Blue Skies, No Candy: Pros and Cons of Freelancing

An informal discussion, moderated by Berkeley-STC President Sarah Lee Hauslinger, featuring Richard Mateosian, Marla Wilson, Thomas Albert, and Judith Herr.

Technical communicators at all levels seem to be interested in freelancing. In fact, many cite a desire to work independently as one of the motivating forces in their decision to enter the profession. Freelancing can be heavenly, hellish, or both; this panel discussion addresses the question of why, how, and when both of these descriptors can apply. The panelists range from diehard independent contractors to steadfast staffers, with a few transitioners thrown in. They'll share their experiences and stories and participate in an audience-driven open Q&A session.

PANELISTS:
Sarah Lee Hauslinger had her own consulting business for 15 years before joining Intraspect Software in 2000 as Director of Publications.

Richard Mateosian was an independent contractor for many years before going captive. He is now with Documentum.

Marla Wilson has her own business, Printed Page Productions. She has been self-employed for well over a decade.

Thomas Albert is a Senior Technical Writer with MDLI, and teaches in the UC Berkeley Extension Technical Communication Program.

Judith Herr started her own business, Well Chosen Words, in 1999 after a ten-year stint with SAIC.

Come and join us on May 9th for what promises to be a lively and interactive program.

Meeting details appear on page 2. You can reserve your seat online at www.stc-berkeley.org.

Chapter Elections
Ballot Enclosed

Ballots and instructions for voting are enclosed in this issue and also appear on the chapter Web site. Votes will be counted at the May chapter meeting.

Candidates are: President—Kathryn Munn; Treasurer—Susan Marchionna; VP of Programs—Ruth Wright; VP of Membership—Paul Sinasohn—all running unopposed. The two candidates for Chapter Secretary are: David McCandless and Joseph Ryshpan. Statements for both appeared last month.

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About the STC

STC strives to:
- Advance the education and practice of technical communication.
- Promote awareness of trends and technologies in technical communication.
- Advance the theory and practice of technical communication.
- Develop community.
- Aid the educational and professional development of its members.

Officers and Volunteers

President: Sarah Lee Hauslinger
415-664-2645

Pres e e a e @ stc . a o o g

VP Programs: Ruth Wright
510-206-9192

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VP Membership: Paul Sinasohn
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Treasurer: Kathryn Munn
510-865-9045
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Secretary: Frank Lucchese
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Employment Manager:
Madeleine Adkins
510-891-3953
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Web Manager:
David Alt
t e etl stc . a o o g

Address, phone, or email changes:
VP Membership (see above)

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New Monthly Column Premieres

The Ragged Left is introducing a new column this month, the Resource Corner. Guest writers will continue to feature resources that benefit the technical writing industry.

Resource Corner

Distance Learning: Online Universities

By Gary Hayes

Need to begin using an unfamiliar software application in a hurry? How about expanding your writing knowledge into a new frontier—possibly Networks & Servers or a programming language? Perhaps you regularly see terms such as APIs, C++, OLE, and you just wonder what they are all about.

At last, the much anticipated day of Web-based distance learning has arrived. Today there are scores of venues for hands-on, interactive training courses of study that address a truckload of subjects in a variety of ways. Training choices include: instructor-led, self-paced tutorials, and even short, video-based information-only seminars.

Instructor-led courses generally run from four to six weeks. Enrollment is limited. The instructor posts assignments and assists students in a virtual classroom. In addition to giving you course materials, these classes often point you towards related links, supplementary references, related applications, and even additional tutorials.

If you like the chat format, you can check out the online university's department lounges where you can discuss assignments and trade ideas with the other students in your class.

One big advantage that distance learning providers offer is single-source learning. You download the class text, data files, and any necessary software plug-ins from a single site. Another advantage is that the person teaching the course is often the person who authored the course.

Due to competition among training providers, these sites make it very easy to decide whether or not a particular course is right for you. Sites usually present clearly written course descriptions, course outlines, and prerequisites. Just to make sure you have a good feel for a course before you hand over your hard-earned plastic, many sites will allow you to download the first chapter of the textbook or to take an initial class session at no charge.


Recap of the April Program

When I Grow Up, I Want To Write API Docs

By Anna T. Araneta

Most of us have tangled with plug-ins and applets enroute to our greater quests for application functionality we're viewing. But how many of us know plug-ins and applets are made usable by application program interfaces (API)? For those of you who are wondering, the answer is yes.

Enlightening an audience of around 60, Jim Bisso of Bitzone LLC defined APIs as interfaces facilitating communication between two software components. An interface is defined at the source code level. Jim made several analogies to illustrate how interfaces access the functionality of applications (as with plug-ins), or implement class libraries (as with applets).

Answers to the "what" and the "how" of APIs begin with documentation. According to Jim, documented APIs are needed to save time. Since API documentation (or API docs) assume a familiarity with C, C++, and Java programming, the audience is comprised primarily of software developers. Jim also counts product managers, technical support, and quality assurance staff among API documentation writers.

API documentation writers' plates are piled high with reference manuals, programmer's guides (tutorials), installation guides, readme files, white papers, technical notes, and specifications. Sounds like the usual fare of technical documentation? Not quite, when the task is to describe the interfaces, the functionality of software components, and abstract programming concepts.

As Jim's title suggests, the first requirement for breaking into this niche is to "grow up" and then you have to WANT to write API documentation. Growing up translates to 3-5 years as a technical writer before you specialize in APIs. Learning programming concepts and the common language of software developers give you the necessary technical background.

The demand for competent API documentation writers hasn't changed with the cooling of the job market, Jim observes. The field is lucrative. continued on page 4
Biotech Column


Biotech Columns focuses on biotechnology in the classroom, how new technology is utilized and its impact on society, government, and the public.

Reading DNA the Polymerase Chain Reaction Explained

By Ruth Wright

Analyzing DNA and reading genes has become commonplace in the 1990’s. The sequencing of the human genome in 1999 with the development of the technique called polymerase chain reaction, or PCR, has revolutionized our ability to analyze DNA sequences. A selected DNA sequence is copied millions of times. The PCR process to perform the same function, but it is much faster and more efficient. PCR amplification starts with a piece of DNA that is from an unusual place, which is being analyzed. The enzyme used in PCR because the enzyme will continue to function when the temperature gets hot.

Every chemical whose name ends in -ase is an enzyme. Enzymes are proteins that speed up chemical reactions. Every protein has a shape. Its three-dimensional shape is critical to its being able to do whatever task it does, so enzymes are very important in making life possible.

The Berkeley Biotech SIG is taking a hiatus. In the absence of meetings, STC Berkeley offers this.

Jim is one of our own; a Berkeley STC member. His career spans 13 years in the computer industry as a technical writer, software archivist, product manager, and trainer. He specializes in API documentation for his clients and is the author of "APIs: A User’s Guide." He has undergraduate degrees in linguistics andasters in computer science.

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One of the miracles of bacteria as a life form is their amazing diversity. There are millions of species, and each one is different. The cell can change its shape with the help of enzymes.

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Résumé and Portfolio Review

District, or you may choose to sign up for a 30-minute review appointment, if you want feedback on the material you submit. Send a hard copy of your résumé to request a portfolio review.

Be sure to write résumé review in the subject heading of the email message.

Optional: Copy and paste your résumé into the message text.

Look for a reply email from the Employment Manager, confirming that you are booked for a portfolio review appointment. The message will also specify your review time (6 or 6:30) and who your reviewer will be.

Résumé and Portfolio Review

Editors Guild Meeting

TUESDAY, MAY 29TH, 7 PM TO 9 PM
ROCKRIDGE LIBRARY, 5366 COLLEGE AVENUE (AT MANILA), OAKLAND

THE MAY EAST BAY EDITORS GUILD MEETING IS INTERACTIVE AND DISCUSSIVE, WITH STRANGELY USEFUL TIPS FOR RESEARCHERS, INTERESTED REVIEWS, AND REVIEWS OF REVIEWERS.

THE MEETING IS HELD AT THE ROCKRIDGE LIBRARY, 5366 COLLEGE AVENUE, OAKLAND, 5:40 PM TO 7:40 PM.

THE MEETING IS OPEN TO EVERYONE INTERESTED IN CREATIVE WRITING, DUE TO THE NATURE OF THE MEETING. THERE WILL BE NO DINNER FOR THE MEETING.

THE MEETING WILL BE FACILITATED BY JYL@DOLBY.COM.

Managing Content Sharing

STC SAN FRANCISCO CHAPTER
WEDNESDAY, MAY 16TH, 2001
6:00 PM: NETWORKING AND SELF-SERVE HORS D'OEUVRES
7:00 PM: PROGRAM


Chip Gettinger, Director of Technical Solutions at Lightspeed Interactive, will present.

The presentation is based on her ongoing classes in SGML evolving into XML.

Most recently she has been working with Web-based applications around structured content, watching SGML evolving into XML. She will show how Lightspeed Interactive is managing content sharing based around XML. She will show how Lightspeed Interactive is managing content sharing, and present a methodology for managing content sharing. She will also discuss the role of the editor in content management.

Chip Gettinger, Director of Technical Solutions at Lightspeed Interactive, will present.

The meeting is held in the Rockridge Library community room. Entry through the front door and come up the stairs. The front door may appear closed, but look for a note—those interested, to come and learn from seasoned professionals. This is a great opportunity for newcomers, or those interested, to come and learn from seasoned professionals.

The meetings are held in the Rockridge Library community room. Entry through the front door and come up the stairs. The front door may appear closed, but slide it open by hand.

The May East Bay Editors Guild meeting program is an opportunity for newcomers, or those interested, to come and learn from seasoned professionals. This is a great opportunity for newcomers, or those interested, to come and learn from seasoned professionals.

San Francisco State University's Multimedia Studies program.

The Oakridge Library is located at 5366 College Avenue (at Manila), Oakland.

Meetings are held in the Rockridge Library community room. Entry through the front door and come up the stairs. The front door may appear closed, but slide it open by hand.

The May East Bay Editors Guild meeting is an opportunity for newcomers, or those interested, to come and learn from seasoned professionals. This is a great opportunity for newcomers, or those interested, to come and learn from seasoned professionals.
Next Meeting:
Wednesday
May 9

Blue Skies, No Candy:
Pros and Cons of Freelancing
AN INTERACTIVE PANEL DISCUSSION

Meal reservations required by Monday, May 7.
See page 2 for costs and meeting details.

RSVP online: Credit cards accepted at

Silver Dragon Chinese Restaurant:
835 Webster Street (at 8th) in Oakland
Dinner
6:30 - 7:30
Announcements and Program
7:30 - 9:00
Please do not call the restaurant!

STC-Berkeley Meeting Directions

From north of Oakland: Take the I-880 North. Merge onto the I-580 East ramp towards downtown Oakland. Merge onto I-980 W. Take the 18th street exit towards 14th street. Merge onto Brush St. Turn left onto 17th St. Turn right onto San Pablo Ave. Turn slight right onto City Hall Plaza. Turn left onto 14th St/International Dr. Turn right onto Webster St. and proceed to 8th & Webster.

From south of Oakland: Take I-880 north from San Jose through Oakland. Take the Oak Street exit towards Lakeside Dr. Turn right onto Oak St. Turn left onto 8th St. Turn right onto Harrison St. Turn left onto 10th St. Turn left onto Webster St.

From San Francisco: Take the Bay Bridge towards Oakland (I-80 East). At the end of the bridge, take the I-580 East ramp towards downtown Oakland (CA-24)/Hayward-Stockton. Merge onto I-580 E. Take I-980 West ramp towards downtown Oakland. Merge onto I-980 W. Take the 18th street exit towards 14th street. Merge onto Brush St. Turn left onto 17th St. Turn right onto San Pablo Ave. Turn slight right onto City Hall Plaza. Turn left onto 14th St/International Dr. Turn right onto Webster St.

From far East Bay: Take Highway 24 west through Caldecott Tunnel. Highway 24 west becomes I-980 west. Take the 18th street exit towards 14th street. Merge onto Brush St. Turn left onto 17th St. Turn right onto San Pablo Ave. Turn slight right onto City Hall Plaza. Turn left onto 14th St/International Dr. Turn right onto Webster St. and proceed to 8th & Webster.

Join us in our New Meeting Location in Oakland

By BART: Exit the 12th Street Oakland station. Walk south for two blocks, to Webster St. Turn right and walk west to 835 Webster St.