Lines & Letters

Northeast Ohio STC Newsletter

President's Corner

Hi all,

I hope you enjoyed your holiday season and are looking forward to a happy, prosperous, and most importantly, career-focused 2014.

A special thanks to Janean Voss for organizing the 2013 Annual Holiday Recognition Banquet and Raffle at the beautiful Signature of Solon Country Club! The NEO recognized and awarded the 2013 NEO STC Competition winners. It was a fabulous celebration of the NEO STC's member accomplishments and it was great end-of-year celebration.

We also held our annual holiday raffle to raise money to fund future NEO STC educational workshops. Thanks to Dan Reichers for coordinating the raffle.

We look forward to seeing everyone on Thursday, January 9th, at the January NEO STC meeting, where Alan Houser will present a program entitled "The All-Star Team: Adobe Technical Communication Suite." This presentation will include something for all experience levels, from beginner to advanced, and is a great opportunity to familiarize yourself with these industry-standard technical communication tools, or, if you are currently using the Adobe Technical Communication Suite, learn tidbits that you may have missed.

It looks like more than 50 percent of NEO members have renewed their membership for 2014 so far. This is great! Members can still renew without a lapse in membership through January 15, 2014. And, remember, you may may be able to deduct membership fees or dues you pay to STC. Refer to Deduct Your Dues for more information (http://www.stc.org/membership/join-or-renew-now/1169-deduct-your-dues).

Membership information is available through the STC website (http://www.stc.org/membership/join-or-renew-now). Questions about renewal or joining can be sent to our NEO membership chairperson: Carrie Cianciola.

As always, if you are interested in getting more involved as a volunteer, please feel free to contact me.

Paul

PS. This month's lady is the Great One, the one and only, never to be replicated nor equaled, the Queen Herself, the Queen Mary. She sits permanently docked in Long Beach, California, and is the only surviving ship of the great ones, the Golden Age of Sea Travel. She is arguably the single greatest liner ever to sail. To this day, you can sit in one of her stairwells (I know; I have)

and, in a hushed whisper, she will tell you how she longs to stretch her legs one last time and race across the waves, defying the mighty Atlantic with ease while offering up the elegance only a true Ocean Liner can offer. Each year, even in retirement, she is a wonderful place to welcome a new year with all of its boundless opportunities and possibilities.

A wonderful 2014 to all of the NEO STC.

NEO STC Competition Award Winners Recognized

Hats off to all who planned our 2013 Annual Holiday Recognition Banquet. Signature of Solon proved to be a great location for the event, which recognized the 2013 NEO STC Competition winners. Attendees also enjoyed the chance to view the winning entries and participate in our holiday raffle.

Robert Young of Rockwell Automation (pictured with Nicole Derr and Barb Philbrick) appears with the certificate for his Distinguised winning entry – PlantPAx System Application Templates Quick Start.

The event let us celebrate our peers' accomplishments with our competition this year, including 16 submissions and entries in the promotional, instructional, informational, and user support categories.

A huge Thank You goes out to everyone involved in running our competitions as well as to those who put together the banquet. Much work goes into the competitions – everything from putting out the calls, to finding an exchange partner, to finding judges, to organizing and evaluating entries, to making awards.

Jeanette Evans (pictured) accepted for the Tri-C group Best of Show entry.

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We are lucky to have the volunteers to support these activities. Many thanks to Nicole Derr and Barb Philbrick, who headed up the competitions activities.

Additionally, the holiday raffle raised money to fund future NEO STC educational workshops.

Tyler Hoffman (pictured) accepted for the Respiratory Recovery Award of Excellence entry.

It was an especially good night for Barb Philbrick, who won the drawing for the Kindle! This contest was for those who provided articles to the newsletter this year. She also won a $20 Amazon gift card in the raffle. In addition to Amazon gift cards, the raffle included wonderful items such as a basket with Dr. Who memorabilia and a basket with organic honey from the bees of our own Joann Rasmussen.

Other awards included:

BEST OF SHOW

Teach for Online Learning: Planning, Teaching, and Managing Your Courses

Company: Cuyahoga Community College

Contributors: Cheryl Knight and Danielle Budzick

DISTINGUISHED AWARD WINNERS

Community Benefit – What Counts?

Company: University Hospital

Contributor: Peggy Goodell

Research Computing and Technology Services Brochure

Company: Case Western Reserve University

Contributors: Kirsten Nagel, Gina Tabasso, Bob Case, Mike Warfe

EXCELLENCE AWARD WINNERS

Filing Mass Transmitters with PROFIBUS-DP: Configuration and Use ManualAnd Filing Mass Transmitters with Modbus: Configuration and Use Manual

Company: Micro Motion

Contributors: Margaret Devere

Technical Product Documentation Package Created for Pre- and Post-Purchase Support of the Micro Motion Gas Density Meter

Company: Micro Motion

Contributors: Margaret Devere, Camille Stauffer

Completing Common C-LION Endorsements

Company: Erie Insurance Group

Contributors: Jeanne Fullerton, Lance Baker

CompactLogix 5370 L3 Controllers Quick Start

Company: Rockwell Automation

Contributors: Jonathan Vasko, Kelly Graham, Rod Shearer

MERIT AWARD WINNERS

Micro Motion ProLink III Multilingual Quick Start Guide (Hard Copy)

Company: Micro Motion

Contributors: Camille Stauffer, Jeff Walker, Neil Gronlie

FlexPoint 1215, 1232 and 1250 Technical Manual

Company: Alpha Technologies

Contributors: Kip Nichols, Ann Boyles, Ryan Roy

Alpha Energy Capabilities Tri-Fold Brochure

Company: Alpha Technologies

Contributors: Danni Thompson, Andrew Azure, Eric Wentz

XM3 120V/240V Conversion Video

Company: Alpha Technologies

Contributors: Kip Nichols, Ryan Roy

Thank you to Tricia Spayer for the photos.

Madcap Flare

Link Your Way to Successful Content Management: Making the Most out of the Global Project Link Feature in Madcap Flare

By Denise Kadilak, Information Architect/Team Manager, Blackbaud

Managing large amounts of content is never an easy task, but moving your organization from a linear authoring environment in Adobe FrameMaker to a topic-

based environment in MadCap Flare will quickly swell your content library to overwhelming proportions. You can complicate this scenario even further by subtracting any possibility of a formal content management system. This is the situation the Blackbaud User Education team faced four years ago, when after 11 years working in FrameMaker, we decided the increasing demands on the documentation team required a move to a topic-based environment.

Solution

After testing several topic-based authoring tools, our team decided to go with MadCap Flare, and the primary selling point was the Global Project Link functionality. We thought this a great tool to help us manage our expanding content library.

To make this work, we created a detailed workflow around the linking feature. The process allows us to import content and project files contained in one Flare project, known as the parent (housing our source content), into another project, known as the child (an empty project). During the import, we select which file types we want to include and exclude in the child project.

When we create a global link, also known as an import, in the child project, we take full advantage of the options Flare offers to help us control what content imports:

♦ Automatically re-import before generating output

♦ Remove "stale" files (stale = files deleted, renamed, or moved)

♦ Specify what type of files you want to include (topics, images, any of the various template files)

♦ Specify what type of files you want to exclude

♦ Select specific files to include

♦ Add additional filters based on condition tags

Workflow

In our workflow, we house all template files in a standalone template project (a parent project). These files include:

♦ Conditional text tags

♦ Skins

♦ Variable sets

♦ Stylesheets (CSS)

♦ MasterPages

♦ PageLayouts

All other projects, both child and parent, use the Global Project Link functionality to import this content, so when we make a change to any of our templates in the template project, all projects pull in the updated content. To establish this linked relationship, we create import files in all projects and point the imports to the template project (this is the Global Project Link setup). In the import file, we tell Flare exactly what we want to import into the project. For example, for the imports pulling in the template content, we tell Flare to include conditions, skins, variables, stylesheets, MasterPages, and PageLayouts.

We use a similar workflow for our source content projects. Our source content is stored in 44 different Flare projects, each project addressing a specific feature set in our software applications. For example, let's say we have a Constituent Records, Administration, and Revenue Processing project, and we have two different software applications: A and B. Application A needs all three feature set projects; application B needs Constituent Records and Administration. In addition, the three feature set projects contain content specifically tagged for each application.

To address this scenario, we create two empty Flare projects, one for each application (A and B), and we import the template project into each. Next, to address the output needs for product A, in the product A Flare project we create imports for Constituent Records, Administration, and Revenue Processing, and we tell each import to include topic and image content and exclude all template-specific content. We also set the Import Conditions to include content tagged for product A and exclude content tagged for product B. For the product B output, in the product B Flare project we create imports for Constituent Records and Administration; we do not create an import for Revenue Processing. Again, we tell each import to include topic and image content and to exclude all template-specific content, and we set the Import Conditions here to include content tagged for product B and exclude content tagged for product A.

You can take this is granular control even further. In addition to basing imported content on file types and condition tags, you can select the specific files housed in the parent project that you want to include in your child project. For example, let's say product B's project needs all content housed in the Constituent Records project

but only four topics housed in Administration. The Constituent Records import stays the same as in the project B example in the above paragraph, but for the Administration import, instead of telling the import what file types to include or exclude, Flare allows you to view all content available in the Administration project and to manually select just the four topics you need.

Drawbacks

Although the Global Project Link functionality offers some nice content management options and robust content reuse between Flare projects, it also comes with a few headaches. My biggest complaint is the import files you create as part of the process occasionally hang and break. If your child project is small, and you are importing only four or five parent projects, this may not be a big deal, but we have child projects importing updates from up to 35 parent projects. In this situation randomly breaking import files are frustrating and take time to fix.

Also, this is a complicated process. It takes extensive planning, preparation, and maintenance. If you hurry at any stage, you will make mistakes, and the error messages provided when the process fails tell you nothing. Troubleshooting is not a pleasant task. As a result, managing this process is not for everyone.

Conclusion

Drawbacks aside, Flare is a great tool that provides you with a lot of options. Although getting started can be overwhelming, it ends up well worth the effort. My best advice to learning the tool is be methodical. Leaning it involves a good deal of trial and error, and it takes time, but if you create solid processes and workflows to start, you will be happy with the results at the end.

Resources

♦ Madcap's Global Project Linking Guide

♦ Feel free to contact me with any questions/observations/tips: denise.kadilak@blackbaud.com

Girls go Science!

By Lynn Nickels

For decades, we've been hearing about STEM careers and how we should get children – more specifically – girls, involved in the fields of Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math. Well, did you know that YOU can personally contribute to this endeavor?

Through the Girls go Science! program at the Great Lakes Science Center, this is not only possible, but is actually an ongoing project that many local companies are participating in. I have been involved with my company, Rockwell Automation, for the past couple of years now, and can't tell you how rewarding it has been. And the best part is you don't have to be an engineer or math genius to participate! Anyone in a technical or scientifically-related field is welcome.

The program encourages girls to pursue careers that they might not have thought about. Of course, the four obvious fields that STEM refers to, but also fields that relate to and support those fields. For example, as technical writers, we contribute to our engineering colleagues in a large way by documenting their designs. We can present this alternative field, and other alternative fields, like marketing and web design, for instance, to girls who may not want to be engineers or mathematicians, but still desire a career in the technical arena.

The Science Center has three large events a year. Two events are on site at the Center, one in March and one in November; the other is during a summer camp, where the girls travel to the local company and spend the day experiencing what that company does. The events allow girls in grades 6-12 to go to a "mini tradeshow" for each company, where they spend 15 to 20 minutes doing a STEM-related activity. Several activities are included per company and run by employees for that company.

Past events have included demos and workshops that have allowed the girls to program robots, write technical documentation to operate a Ferris wheel, and make their own nail polish. The next event in March is at the Science Center and will center around ecology.

For more information, visit http://www.glsc.org/programs/kid-and-teen-programs/girls-go!-science.aspx, or contact me at lanickels@ra.rockwell.com.

STC International Summit Awards – Call for Judges

STC is seeking judges for the 2014 International Summit Awards. All STC members are invited to apply to judge in the upcoming competition based on qualifications in at least two of the following areas:

♦ Senior membership in STC.

♦ Five years in technical communication or a related field.

♦ Teaching experience in communication or a related field.

♦ Master's degree or higher in technical communication or a related field.

♦ CPTC or other certification from a related professional organization.

♦ Winner of an STC or other technical communication competition award.

♦ Three years' experience in the category you want to judge.

For more information or to apply, see the STC Notebook blog post (http://notebook.stc.org/stc-international-summit-awards-2014-call-for-judges/) from judging manager Paula Robertson.

STC 2014 Summit Registration is Open!

The 2014 Technical Communication Summit will take place May 18-21, 2014, in Phoenix, Arizona. Registration is now open on the Summit website at http://summit.stc.org/. The Really Early Bird rate (available only to STC members) is $835, and this rate is only valid through January 15. See the STC Notebook blog (http://notebook.stc.org/registration-is-now-open-for-the-2014-summit/) and Summit website for more details about the conference.

Lines & Letters Wants You in the Spotlight!

By Lynn Nickels

Why accept an invitation to be in the Spotlight? It's a great way to network!

I know as technical writers, some of us tend to be slightly shy...but, think of the many benefits you gain from being my willing victim in a Spotlight article!

Not only do you allow people to know you on a more personal level, but it's a way to start conversations and network with people you might never have had the chance to interact with. Think of it as self-promotion—a way to market yourself and your skills, because you never know when you might need to in this uncertain economy.

It's also a way to learn. Think of it as an educational resource—maybe someone's background includes knowledge of a software application you've always wanted to learn. What a great way to start a conversation and learn something new at the same time!

I know we are a modest species, but don't look at being in the Spotlight as tooting your own horn, look at it as a way to open up yourself and allow people to get to know you. Business and personal relationships are very valuable, so look at being a Spotlight feature as a positive win-win for everyone involved!

If you would like to volunteer as a Spotlight subject, and have not been featured in the last couple of years, please contact me. It involves answering a few simple questions via email. I would love to hear from you! I can be reached at lanickels@ra.rockwell.com. I promise, it won't hurt too badly!

Good Blogging Today: Some Thoughts

By Jeanette Evans

What is good blogging today? We can get part of the answer by looking at award winners and lists identifying top blogs. Here are some examples.

Education blogs

OEDB lists top 100 education blogs with topics such as college, e-learning, education news, internet culture, teaching, and technology. Digital Writing and Digital Teaching is one the of the blogs noted in the internet culture category.

Award winners

Apex and STC run contests where blogs can win awards. Some of these award winners include the American Society of Clinical Oncology, Cleveland Metroparks, and Cuyahoga Community College Title 3 blogs.

Blogs and technical communication

I'd Rather Be Writing is a technical communication blog that recently included a post on the sins of blogging to

include being fake, irrelevant, unreadable, unfindable, and inattentive.

Is it time to reinvent Lines & Letters and use a blog format instead? This is food for thought. The STC Rochester community has a blog and newsletter. They also have on their site a list of blogs related to technical communication. Here are the related links from stc-rochester.org.

http://notebook.stc.org/links/

http://stc-rochester.org/blog/

You might also find of interest Alan Houser's blog http://www.groupwellesley.com/group-wellesley-wire/ as he is our January speaker.

Note to readers: This article includes snippets from a related article scheduled to appear in Intercom.

Newsletter Notes: Happy New Year (and thoughts about words)

by Jeanette Evans (co-editor, Lines & Letters)

Best wishes to everyone for 2014. In thinking back to 2013, I imagine you noticed that Oxford Dictionaries (http://blog.oxforddictionaries.com/2013/11/interplanetary-woty/) chose selfie as word of the year. It is an interesting choice often associated with social networking. It is also interesting to me that Merriam-Webster (http://newsfeed.time.com/2013/12/03/and-merriam-websters-word-of-the-year-is) picked science as their word of the year, due to spikes in lookups—arguing these spikes reflect "big ideas" in our culture.

In more thoughts on words—maybe this is one of my awkward transitions—I am again thinking about those of us—myself included—who miss our book discussion meetings. The http://www.behindthebeautifulforevers.com/ site gives information about Behind the Beautiful Forevers book our community choose—a thoughtful choice for sure. "Reads like a novel," appears as one of the reader's comments on Amazon.com, referring to this book about residents of a slum near Mumbai's International Airport. Author Katherine Boo won a MacArthur "Genius" grant and Pulitzer Prize for this work, and spent three years in the slum she writes about in the book.

In thinking about 2014, a resolution to consider is to provide an item for this newsletter. We normally plan to release a newsletter about a week before a meeting and want to hear from you.This is especially true if you attend the upcoming Summit. Those of us who do not

attend would especially like to hear from attendees. Let's hope writing for our newsletter is a growth experience for you, a good addition to your portfolio and experience base, and fun. You might also consider volunteering for a write-up in our In the Spotlight section. This is a great way to network and can be a small investment of time for you.

Here's hoping you find of special interest, in this edition, Lynn Nickels' Girls go Science! article. She suggests the article is a continuation of thoughts on Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) from our last issue. Lynn provides us with information about a worthwhile activity to think about for 2014 and beyond.

Let's not forget to congratulate the winner of the drawing that included those who wrote for this newsletter. Of our wonderful contributors, Barb Philbrick turned out to be the lucky winner of the Kindle.

Going back to thoughts on words and the word selfie, the related wikipedia entry maybe you saw, has, what I thought, was a fun statement about "Grand Duchess Anastasia Nikolaevna of Russia taking one of the first teenage self-portraits using a mirror and a Kodak Brownie camera to send to a friend in 1914."