

Ragged Left

The newsletter for the
Berkeley Chapter of the
Society for Technical
Communication

In this issue

"The future of the globe
depends upon technical com-
municators" on page 1

"President's Letter" on page 5

"How Can Help Help You?"
on page 4

"Web Usability: Organiza-
tion and Navigation" on
page 6

"Where Does Documentation Fit
into Agile Development?" on
page 6

"Getting Yourself Hired" on
page 8

"Tips & Tricks" on page 10

"Meetings" on page 10

"STC News" on page 13



Volume 20, Number 2
March/April 2007

Meeting Notes

The future of the globe depends upon technical communicators

Joe Devney on Susan Burton's presentation
at the Berkeley STC February 2007 meeting

Susan Burton, STC's new executive director, was the guest speaker at the STC Berkeley meeting in February. After telling us a bit about herself, Susan explained many of the changes going on in the Society.

Her background is not in technical communication, but in managing nonprofit organizations. Her first job was as a legal secretary with a mining industry association, where she had a chance to work as a lobbyist. That didn't work out well—she had philosophical objections to one of the first bills she was expected to encourage political support for. (Its aim was to take away benefits for widows and children of miners who died on the job, in order to save money for the mining companies.) But the experience did start her on a new career direction. To date, she has consulted with about 150 nonprofit organizations, and has served as CEO of three. She is a Certified Associate Executive (CAE), a certification granted by the Society of Association Executives.

But why STC? "The future of the globe depends upon technical communicators," she said. Susan told the story of an Indian beggar who educated himself via the Internet. Using the technology—and the information put together by technical communicators—this man earned his high school diploma. He has since formed a nonprofit organization himself, aimed at helping people in Africa better their stations in life. Susan said that stories like this are only possible with modern technology, enabled by people in our profession.

Bringing in someone from outside the profession to head STC is one change for the Society among many that Susan talked about. Another change will be addressing the problem she sees that "STC is understaffed." The organization has 15,000 members, but only 14 full-time people, staff plus contractors. Plus, personnel resources the organization does have could be put to better use. For example, she said that currently STC uses an accounting system developed in-house, however because that sort of project is not part of the main business of STC, a commercially produced product would probably have been a better choice. The Society employs two programmers full-time simply to maintain the accounting system.

This situation will change this summer, when a new accounting system, a commercial one developed for nonprofit organizations, replaces the in-house system. This will eliminate the need for the two programmers, Susan says, and STC can use the freed-up resources to hire staff in positions that will more directly benefit members.

On the broader scale, STC is being reorganized. After the 2008 election, there will be no more regional directors. The regional directors were "focused," she said. But regions are being rethought, and the geographic focus no longer seems as important. The new thinking makes a distinction between

Continued on page 3

STC Headquarters

901 N. Stuart Street #904
Arlington VA 22203-1854
(703) 522-4114
stc@stc.org
fax 703-522-2075

Executive Director: Susan Burton
susan@stc.org

Membership: Mary Kabza
mary@stc.org

STC President

Paula Berger
pres@stc.org

STC Region 8 Director

Beau Cain
ds8@stc.org

Chapter Officers and Volunteers

President: Richard Mateosian
president@stc-berkeley.org

VP Programs: Mary Ann Campbell
programs@stc-berkeley.org

VP Membership: Jim Dexter
membership@stc-berkeley.org

Secretary: Jim Dexter, acting
secretary@stc-berkeley.org

Treasurer: Richard Mateosian, acting
treasurer@stc.berkeley.org

Employment: Caroline Scharf
employment@stc-berkeley.org

Public Relations: Jessica Livingston
publicrelations@stc-berkeley.org

Volunteers: Joe Devney
volunteers@stc-berkeley.org

Ragged Left

P.O. Box 1007
Berkeley CA 94701

Editor: Jennifer Abbott
newsletter@stc-berkeley.org

Other contacts

STC on the Internet: www.stc.org

Chapter Job List: employment@stc-berkeley.org

Address, phone, or email changes:
VP for Membership
membership@stc-berkeley.org

STC Mission

Creating and supporting a forum for
communities of practice in the
profession of technical communication.

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.

THE SOCIETY FOR TECHNICAL COMMUNICATION (STC) has members worldwide. Its members include writers and editors, artists and illustrators, photographers and audiovisual specialists, managers and supervisors, educators and 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. Classic membership is \$145/year with an additional \$15 enrollment fee. STC also offers Limited, E-Membership, and Student Membership options. To receive additional information and an application form, via mail or email.

- Send email to membership@stc-berkeley.org
- Send mail to Berkeley STC, PO Box 1007, Berkeley CA 94701-1007

INSURANCE Members of STC can apply for health, disability, and other insurance at STC group rates. For more information, contact STC office at stc@stc.org or (703) 522-4114.

WORLDWIDE ACTIVITIES STC's annual conference brings together more than 2,000 technical communicators from around the world for educational programs, seminars, and workshops conducted by experts in the field. Upcoming annual conference: Minneapolis, May 13-16, 2007. In addition the STC sponsors many regional conferences, which feature the same sorts of programs, seminars, and workshops on a more intimate scale. STC sponsors international and regional competitions in all aspects of technical communication. STC Special Interest Groups (SIGs) bring together members with common experiences and interests to share their skills and knowledge. STC SIGs include:

- Academic
- AccessAbility
- Canadian Issues
- Consulting and Independent Contracting
- Emerging Technologies
- Environmental, Safety, and Health Communication
- Illustrators and Visual Designers
- Information Design and Architecture
- Instructional Design & Learning
- International Technical Communication
- Lone Writer
- Management
- Marketing Communication
- Online
- Policies and Procedures
- Quality and Process Improvement
- Scientific Communication
- Single Sourcing
- Technical Editing
- Usability & User Experience

STC sponsors research grants and scholarships in technical communication.

STC publishes the quarterly journal *Technical Communication*, the newsletter *Intercom*, and other periodicals, reference materials, manuals, anthologies, standards, and booklets.

Formed in 1953, STC has today become the largest professional society in the world dedicated to advancing the theory and practice of technical communication.

LOCAL ACTIVITIES The six northern California chapters of STC conduct a variety of individual and joint activities. See page 10 for contacts for these chapters. See page 15 for a list of other local organizations in which STC members may be interested.

SUBSCRIPTIONS This newsletter is free to members of the Berkeley chapter.

ADVERTISING RATES The *Ragged Left* is not accepting advertising at this time.

SUBMISSIONS *Ragged Left* publishes original articles and illustrations. We edit them to meet our needs. You retain copyright but grant every STC publication royalty-free permission to reproduce the article or illustration in print or any other medium. Please talk with the editor for details of how to submit articles and illustrations.

The deadline for unsolicited submissions is the last Friday of the odd months.

Other STC publications are hereby granted permission to reprint articles from *Ragged Left*, provided such reprints credit the author and the specific *Ragged Left* issue, and a copy of any publication containing such a reprint is sent to the *Ragged Left* editor.



geographical communities and virtual communities: chapters versus special interest groups.

This observation brought an objection from a couple of the meeting's attendees. Gwaltney Mountford and Judith Herr disagreed with Susan's explanation. The distinction is not geographic versus virtual, they pointed out, but geographic versus topic-based. A virtual community could be created with a geographic focus. It seems there may still be discussion to be had on this issue.

Susan also talked about some other changes coming at the Society level. STC's old management saw other professional organizations as competition. The new view is that the Society should pursue reciprocal relationships with ASTD, IEEE, and other organizations. There are 30 or 40 organizations with which the Society could possibly form mutually beneficial relationships.

Finances are of course a big issue. STC loses money on each member. Supplemental income comes from conferences and other sources, but this approach is not sustainable. The Society is looking for ways to increase revenue or decrease costs.

On this topic, attendee Steven Zegas asked about the money spent to publish two separate magazines. He said that *Intercom* seems too simplistic for the audience, but *Technical Communication* is too high-level. Susan said that STC needs the academic input provided by *Technical Communication*, and Gwaltney agreed. In addition, both publications offer places for academics (*Technical Communication*) and STC members (*Intercom*) to get their work published. This is of definite benefit to those people who do get published. Jim Dexter suggested that *Technical Communication* be a separate subscription, and that may indeed happen. Susan also said that there will be a new monthly newsletter, and this may cause *Intercom* to shrink. These two changes would help STC's bottom line.

Near the end of her presentation, Susan addressed the issue of the market for the skills of STC members. As part of meeting the Society's strategic objective of "Telling a powerful story" about what is important to

members, she wants to find solid sources of information about this market. The Society has two sources now, and each has its own limitations. The Society's own salary survey is limited to STC members, and the Bureau of Labor Statistics uses a very narrow definition of what a "technical writer" does.

There was a lively discussion at STC about the implications of these limitations. As it happened, economist Rick O'Sullivan works with STC and is also one of 30 people who advises the BLS on their statistics. STC wanted to come up with a new and better definition of "technical communicator," and Rick was able to get STC a three-month extension for providing their input to the BLS.

Susan pointed out that in Europe, 70 percent of product returns are because of bad technical communication: the customer can't figure out the product. Also, there are lawsuits over bad documents: the document is considered part of the product.

With this in mind, should technical communicators be classed with designers for purposes of the BLS statistics? This may be a better way to acknowledge STC members' contributions. The definition that STC has suggested to the BLS begins, "Develop and design instructional and informational tools."

Any changes in the BLS statistics will be announced at a later date.

In an effort to improve the member salary survey, STC contacted the Society of Human Resources Managers for input. Unfortunately, they had no guidelines for a what makes a "good" salary survey. Taking a different starting point, STC will survey HR people who work in technical communication.

As the presentation was ending and Susan was answering the last few questions, attendee Jim Dexter asked about the issue of certification of technical communicators. The discussion turned out to be a complex one, too big to go into at the late hour. It was pointed out that one attempt to develop a certification test for technical writers had to

cover so many different types of writing that it boiled down to a grammar test—something that didn't touch on the higher-level document design and development skills discussed earlier in the evening. One solution might be to have several narrow certifications, but that would put more of a burden on the STC members who want to be certified for all the types of work they do. If certification is put into place it will only be with much difficulty.

Question-and-answer time over, Susan briefly talked about how the annual conference had been revamped, and passed out flyers announcing it before ending her presentation.

How Can Help Help You?

Help's Role in Agile Development

March 7, 2007 meeting notes
by Billy Blackwell II

When Jennifer Abbott's engineering group moved to an agile development process, the group had no process for coordinating the project, managing last-minute software changes and keeping track of the conversations between the developers, quality assurance, and user representatives. Abbott, a technical writer who had worked with the engineering group for 10 years, had been keeping development notes using her trusty help program and saw an opportunity to contribute more to the process.

She jumped in, put all of the project information in RoboHelp and volunteered to maintain the information. Doing this changed her role in the development process and redefined both the role of documentation (the deliverable) and her role as a technical writer. Abbott explained how help programs, like RoboHelp, could be used in the development process. Abbott still shuns the title of project manager, but she did use the term "project coordinator" when referring to her role on the agile development

team.

Agile development is a methodology based on rapid turnaround of small usable pieces of software. Face-to-face communication between development teams and business experts, working in close collaboration, is prized as more efficient than written documentation, making it difficult for a technical writer, who already is challenged to justify the importance of documentation. For more information about agile development you can, check Wikipedia or see www.agilealliance.org.

Before Abbott began using RoboHelp to coordinate the project information, the documentation process was fraught with the typical challenges of a "waterfall" development structure: incorporating and updating multiple documents, getting content late in the development process, separate instructions for each turnover to QA, losing questions and issues in meeting notes, and struggling to coordinate fluctuating schedules. For years, Abbott had been using RoboHelp to keep notes, and she knew the non-linear format of help programs made them a powerful tool for organizing information, not just explaining user interface to users.

Help project source code can include all of the conceptual and procedural information for a project, as well as questions for reviewers, current issues under discussion, instructions for QA, task lists and notes for features in progress. As her role in the development process changed, Abbott used RoboHelp to generate an internal reference and central repository of information for the development team.

Centralizing the information meant user stories, required documents and the development plan were all in one place—which meant there was just one place to update the information. All of the information was contained in a single compiled HTML Help (.chm) file, and if a reviewer wanted to use change tracking, she could generate Word output.

By taking a more central role in the process, Abbott found she could keep the focus on the user, get reviews going early in the process,

Continued on next page

keep up to date on plans or changes in UI details, and provide information to QA to use even in the early phases of testing. While collecting this information, she started the structure for the final, end-user .chm file.

Conditional tags are central to the usefulness of help programs for project coordination. Conditional tags mark text to be used in some renditions of the document and not others. Help compiles smaller versions of the larger document, using conditional tags to mark topics or section for exclusion from a general audience. It is possible to have multiple conditional tags per project and use more than one conditional tag at a time. No fancy tools are needed. All that is needed is an authoring tool that supports conditional tags:

- RoboHelp version 3 and later
- MadCap Flare
- AuthorIT
- FrameMaker (convert to Help)
- Etc.

Abbott used conditional tags to separate help topics for each different audience, “Internal”, for example, for internal her reference material, “Questions” for explicit questions to reviewers, and “Next” for incomplete feature content to include in the next build. She found it helped to keep a chart of conditional tags to keep track of which tag she used for each output, whether it was internal notes or questions for developers, QA, and reviewers or final user content.

Abbott said the challenges were getting buy-in from the development team, keeping up with the changes, and making the latest .chm files available to everyone on the team in a timely manner. To improve on the process next time, Abbott plans on incorporating the development plan into help earlier in the process; including the complete schedule, list of resources, and contact information; and sharing documentation with the training department early in the process.

By integrating help programs into the process before the product existed, help programs can function as a project coordination tool. By replacing the usual internal,

development-cycle-only “user guide,” using help programs removes a step from the documentation process, keeps the development user focused, and keeps user documentation at the center of the agile process.

President’s Letter

April 2007

It's that time again, as one of our esteemed senior members used to say when, as head of the election committee, she tried to cajole members into serving the chapter in one of our elective positions. Our new chapter year begins July 1, 2007. We will hold our election in May. You can vote in advance by confidential email or submit an anonymous paper ballot at or before our May 9th chapter meeting. We will count all the votes and announce the result at the meeting. Candidates must declare themselves and provide brief statements for the ballot by April 25th. If the idea of serving in this way interests you at all, go to our website and click the Officers' Job Descriptions link, or talk with our elections manager, Joe Devney, or any of our other volunteers at our April 11th chapter meeting. They'll tell you how much fun and how rewarding it is.

And now for something completely different: Our chapter has survived for nearly 20 years without bylaws, but we don't want to push our luck. Former chapter president Joe Devney is leading the effort to codify our bylaws. Several issues have arisen that everybody ought to have a chance to weigh in on. I hope we can discuss these issues on our Yahoo group. If you'd like to participate, please join by sending email to Berkeley-STC-subscribe@yahoogroups.com.

The STC annual conference is in Minneapolis in mid-May. I'd appreciate hearing from anyone who plans to attend. Perhaps we can bring useful information back to the chapter.

More on the next page



Where Does Documentation Fit into Agile Development?

Editorial

Agile Documentation, in my opinion, is an emerging concept—obviously related to Agile Development, but not firmly defined. Internet research reveals little, so far—some for sure, and not all recent, but it's waiting for best practices, guidelines, notes from the field. Let's start the conversation!

Agile development isn't new to the engineering scene, but increasingly technical writers have opportunities to add their flexible format to the nimble mix. Conditional tags have long been in technical writers' toolboxes, ready to assist in adding an output from single-source project code and content: For internal users, development teams, and testers.

For collaborative information collecting, wikis are brilliantly flexible, easy to use, and constantly up-to-date. The trouble with having content in a wiki, however, I have to extract it, re-format, and revise it for help or PDF—and track changes in the wiki and manually update my project. I prefer to have the content in RoboHelp or FrameMaker or whichever tool I use to produce my end-user documentation, so that I can generate end-user output anytime during the development process.

Web Usability: Organization and Navigation

by Eric Hughes, Managing Director
Simplexity, LLC

In our previous columns, we identified best practice criteria to consider when building usable websites and applications. We discussed the importance of identifying and analyzing audiences, because best-practice

criteria are only useful in relation to how those audiences use and perceive what is built. Good usability practice starts in the planning stage and continues throughout the lifecycle of a product. In this column, we'll discuss navigation and organization and their impact on usability.

Navigational horror: There is a bakery and restaurant in the 4th Street area of Berkeley called the Sugar Bowl Bakery. I wanted to meet a friend of mine there recently, and needed to send him the address. I went to the website (<http://www.sugarbowl-bakery.com>) to get the address, but it was nowhere that I could find it. Not only that, but when I clicked on any of the navigational items, the entire page shifted—sometimes up—sometimes down. Then when I clicked the 'back' button on my browser, I arrived back at the home page with no navigation showing anymore. I didn't know where I had gone, didn't know where I had been and could barely tell where I was.

But OK, I can ignore that as long as I can find the address of the restaurant. Is it under "information?" No, that is information about the corporation that owns the bakery. Is it under "Contact?" No, that causes the page to shift, where I have to make another choice for another item called "Contact." I click on that and I get a form to fill out and an address! Oops, the address is for a San Francisco location. Hmm...perhaps if I click on "About." No, that causes the page to shift again, where I have to choose between "Our History" and "FAQs". Not there, either. Never did find it. Whether I wanted to order lunch or a wedding cake, I feel frustrated.

Navigational bliss: My wife and I decided to replace most of our linens and bath towels as a Christmas present for each other. It seemed to be the perfect thing to order on-line. There are a variety of quality firms to use, and we wouldn't have to make the time to drive someplace. We had always liked the quality of goods from Pottery Barn, and were willing to pay a bit more for the convenience of ordering what we needed on-line. Coincidentally, a Pottery Barn catalogue had recently arrived at our house, and they were having a sale on some of the items we

needed. We marked the catalogue, then went to the website (<http://www.pottery-barn.com>). At the top of the page, the first field I see is a box where I can enter “item # or keyword.” I type the item numbers from the catalogue and find what I'm looking for in seconds. My order is placed in a few minutes. I opt for the overnight delivery because we have guests coming in a few days. Pottery Barn is delighted that I am spending my money with them, and they politely let me know that. I feel good.

One navigational horror, one great navigational experience. Although I wasn't a part of the interaction design process for either of these sites, I'm guessing that adequate planning and research went into one of them, and the other one just happened. The Pottery Barn design team knows who their audience is, and what they need (at least they know what I needed). Pottery Barn assembled a team, ensured roles were clear, and followed a planning process before a single line of code was written. Sugar Bowl Bakery didn't follow that sort of process, and I'm guessing I'm not the only person who finds their site to be frustrating.

So how do you get started when there is a web development project in front of you? How do you make certain that usability is a consideration from the very beginning of your project? This 10-step process fits particularly well with an agile development methodology because of the small team approach, and the need for rapid and frequent review cycles.

1. Assemble a development team. Keep it small, multidisciplinary, with 6 people or less. Identify potential meddlers from outside that team and come up with a way to keep them involved without letting them torpedo your project. The disciplines you may find critical are: marketing product management, sales, technology development, project management, and communications (technical or marketing). Also training or HR (if an intranet project). Six people, you say??!! No way - the entire company wants to be involved! Figure out a way

to include them without having them as a core part of your project team.

2. Understand and discuss roles on the team so that you can try to avoid duplication of effort. One of the roles must be to keep the potential meddlers involved and informed. Create a glossary of key words.
3. There are lots of ways to get a design process started (see “Designing Interactions”, Moggridge, 2007, pp. 647-735) but we suggest starting with audience analysis and an information architecture process. Defer everything else as well as you can, especially discussions about look & feel. Develop personas and create scenarios for how your audience will use the application when it is done.
4. Discover and document the available universe of relevant information. Write down every information object that might be present when you are finished. Post-it notes(TM) are great for this.
5. Organize the information into categories that your audience will understand. You will not be able to identify every item. Some will only be identified during the course of development, but the idea is to keep those to a bare minimum. Don't be fooled by the “it is just a blogging site” or “people will find everything via our search function” cop-outs. If you want people to use your site, organize it carefully. If you make them work too hard, you will lose them.
6. Collect key data about the information you identify: where does it exist? Who updates it? How is it currently distributed? Which of your audiences will be most interested in it? What format is it in? Are there security concerns? How often does it change? How long will it be relevant? Is it related to other information?
7. Spend lots of time considering how you will label the information and where it will go. If labels and categories come too quickly to you, they will be wrong.
8. Identify business processes that will be impacted.

9. Document your architecture in Microsoft(TM) Visio and a spreadsheet program. Once you have consensus from your team, share (and modify) the architecture with a few key people outside the team before you share it more broadly.
10. Complete your technical specifications development process: how will the application work, with what technologies, and how will it be supported? Know what your audience wants and give it to them. Don't make them beg, don't pontificate about what a wonderful company you run, and don't force them see what you want them to see—give them what they want to buy, produce, or learn about, and give it to them at their pace. You can only do that if you follow a disciplined process.

Whether you are designing a website for a bakery or an application for monitoring the performance of mutual funds, there are some basic usability guidelines that you should follow:

1. Make it clear where your audience is in relation to the rest of the site. Always indicate where they have been.
2. Provide an obvious way to get back to the home page on every page of the site.
3. Provide a clear path to the next page, step, or transaction.
4. Provide a clear path to return to where you just were.
5. Group related information together.
6. Use labels that your customers will understand quickly. Don't use multiple labels that mean the same thing.
7. Study how your audience will use your site so that you can provide navigation to exactly what they will want to do next.

Just about everybody who needs a website has one. Those who have had one for a while are probably considering what sorts of additional sophistication to migrate to the web (or to their intranet). The challenge over the next couple of years will be to develop the minimal amount of code that addresses the maximum amount of business imperative.

To do that, business managers must avoid the tendency to add content that their customers find irrelevant while making both first and subsequent visits productive. Spend adequate time planning the organization of your web applications, and you will be rewarded with happy and loyal customers!

Getting Yourself Hired

Lesson 1: Providing a Sample of your Work

by Dalton Hooper, STC Member

Do you bring examples of your writing with you on job interviews? Hopefully, you answered in the affirmative. But, did you know that someone sent the interviewer an example of your writing before your interview was even scheduled?

The most important writing sample

Would you expect a candidate applying for a job as a tailor to show up at the interview wearing a suit that did not fit well? Would you expect a candidate for an auto mechanic's job to pull into the parking lot in a car that was knocking loudly and spewing black smoke? Then why would you, as a technical communicator, send a résumé to a prospective employer that was not an example of your very best documentation work?

As a technical communicator you are unique in that you are able to get the interviewer to see a sample of your work without having to wait for an interview. The person who sent the interviewer an example of your writing before your interview was even scheduled was—YOU! If you haven't caught on by now, your résumé IS an example of your work! The question is: Is it an excellent example?



What would make your résumé excellent?

Let's think about this for a moment. What is the value that we, as technical communicators, typically bring to the creation of documentation to make it excellent? Some examples include:

- Identifying the intended audience (the interviewer).
- Assessing the needs of the intended audience.
- What is the interviewer looking for?
- How can you meet the interviewer's needs?
- Understanding how the documentation will be used (as an aid in deciding who to interview).
- Determining the optimal method by which to transform the source information into understanding for the intended audience. (Creating a resume with the right information, in the right amount, and in the right layout.)

It is appropriate to think of your résumé as a type of job aid, with the interviewer being the user and the objective being to assist in the decision whether to pursue you further (i.e., interview). Consequently, an excellent résumé would be one that convinces the reader that you should be interviewed.

The right information

Your résumé should contain information supporting your assertion that it is in the company's best interest to pursue you further. Your résumé should only address what you can do for the company—not what the company can do for you. In too many instances, résumés waste valuable space (not to mention the reader's time!) in relating what a position with Acme Widgets would mean to the candidate's career, livelihood, and self-esteem. Frankly, companies are not in business to serve the needs of their employees, but to serve the needs of the owners (stockholders) of those companies. Filling the needs of the employees is simply a fortuitous by-product.

The right amount

Your résumé should contain enough information to convince the reader you should be interviewed. No more, no less. That is, after all, the objective of a résumé: to get you the interview!

The right layout

This is very important: Your résumé should be easy to skim, with liberal use of white space. The first thing the reader sees when viewing your résumé for the first time is not the content—but the layout! The layout sets the tone in the reader's mind before they have even read the first line. If your layout is very busy, with small point type (less than 10 pt), narrative form (few or no bulleted lists), and goes on for too many pages, the reader will dread the upcoming reading, rather than be enticed by it. The more you give the reader a feeling that they will be able to easily glean the information they need from your résumé, the more likely it will become a self-fulfilling prophecy.

The write stuff

Even if you followed all the advice mentioned above, if your résumé contains a misspelling, grammatical error, non-parallel construction, or any other violation of documentation standards recognized by technical communication professionals, it will rightly go on the "reject" pile. After all, when deciding which writing samples to bring to an interview, you wouldn't dream of including an example that had not been spell-checked, grammar-checked, proofread, and critiqued, would you? Why hold your résumé to a lesser standard? It is, after all, what determines whether there will even be an interview in which to show off those writing samples.

Dalton Hooper is currently the Documentation Project Manager for Walt Disney Parks and Resorts Information Technology. Dalton directs a team of technical writers responsible for providing all relevant technical documentation during the development and support of internal business systems for Disney parks and resorts worldwide. He can be reached at dalton.hooper@disney.com.



Tips & Tricks

by Communications Concepts

From COMMUNICATOR'S eNEWS
Issue No. 73, March 13, 2007

© 2007, Communications Concepts, Inc.

eTip: Reaching an over-50 audience

1. Talk to a person, not a birth date. Age alone no longer paints the complete portrait. Proper nutrition, a zest for fitness and more active lifestyles have added years and diversity to people's lives. Today's over 50 crowd looks and acts much younger than their parents.
2. Tell the whole story. Older readers want all the facts. They are willing to read, analyze and evaluate before making a decision. To get all the facts, they'll read every word of copy. So don't short-change them or yourself.
3. A little sample won't hurt. Older readers are very analytical. They want to know what they're buying. Talk about trial periods, guarantees and warranties. Use coupons. Give and fulfill expectations. Once satisfied, you'll have loyal customers or members.

Source: Cary Silvers, research director, Modern Maturity Magazine, New York, NY; Darrell Fearn, creative services director, AARP, Washington, D.C.

Meetings

Our chapter holds a dinner meeting the second Wednesday of each month at the Shattuck Plaza Hotel, 2086 Allston Way, just west of Shattuck Avenue in Berkeley. The Hotel is across the street from the BART station at Allston and Shattuck.

New Meeting Price Structure

STC Berkeley Leadership

Meeting cost:

STC Members Meeting and Dinner

\$21.00 per person at door

\$18.00 if reserved on our Chapter's Website by the day before the meeting

Students Meeting and Dinner

\$18.00 per person at door

\$15.00 if reserved on our Chapter's Website by the day before the meeting

Non-STC Member Meeting and Dinner

\$24.00 per person at door

\$21.00 if reserved on our Chapter's Website by the day before the meeting

Meeting-only prices (reserved and at door are the same):

STC Member \$12.00

Student \$10.00

Non-STC Member \$15.00

Special cost notes:

- All members of the San Francisco Chapter of the IABC are welcome to register for Berkeley STC General Meetings at the member price (\$18 dinner/\$12 without dinner) by midnight on the day before the meeting.
- Nonmembers are always welcome to STC meetings at the non-member rates.

Other STC chapters in Northern California

East Bay: www.ebstc.org/

North Bay: www.stc-northbay.org/

Sacramento: www.stcsacramento.org/

San Francisco: www.stc-sf.org/

Silicon Valley: www.stc-



Automating API Documentation and a DoxyS Case Study

by Monique Semp, Write Quick, Inc.

Wednesday, April 11, 2007, 6-9:30pm
Shattuck Plaza Hotel
2086 Allston Way, Berkeley

(See "New Meeting Price Structure" on page 10 for information on dinner/meeting prices.)

Program

API Documentation is a fast-growing and highly-paid specialty in technical communication. As Monique explains, you can write an API Reference in FrameMaker and publish it as a PDF, but such a document is difficult to maintain and unlikely to satisfy your target audience: programmers.

Programmers expect online, hyperlinked reference material that's exactly in sync with API elements such as classes and functions.

This presentation shows how to use automated tools to generate an HTML-formatted API Reference. Monique will give us an overview of how to automate production of the reference and tell us the advantages of such an approach over a manual solution such as FrameMaker-to-PDF. She will give us guidelines for choosing the right tool, and explain how she reached agreements with engineers about coding standards and workflow changes. She will demonstrate how this all worked when, using DoxyS, she developed an API Reference for a 700+ function ANSI C API.

Speaker

Monique Semp is a senior member of STC with more than 15 years of documentation and software experience. She has won many STC competition awards. She has her own company, Write Quick, Inc., through which she provides technical writing services that include API references, programming guides, configuration manuals, and technical processes and procedures.

Monique began her career as a software engineer writing PL/M and C code for automated train control (the "people movers" in airports) and the accompanying user manuals. She has been a technical writer since 2001. Her first project was producing API documentation for Java-based wireless applications.

Upcoming Meetings

What does Web 2.0 Mean for Technical Communication?

by Tim Bombosch

Wednesday, May 9, 2007, 6-9:30pm
Shattuck Plaza Hotel
2086 Allston Way, Berkeley

Program

Web 2.0 is a concept without a definition. Think of it as wikis and blogs, collective intelligence, multidirectional communication. Technology often innovates faster than businesses can adapt, and Web 2.0 is no exception. This new webscape's challenge to technical communicators is profound:

- How can technical communicators maintain complete, accurate, and easy to use documentation in an environment that is constantly evolving and invites both participation and customization?
- What is the evolving role of technical communicators in this paradigm?
- What technology and production issues do technical communicators face?

On a deeper level, the role of technical communicators changes most dramatically because, in a Web 2.0 world, the value and role of information changes.

Instead of an add-on expense to product development, technical communication holds all of the pieces of Web 2.0 technology together. In addition to integrating help files and PDFs into product packages or interfaces, technical communicators become deeply embedded in marketing communication, support, and e-commerce.



Speaker

Tim is a certified project management professional (PMP) and technical communication consultant with Lasselle-Ramsay in Mountain View, California. He is currently a project manager for information development projects. He also implements content management systems and plans strategically for the future of technical communication.

Tim has over 8 years of experience in the technical communication industry. He worked at Mindjet, Sygate Technologies (now Symantec), IBM, Web MD, and Kaiser Permanente. Before beginning his career as a technical communicator, Tim taught media studies at Stanford University, where he completed his Ph.D. in German studies and wrote extensively about German cinema.

Meeting Agenda

- 6:00 Check-in, networking, and conversation.
- 6:30 Dinner.
- 7:15 Chapter business and announcements. Anyone can announce jobs that they know about.*
- 7:30 Formal program. Usually we have a speaker or panel of speakers on a topic related to the business or technology of technical communication.
- 8:30 Conversation, offline questions for the speaker, follow-up on job announcements
- 9:00 Clear the room. Move conversations to the sidewalk.

* **Attendees**, please announce open positions, and bring job listings for distribution.

Recruiters are welcome to attend meetings, place literature on a designated table, and talk with attendees one-on-one during the informal parts of the meeting. We ask them not to announce specific jobs during the formal announcement period, but they are free to stand up and identify themselves.

Similarly, we ask anyone else with commercial announcements to confine themselves to calling attention to the availability of literature on the designated table.

Berkeley STC Meeting Location and Directions

Give the following address to your favorite mapping program:
2086 Allston Way, Berkeley, CA 94704

By BART

Get off at the downtown Berkeley station (Richmond line). Emerge from the west side of the Downtown Berkeley BART station. Walk south on Shattuck one block to Allston Way and turn right.

By Car

From north of Berkeley on I-80, take the University Avenue exit (east). Turn right on Shattuck Avenue. Allston Way is three blocks south.

From south of Berkeley, take 880 north from San Jose. Continue through Oakland on 880. Follow the highway as it curves sharply to the right (where traffic merges in) and becomes 980. Continue on 980 to Highway 24 (toward Berkeley and Walnut Creek). Take the first exit from 24 (Martin Luther King Jr./51st). Turn right on 51st and make an immediate left onto Shattuck. Proceed north on Shattuck 2.3 miles to downtown Berkeley. Allston Way is immediately before the BART station.

Parking

The nearest lot is on Oxford, between Kitteredge and Allston. Flat rate of \$4.00 for the evening (subject to change—not under our control).

Street parking is scarce, but free after 6:00 p.m.



Walking to your car or BART?

We can't guarantee you an escort, but we'll try.



STC News

Chapter News

Leadership Positions Available

We are looking for a treasurer! Contact Richard Mateosian if you are interested.

Membership Update

by Jim Dexter

February 2007

Total STC Membership: 16,802 (up 446 since January, 2007)

Total Chapter Membership: 161 (up 6 since January, 2007)

Welcome to Nancy C. Beckus, Robert L. Carel, Randina M. Casenza, Anne M. Clements, Jane Lee, and Meghan K. Mahar!

March 2007

NOTE: The March 2007 report contains an artificial downward trend in numbers, based on a purge of the database of members who have not yet renewed. There will be significant rises in membership in the next couple of months, based on members who will renew.

Total STC Membership: 12,767 (down 4,035 since February, 2007)

Total Chapter Membership: 133 (down 28 since February, 2007)

Welcome to Anne Bennedsen and Drew Wheeler!

Regional STC News

The STC Silicon Valley Chapter invites us to attend their meeting on **Thursday April 26, 2007 in Santa Clara.**

Writing for Bio-Medicine

Learn about writing for the growing medical and pharmaceutical markets! Mimi Wessling will moderate a panel with Susan Caldwell, Ingfei Chen, Catheryn Magill, Naomi Ruff and Hillary Russak.

6:00 - 9:00 p.m.

Techmart Network Meeting Center
5201 Great America Parkway
Santa Clara, CA 95054

Registration:

STC Members for beverages only: \$12, Non-members: \$17

STC Members for dinner: \$25, Non-members: \$35

For more information, see the Silicon Valley Chapter website at:

<http://stc-siliconvalley.org/>

National STC News

STC 2007 Elections

Vote now! STC's 2007 elections are open.

<https://eballot3.votenet.com/stc/login.cfm>

To help members make informed choices, STC has posted brief biographies about each candidate to the STC website. Members can also use the "Ask the Candidate" feature on the website to submit questions directly to the candidates.

Voting instructions and ballots were sent to all members in March.

Steven Jong asked us to share this information about him and his candidacy. STC-Berkeley does not endorse any candidate—this information is provided for your reference. His article is on the next page.



Steven Jong

I'd like to introduce myself and give you some of my background and ideas for the Society.

Background

Professional: I've been a technical communicator for 30 years. Currently I'm a documentation project manager at 3Com. I've also delivered training in the US and Europe, and taught writing to law students.

Communities: I am a past president of the Boston chapter. I maintained services despite declining income; we won three chapter awards of Distinction in four years. I'm active in the Quality and Process Improvement SIG (where for ten years I was a columnist for DocQment, the SIG's award-winning newsletter) and the Management SIG.

Society: Since 2002 I've served the International Technical Publications Competition as a judge, lead judge, and Best of Show judge. I've presented papers at seven Annual Conferences and several regional conferences. I'm currently involved with ISO, as an author and reviewer, as they revise and consolidate the standards for software documentation.

Nonprofit leadership: I have experience founding and leading nonprofit organizations to long-term stability. I started a recreational volleyball league at Digital Equipment. The corporate subsidy was eventually eliminated, but we dealt with this transition so well that the league still operates 20 years later as an independent entity. Also, for two years I was the president of my community chorus, a 501(c)(3) corporation.

Society Issues

STC's biggest issue is member retention. Our profession is growing worldwide, yet membership has declined by a third over the last five years. Today less than 10% of practitioners worldwide are members. Increasingly, employers don't subsidize dues, and practitioners don't see the value of membership. We need to create an STC that more practitioners want to join and more employers want to subsidize. The challenge

is to provide more value, especially to senior members, and publicize that value to both practitioners and employers. We also need an open flow of information and ideas between communities and the Society. Finally, we deserve a transparent accounting of how the Society spends our money, and why.

The New Director Role

The current Director-Sponsors are being replaced by directors. While a D-S represented and supported chapters in one region, directors are expected to represent all communities and all members. The role requires a strategic view of Society goals and how to reach them. For example, a tactical concern is strengthening a community; a strategic concern is strengthening the Society. (The Leadership Community Resource is being established to support communities.)

Summary

I believe what sets me apart from the other director candidates is my long experience and broad perspective. I'm a life-long technical communicator; I've been active in both chapters and SIGs, as well as at the Society level; I've traveled abroad to deliver training; and I've led non-profit organizations to long-term stability and fiscal health.

If you'd like more information, please go to www.StevenJong.net. When you vote for directors, I hope you will cast a vote for me. Thanks in advance!



Other Organizations

American Medical Writers Association (AMWA) of Northern California. Meets periodically at various Bay Area locations. www.amwancal.org

American Society for Training and Development, Mount Diablo Chapter. Meets monthly in Danville. <http://mtdiabloastd.org/>.

American Society of Indexers, Golden Gate Chapter. www.asindexing.org/site/chapters.shtml#golden

Association for Women in Computing, San Francisco Bay Area chapter
www.awc-sf.org/

International Association of Business Communicators, San Francisco chapter. A network of professionals committed to improving the effectiveness of organizations through strategic interactive and integrated business communication management
<http://sf.iabc.com/>

National Writers Union (UAW). A labor union for freelance writers of all genres.
www.nwu.org

Northern California Science Writers' Association. Quarterly meetings and other events.
www.ncswa.org

Industry News

ComponentOne® Announces Doc-To-Help 2007 v1

New Release Focuses on Customer Requests by Improving HTML and Print Outputs.

This release delivers a powerful new search engine for NetHelp, a convenient new breadcrumb navigation feature in HTML-based outputs, and a “generate PDF” button in Word manual outputs to create PDF files. These features give Doc-To-Help users a higher level of customizability and makes delivering effective Help systems and printed documentation to users easier than ever before.

www.doctohelp.com

March/April
2007