

# Ragged Left

The Monthly Newsletter for the Berkeley Chapter of the Society of Technical Communication



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## July 2002

### In this issue

#### Next Meeting

Getting the correct information and writing it for the intended audience are major elements of creating a successful technical document. In this issue, we feature a column by Eunie Malley on researching and analyzing technical information.

#### Proving Our Worth

"People don't understand what we do, how we do it, or why we do it." That is the first hurdle technical writers need to overcome: perceptions of the value of our services, according to Bonni Graham. Check out Joe Devney's extensive recap of June's [Monthly Wrap](#).

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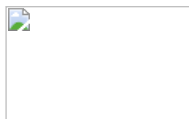
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Most months we get a few words from our Chapter President, Kathryn Munn, whose on vacation this month.

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Each month rotating guest writers offer resources that benefit the technical writing industry. If there is a topic you would like to cover for a future

## Proving our Worth Bonni Graham at the June Berkeley chapter meeting

by Joe Devney

"People don't understand what we do, how we do it, or why we do it." That is the first hurdle technical writers need to overcome: people's perceptions of the value of our services, according to Bonni Graham.

Many of the attendees at the meeting already knew Bonni in her capacity as the Director/Sponsor of STC's Region 8. Talking about her speaking as an experienced technical writer and the founder of a documentation company Manual Labour. Her presentation was titled *Some Doc? Selling Content Development to Clients, Co-workers, and Management.* She was there to talk about marketing in the first person plural, to include both herself and her audience.

Marketing and selling don't come easy to technical writers, Bonni said. She cited several reasons, having to do with the nature of the industry: attracted to it-often introverts who are uncomfortable drawing attention to themselves. But we need to work on sales and marketing ourselves and our work is important to our professional success. Too many people, she said, think that "we write documentation papers in college," that is, late at night before the paper is due, with little or no preparation.

This perception of our writing skills and technical knowledge is inadequate. The work we do places us in a unique position: marketing arms of a technical company, and the skills we bring to the job help us act as a bridge between the two areas.

More important, the value we add to the final product can contribute to its success or failure. Bonni said that the technology adoption bell curve is an important point in its history. To make her point, she first explained the "technology adoption bell curve." She described this as a curve that could be split into five stages: innovators, early adopters, mainstream, mature, and declining. She used the wired telephone as an example that has been through these stages in the last century, and is now declining as wireless phones gain more and more popularity.

The important point in this progression, she said, is the "chasm" between the early adopter stage and the mainstream stage. (Geoffrey Moore, a "guru of high-tech marketing," according to Bonni.) It is at this point that the technology must improve and be widely adopted. The qualities that appealed to the first two groups-innovators and early adopters-will turn away mainstream consumers. Most people want the technology to work easily and well.

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## News and Features

### Usage Survey Respondents Lean Toward Tradition

from [Writing That Works](#)

E-mail whumps email.  
 Web site edges out website.  
 Whom comes back to win over who.  
 Data is sounds right to more people than data are.

So said 633 writers and editors who responded to the 11th annual usage survey conducted by Writing That Works, the print-only subscription new published by Communications Concepts, Springfield, Virginia.

This year's online survey tracked preferences on five computer-related terms and five editing issues. The self-selected respondents come from arc

#### Trend Reversals?

Their responses indicated a more traditional approach than in earlier surveys, with two possible trend reversals. The first was the increasing popul had lost ground to website. This year 13% more respondents favored Web site than last year, and 11% fewer favored website.

The second was the comeback of whom, a word many think is disappearing from the language. In 1993, just 49% preferred the grammatically co

#### Yuk!

Many respondents expressed discomfort with their choices, particularly for computer mouses and mice, media as a singular or plural and none as

None of the 10 questions elicited consensus, but the great majority agreed writers can drop http:// when giving Web addresses in their print publi

#### Want More?

The total percentages follow. To see a breakdown by style manual, go to <http://www.writingthatworks.com/survey/results.php>. You can also read there.

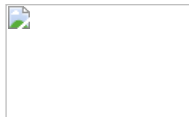
### AP and Chicago Remain Primary Style Manuals

from [Writing That Works](#)

Two manuals, The Associated Press Style Book and Libel Manual and The Chicago Manual of Style, have been the most popular in all 11 surveys. /

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Each month we seek a volunteer to write a recap of the program at our monthly meeting.

## Proving our Worth

### Bonni Graham at the June Berkeley chapter meeting

by Joe Devney

"People don't understand what we do, how we do it, or why we do it." That is the first hurdle technical writers need to overcome in order to improve services, according to Bonni Graham.

Many of the attendees at the meeting already knew Bonni in her capacity as the Director/Sponsor of STC's Region 8. This evening, though, she was a writer and the founder of a documentation company Manual Labour. Her presentation was titled, "Psst! Wanna Buy Some Doc? Selling Content Development Management." She was there to talk about marketing for tech writers-often in the first person plural, to include both herself and her audience.

Marketing and selling don't come easy to technical writers, Bonni said. She cited several reasons, having to do with the profession and the types of people who are uncomfortable drawing attention to themselves. But we need to work on sales skills nonetheless-marketing ourselves and our work is important to many people, she said, think that "we write documentation the way they wrote term papers in college," that is, late at night before the paper is due.

This perception of our writing skills and technical knowledge is inadequate. The work we do places us in a unique position between the engineering company, and the skills we bring to the job help us act as a bridge between the two areas.

More important, the value we add to the final product can contribute to its success or failure.

Bonni said that the technical writing profession is at a crucial point in its history. To make her point, she first explained the "technology adoption curve with a long tail, that could be split into five stages: innovators, early adopters, mainstream, mature, and declining. She used the wired telephone as an example that has been through these stages in the last century, and is now declining as wireless phones gain more and more prominence.

The important point in this progression, she said, is the "chasm" between the early adopter stage and the mainstream stage. (This concept comes from "The Diffusion of Innovations" by Everett Rogers.) It is at this point that the technology must improve substantially in order to become widely adopted. The quality of the technology must improve or else innovators and early adopters will turn away mainstream buyers. New and slick and esoteric won't wash. Most people want the technology to work.

Technical communication as a profession is on the brink of this chasm, Bonni said. We have already sold our services to everyone who understands the need to create a "whirlwind of demand," to use Moore's phrase.

A company that had successfully crossed the chasm, said Bonni, is Microsoft. The use of Microsoft as an example we should emulate caused a noticeable discomfort in Bonni's audience. People objected that Microsoft reached the chasm by monopolistic practices. This did not seem to be the message that people wanted to hear.

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## Other Meetings for STC and related groups in the Northern California area:

[STC Sacramento Chapter](#)

[STC East Bay Chapter](#)

[STC San Francisco Chapter](#)

[STC North Bay Chapter](#)

[STC Silicon Valley Chapter](#)

[Bay Area Editors' Forum](#)

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## Back Issues

PDF versions of the *Ragged Left* are conveniently available online.

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- [March 2002](#)
- [February 2002](#)
- [January 2002](#)
- [November 2001](#)
- [September 2001](#)
- [August 2001](#)
- [July 2001](#)
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Thank you for considering writing for the *Ragged Left*, the Berkeley STC chapter's award-winning monthly newsletter. It publishes original articles and illustrations. This is a great opportunity to be published with a byline to add to your portfolio needs. You retain copyright, but grant every STC publication royalty-free permission to reproduce the article or illustration.

Please contact the [editor](#) to make sure your intended topic is timely and appropriate, and for details of how to submit and unsolicited submissions is the 20th of the month preceding publication.

Thanks,

Jessica Livingston  
*Ragged Left* Editor

## Ragged Left Topic Needs

Below is a list of the articles we are most often searching for.

### Monthly Recap

Each month we look for a volunteer to write a recap of the speaker's presentation at our monthly meeting. The length is 300-400 words, although if it was a particularly engaging topic we can run a longer article. Attendance at the meeting would be a plus.

### Resource Column

Every month we run a monthly resource column. Suggested topics include a review of software; new, new version, or a resource related to our industry: books or other tools you found useful; a process, language, or class that was beneficial. If a topic has been recently covered, please clear the topic in advance with the [editor](#). Suggested length: 375-750 words

### Introduce New Members

Periodically we write a paragraph or two about new members in our chapter. This involves contacting the names we are interested in, their interests and involvement in the industry, and meshing it all into a cohesive article. It will take a bit longer to get the article than most.

### Feature Articles

We're open to articles on unsolicited topics.



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## STC Berkeley Chapter Officers and Volunteers

President: [Kathryn Munn](#)

510-865-9045

Vice-President of Programs: [Paul Sinasohn](#)

Vice-President of Membership: [Ruth Wright](#)

510-206-9192

Treasurer: [Susan Marchionna](#)

Secretary: [David McCoard](#)

Employment Manager: [Madeleine Adkins](#)

Web Manager: [David Alt](#)

*Ragged Left* Editor: [Jessica Livingston](#)

For address, phone, or email changes, contact the Vice-President of Membership.

Send chapter mail to STC-Berkeley, PO Box 1007, Berkeley CA 94701-1007.

## Society of Technical Communications

Technical communication is the bridge between those who create ideas and those who use them. Conveying scientific and technical information precisely, and accurately is an essential occupation in all sectors of business and government.

STC has more than 20,000 members and 155 chapters worldwide. Its members include writers, editors, artists, illustrators, 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. To receive additional information and an application form, via mail or email: Send email to [bkymbrs@stc.org](mailto:bkymbrs@stc.org).