left (west) on University Ave., then right again at first light (north) onto Shattuck for seven blocks to 1600 Shattuck. Turn left on Cedar for parking.