Translate from FrameMaker to Acrobat—and Back!

Join us at our September meeting to acquire some top level FrameMaker–to–Acrobat skills as we welcome internationally known expert Shlomo Perets of MicroType. Mr. Perets will demonstrate PDF problems, pitfalls and deficiencies and their remedies. He will discuss issues like display and print quality, find and search functionality, bookmarks and links, testing principles and checklists.

Mr. Perets has focused primarily on developing FrameMaker and online documentation applications since 1993. He trains technical communicators to get the most out of FrameMaker and Acrobat, separately and together. He is the developer of the SP TimeSavers and SP Bookmark Controller. Shlomo is a regular speaker at PDF and FrameMaker conferences and is a PlanetPDF columnist, where his series “PDF Best Practices” is being published. Mr. Perets is giving his seminar on Advanced FrameMaker–to–Acrobat Techniques in San Francisco at Caxton on September 13-14.

In October, Eric De Mund will be getting us up to speed on “Linux for Technical Writers.” This is the last call for questions!

For those of you who have sent yours along, many thanks. They’ve been forwarded on to Eric. If there is something specific that you would like Mr. De Mund to discuss, send your questions to programs@stc-berkeley.org and his talk will be tailored with your concerns in mind.

Annual Touchstone Competition Nears

Touchstone 2001 Technical Communication Competition Seeks Entries and Volunteers

Touchstone 2001, the California technical communication competition, is seeking entries and volunteers. Sponsored by the Northern California STC chapters, the competition is expected to draw several hundred entries. Over the coming months, several volunteers will be needed to process and judge entries, and to perform many other tasks needed to make the competition a success.

Touchstone entries are a technique used in mineral assaying. Ore is scratched against a fine-grained stone, and judged by the color of the streak it leaves. Touchstone has come to mean a criterion used to assess value. Each year Touchstone works to promote the profession, foster excellence in technical communication, and ensure that outstanding work gets the recognition it deserves.

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About the STC

STC strives to:  
- Aid the educational and professional development of its members. 
- Advance the theory and practice of technical communication. 
- Promote awareness of trends and technology in technical communication. 
- Develop, improve, and distribute relevant technical communication products and resources.

Membership
Membership Information is sent to the address, phone, or email changes:
- STC President: Judy Glick-Smith  
  bgraham@manuallabour.com  
- Exec. Director: William Stolgitis  
  newsletter@stc-berkeley.org  
- Treasurer: David MeCoard  
  president@stc-berkeley.org  
- Secretary: David McCoard  
  secretary@stc-berkeley.org  
- VP Programs: Ruth Wright  
  treasurer@stc-berkeley.org

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Recap of Making Feedback Meaningful
B KELL PARKINSON

Feedback is a word everyone uses but no one seems to do well. (In the last month, this writer received 30 feedback-related e-mails. "Highlight the topic in the information," one person suggested, cryptically.)

Maybe people don't have enough time. Maybe they're used to providing "yes" or "no" answers on comment cards. Or maybe they just don't know any better. At the August STC meeting, VP of Membership Paul Sinasohn gave a talk on giving good feedback. An audience of about 30 was on hand to feel twinges of guilt and to promise themselves never to rush through a feedback exercise again.

Drawing from a deep well of personal experience, Paul provided several colorful examples of bad feedback. Such comments as "What the F*** is this?" "Why don't you bother to USE the product," and "This graph is really cool; I liked the colors," were deconstructed and reworked into shining examples of helpful feedback.

Paul listed a few "musts" for providing good feedback:

1. Know the intended audience and purpose of the document. Develop your feedback with those factors in mind, not your own preferences.
2. Whether you're praising or criticizing, give specific examples.
3. If you're criticizing, follow these steps:
   - Find a lot of problems? Emphasize the positive before launching into the negative.
   - Be a problem-solver. Offer thoughtful solutions to any problems you find.
   - Use imperatives in the present tense. Don't beat around the bush with "nights and shields.
4. Think you don't have time to make thoughtful suggestions? Remember, what goes around, comes around. When you give good feedback, you can expect good feedback in return.

If you missed the meeting, you can view Paul's before-and-after feedback examples on the Berkeley-STC Web site at http://www.stc-berkeley.org.

Touchstone Volunteers

Patrick Lufkin is a senior judge for the competition, and a past president of the San Francisco chapter of STC.

To Volunteer

Every month new members join the STC Berkeley Chapter. Some transfer and others are first time members of STC. In this new Ragged Left column we’ll be introducing you to your newest colleagues.

New and Returning Members

By Joe DeNe

Here’s a list of the newest faces at the STC Berkeley Chapter meetings.

Gail Shea has been a freelance technical writer for over ten years. She started out as a copy writer for a large engineering company, but later moved on to write technical writing for a corporate magazine. She has degrees in both English and Education, and has taught English as a Second Language to corporate staffs in Europe. For the past twenty years she has worked as a technical writer and editor in the engineering and construction industry, producing technical specifications and other documents pertinent to application development. Part of her duties in her current position are familiar to many tech writers: technical editing, writing, research, and project management.

Spencer Read is a returning member. He is a Senior R&D Analyst in the Oil Industry. He has spent the last three years as a senior technical writer for Kaiser Permanente’s California/Alaska Region. He is currently in a Senior Web Coordinator at Kaiser Permanente, a job he moved into after a couple of years as a senior technical writer. He has degrees in both English and Education, and has taught English as a Second Language to corporate staffs in Europe. For the past twenty years he has worked as a technical writer and editor in the engineering and construction industry, producing technical specifications and other documents pertinent to application development.

New member Brian Halton is originally from Ireland. He has degrees in English and Education, and has taught English as a Second Language to corporate staffs in Europe. For the past twenty years he has worked as a technical writer and editor in the engineering and construction industry, producing technical specifications and other documents pertinent to application development.

S C Bor is a returning member. He is a Senior R&D Analyst in the Oil Industry. He has spent the last three years as a senior technical writer for Kaiser Permanente’s California/Alaska Region. He is currently in a Senior Web Coordinator at Kaiser Permanente, a job he moved into after a couple of years as a senior technical writer. He has degrees in both English and Education, and has taught English as a Second Language to corporate staffs in Europe. For the past twenty years he has worked as a technical writer and editor in the engineering and construction industry, producing technical specifications and other documents pertinent to application development.

Finding a Needle in a Haystack: Making Efficient Use of the World Wide Web

BY SUSAN MARCHIONNA

With the increasing use of the Internet in our daily lives, it is important to understand how to search the World Wide Web effectively. There are many tools available to help us find what we need, but it can be overwhelming to know which ones to use and how to use them.

One of the most useful tools is a metasearch engine. A metasearch engine is a tool that searches multiple search engines simultaneously, collecting results from each one. They offer a simple way to cover as much of the web as possible, however, the search formula is automatically simplified in a way that may not yield the most relevant results. Some of the major metasearch engines are Google, Lycos, Excite, Direct Hit, and Northern Light.

Directories are also a useful tool for navigating the World Wide Web. These are databases maintained by human editors, who review, evaluate, annotate, and compile websites into huge, interconnected lists. Websites are categorized and fit into a hierarchy organized from the general to the specific. Directories vary mostly in size and level of quality control. Some of the major directories are Yahoo, Galaxy, Open Directory, About, Lycos, and GO Network.

Virtual libraries are another useful tool for searching the World Wide Web. These are actual libraries, using the principles of library science to organize information and make it easier to find. Some of the major virtual libraries are Argus, Open Directory, Internet Public Library, Britannica, and Infomine.

Metasearch tools are useful for covering a wide range of search engines, but they can be overwhelming to use, especially when there are hundreds available, and they are not all alike. Having a more informed set of tactics can help us use a wider variety of services, reduce our level of frustration, and increase our rate of success.

Technical communicators frequently search the web for new public sites and compile them into databases. All search engines cannot be uniformly examined, but they differ from one another in the number of websites they access, the relevance of their results, the frequency of their updates, the syntax they use in advanced searches, and the speed of their return.

Some search engines are better suited for specific types of searches. For example, Usenet newsgroups are not discussed here. Which is best for your search? The major types we search are search engines, directories, libraries, and metasearch tools. All search engines use artificial intelligence, but they differ in their ability to search. Some are best at finding specific types of information, while others are better suited for general searches.

What is the best tool for your search? The major types we search are search engines, directories, libraries, and metasearch tools. There are also email discussion groups, and tutorial websites. Some of the best are Netscape, Yahoo, and Lycos.

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The Self-Governing Manufacturing Process: What it Means to be ISO Certified

A company that meets ISO certification standards essentially has their process systems in place.
Develop meaningful search strategies

Analyze your search

Analyzing your search is very useful. It helps you understand the nature of the information you are seeking. A library is a good choice if you are looking for something that would be found in a standard reference.

Browsing by category

A directory is a good choice for broad searches or categorizing within directories and search engines. A single word search of a category will return sites that have relevant content of your topic. All newsgroups are indexed by a special machine, so your search will return links to the material that best suit your needs.

Field searching

A search engine looks through the entire text of its webpage. Search engines scan the entire text of their websites for your keywords. A single word search can link you to sites that have real relevance to your topic. A search engine might be better if your topic is very specific, multi-faceted, or detailed, or if you are looking for information of a special nature, or if you are searching for general information. Use a standard reference.

Proximity searches use the word NEAR to indicate that searches between words should be 'stemmed' or limited to specific words. For example, ozone depletion NEAR cancer rates.

Truncating

Truncating uses word wildcards to search for many forms of a word simultaneously. For example, postmodern* will return postmodern, postmodernist, and postmodernists. An asterisk in place of the missing letters can also be used. For example, postmodern* will return postmodern, postmodernist, and postmodernists.

Boolean operators

Boolean operators use English conjunctions (AND, OR, and NOT) to represent relationships between words and concepts. From simple, ozone depletion NEAR cancer rates.

Case sensitivity

Case sensitivity is important when your query is case sensitive, but not all services recognize capitals. Use list operators to narrow your search as needed.

Limiting by date

Limiting by date instructs the search engine to restrict the search results to a date range that you define. For example, ozone depletion NEAR cancer rates.

Analyze your results

Analyzing your results is an option in every search engine or directory. You can limit and direct the search using a variety of methods. The exact rules for proper names, but not all services recognize capitals.

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Next Meeting:
Wednesday

September 12: Translate from FrameMaker to Acrobat—and Back!

Meal reservations required by Monday, September 10.
See page 2 for costs and meeting details.

RSVP online: Credit cards accepted at www.stc-berkeley.org.

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.