

Lines & Letters

Northeast Ohio STC Newsletter



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President's Column



Dear Readers,

We have had just over 70% of our membership renew so far in 2013 – this is great! If you have not renewed yet, the deadline for membership renewal is near! You have until

February 28 to renew to avoid having a lapse in your membership.

Reasons to renew:

- ◆ The cost averages out to less than \$5/week for the basic membership plus chapter (and SIG).
- ◆ STC provides several opportunities to experience leadership roles, both at the chapter and international levels.
- ◆ STC membership and volunteer positions make your resume stand out from the crowd.
- ◆ NEO STC has earned the annual Community Achievement Award (Community of Distinction, Excellence, or Merit) from the Society for over ten years for its outstanding service to members.
- ◆ NEO STC offers a variety of events during the year (program meetings, book club, networking lunches, webinars, and workshop) at a reduced rate for members, and these events allow you to expand your knowledge in the field and your professional network.

Renew/Join today: <http://www.stc.org/membership/join-or-renew-now>.

We submitted our Community Achievement Award application for 2012 this past week, and we want to thank our community for again making 2012 a great year. We will hear the results back from the Society in the coming months.

Our semi-annual board meeting will have taken place by the time this newsletter is released. We held it at the Warrensville Heights Library on January 28, and discussed progress on our committee plans for the 2012-13 year, and any new or modified plans.

If you ever have comments, questions, or suggestions about NEO STC, or you're interested in becoming a chapter volunteer, please write to me. I look forward to seeing you again soon at an NEO STC event!

Janean Voss

NEO STC Chapter President

Don't Forget to Vote! Check out the National STC Candidates

For full information on the candidates, visit <http://www.stc.org/about-stc/leadership/stcelection>. The 2013 Society election is scheduled to begin at 10 AM EST (GMT-5) on March 11 and will close at 5 PM EST (GMT-5) on March 22.

The positions and candidates are listed below.

PRESIDENT

- ◆ Nicky Bleiel will automatically succeed from Vice President.

CANDIDATES FOR VICE PRESIDENT

- ◆ Katherine Brown-Hoekstra
- ◆ Paul Mueller

CANDIDATES FOR TREASURER

- ◆ Brian Lindgren
- ◆ Jane Wilson

CANDIDATES FOR DIRECTOR (TWO POSITIONS TO BE ELECTED)

- ◆ Ben Woelk
- ◆ Deanne Levander
- ◆ Michael Opsteegh

CANDIDATES FOR NOMINATING COMMITTEE (TWO POSITIONS TO BE ELECTED)

- ◆ Andrea Wenger
- ◆ Phylise Banner

From Ben Woelk: Candidate for Director

Why Your Vote Matters

STC and other professional organizations are facing common challenges as the workforce shifts from the Baby Boomers to Generations X and Y. This shift is forcing STC (and others) to evaluate everything we do in order to be a vibrant relevant organization. I believe this year's Board of Directors has us well on the way.

Two of the Directors (and others) are at the end of their terms and it's time to elect the next set of leaders. Your vote matters because each candidate brings different strengths and perspectives. We're committed to helping STC succeed. You need to decide who can best lead STC to success.

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Why I want to serve as Director

I want to make a difference. The Society is facing tremendous challenges as it adapts to a culture where volunteerism is waning. I believe my ability to analyze problems and devise solutions, understand customer requirements, and willingness to make tough decisions will serve the Society well. I believe that the degree of satisfaction we gain from involvement in a professional organization is directly related to the depth of our involvement.

One of the most rewarding ways to serve is in leadership. I've been able to make a difference in the Rochester chapter as an active leader and as the architect and team lead of the Outreach program of the Community Affairs Committee. Although it's been challenging, it's also been incredibly exciting and fulfilling. I want to be a change agent and help STC reinvent itself to keep pace with a changing profession and society.

For more information about my candidacy, visit <http://benwoelk.com> and click on the "Ben Woelk for STC Director" link. Voting in the 2013 Society for Technical Communication (STC) election begins March 11 and ends March 22 at 5 pm ET (10.00 GMT).

Visit <http://stc.org/election> for details. Whether you choose to support me or not, please vote. In the last two Director elections there's been a 1-2 vote difference between being elected or not. Your vote will make a difference. We have three candidates for the position, with two seats to be filled.

Thanks!

Ben Woelk

<http://benwoelk.com>

Senior Member Candidate for Director

Outreach Team Lead, Community Affairs Committee

Ginny Haas and Denise Kadilak Receive Distinguished Chapter Service Awards

The Northeast Ohio Community of the Society for Technical Communication is pleased to announce that Ginny Haas and Denise Kadilak have achieved the Distinguished Chapter Service Award. Their tireless service to the NEO STC is a source of pride and inspiration to all of us.

Their active participation in the NEO STC over the years has been a positive influence on the chapter, and has

moved us forward in our goal of promoting and sustaining the role of technical communicators in our community.

Their spirit of volunteerism has greatly benefited our chapter over the years, and we thank them for it. Though their contributions are too many to list here, we would like to recognize:

Ginny specifically for her outstanding efforts in the following roles:

- ◆ Programs Chairperson (2011 to present)
- ◆ Community Vice President, President, and Immediate Past President (2009-2011)
- ◆ NEO STC Volunteer of the Year award winner (2009 and 2010)
- ◆ Community Treasurer (2008-2009)
- ◆ Crucial Communicator Core Committee member and Sponsorship/PR coordinator (2008)
- ◆ Committee of the Year award winner, Crucial Communicator Core Committee (2008)

Denise specifically for her outstanding efforts in the following roles:

- ◆ Website Committee Co-Chairperson (2010 to present)
- ◆ Presenter, NEO STC Writing Canvas Workshop: "Technical Writing and New Trends" (2012)
- ◆ Presenter, NEO STC November Program Meeting: "Moving from FrameMaker to Flare" (2011)
- ◆ Community Vice President, President, and Immediate Past President (2008-2011)
- ◆ Networking Social Committee Volunteer (2008-2009)
- ◆ Community Treasurer (2007-2008)
- ◆ Regional Conference Committee Volunteer (2007-2008)
- ◆ Education Committee Chairperson (2006-2007)
- ◆ Committee of the Year award winner, Education Committee (2007)

Their experience and wisdom have been invaluable to the NEO STC. We hope that they will continue to be a crucial part of our community for years to come.

Please stay tuned and make arrangements to help us to formally recognize Ginny and Denise for their

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achievements at our NEO STC Annual Chapter Awards Banquet and Election on May 16.

The Distinguished Chapter Service Award recognizes the hard work and commitment of STC's community leaders. The award recognizes an individual's exemplary effort, energy, and dedication to their community and its activities. This award is the highest level of recognition that a member can receive for service to their community.

Congratulations, Ginny and Denise!

2012 to 2013 Competition Wrap-up

For this year's competition, NEO STC tried out some different processes and tweaked how we did some other things. The result was a great competition year!

The biggest change in process was the exchange of entries with another chapter. Exchanging entries helps keep judging impartial, because the judges are less likely to know the authors of the entries. It also gives the judges the opportunity to see entries that are submitted to other chapters. However, it also poses challenges, such as making sure we don't get overwhelmed by a huge number of entries from a bigger chapter and the logistics of transferring entries between the chapters. We looked at several chapters as possible exchange partners, based on their size, timing of their competitions, and ease of transfer of documents. We decided to exchange with the Rochester chapter. It turned out to be a good fit. We set up a competition agreement with them and worked out the details of exchanging the entries.

They provided us with seven entries, which we distributed among our three teams of judges. We awarded four awards of Merit and two awards of Distinguished.

We provided them with fifteen entries. They awarded us with five awards of Merit, one award of Excellence, and four awards of Distinguished. (For a list of award winners, see the December newsletter.)

The judging and exchange process went smoothly. Both chapters completed judging in the allotted time (about a month) and there was no problem with shipping the entries. The judges from the Rochester chapter commented that they enjoyed working with the entries from our chapter.

The tweaks to the competition were mostly to items that could help the competition remain in budget while still offering benefits to our entrants. To do this, we limited

the number of NEO STC banquet tickets to one for each winning entry (previously, we had allowed two for each winning entry), while still keeping the competition entry fee the same as previous years. We also made some other adjustments. The result is that we maintained a good benefit level for entrants and made a modest profit this year.

The entries that were given Awards of Distinguished or Excellence are eligible to be entered into STC's 2013 International Summit Awards Competition. The deadline is February 8 2013. Some of our local winners are submitting their entries to International. We will keep an eye out to see how they do!

Of course there were small glitches, like problems with the application and entry forms, that we will try to improve upon in future competitions. But overall, this turned out to be a positive experience for both chapters!

Thank you to everyone who helped out to make this year a success.

*Barb Philbrick and Nicole Derr,
NEO STC Competition Co-Chairs*

Radcom Four-Time Business Growth Award Winner

Radcom, Inc., with the receipt of its fourth award for outstanding sales growth in 2012, is proof that successful small businesses do prevail even during a sluggish economy. Radcom, an instructional design and technical communication consulting firm based in Hudson, Ohio, was recognized by the Weatherhead 100 as one of the 100 fastest growing companies in Northeast Ohio based on revenues from 2006 to 2011.

The 2012 winners were honored at the Weatherhead 100 Awards in December, at Executive Caterers of Landerhaven. Previously, Radcom was named a Weatherhead 100 Outstanding Growth Company in 2011, 2009, and 2004.

Bob Dianetti, Radcom president and founder said that, "Winning the Weatherhead 100 again shows that quality work is respected, rewarded, and in demand in Northeast Ohio. Our region is dedicated to providing quality products and services. Radcom helps these great companies deliver training and documentation to help their employees and customers succeed. Our team of dedicated and experienced professionals know how to help our clients excel."

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Being named a Weatherhead 100 company is a unique recognition that distinguishes a company as among Northeast Ohio's best. Weatherhead 100 companies selected in 2012 must have had net sales of at least \$100,000 in 2007 and more than \$1 million in 2011. Additionally, winning companies must have employed a minimum of 16 full-time employees in 2011 and be located in one of the 16 eligible Northeast Ohio counties. The honor is bestowed by the Council of Smaller Enterprises (COSE) and the Case Weatherhead School of Management.

From the Editors: February Update

With February here and thoughts in the air of Valentine's Day and love, your editors would like to know if you love to read this newsletter. In addition, we want you to know we would love to see your submissions at newsletter@neostc.org or directly in Joomla.

We also hope you love seeing Bulwer-Lytton contest entries. The author of the Hillbilly Fishing entry (from last month) is Kim Lindsey. Who is the author of the following? See a future edition of this newsletter for the answer.

Columbo.

Just as lightning struck, who should walk in the door, but for the ever-perspicacious inspector Columbo who is famous for his "oh, and one more thing line" that he likes to pull on his suspects, knowing well that they are guilty, yet he tries to trip them up by acting loggerheaded and unretentive, and then the electric lights of the ostentatious manor house flickered like the many lit Mackinac Island Fudge-scented candles that were placed all along the churriguesque entry hallway.

While it is true February is here, some of us might still be pondering the end of 2012 and beginning of 2013, especially as they relate to the "word" of the year. **Big Data** should be the "word" of the year according to Geoff Nunberg - as you might have heard - as he explains at the <http://insidehpc.com/2012/12/21/npr-podcast-why-big-data-should-be-the-word-of-the-year/> NPR site.

Nunberg argues that there are many reasons why Big Data is a good choice. As he explains one reason, "And it was Big Data analytics that Nate Silver used to correctly predict the election outcome in all 50 states, skunking the pundits in the process."

Whether you vote for **gif** or **Big Data**, at the very least it can be interesting to think about these words and the year gone by. This thought can lead us back to the thought of February and love and how one can love words, as you probably know. One can also love thinking about words.

Tech Writing Blogs of Note

By Jeanette Evans



When I googled **technical writing blogs** recently - as many of you probably have - at the top of the results I saw the entries at the http://www.invesp.com/blog-rank/technical_writing site that showed responses by categories such as unique monthly visitors, RSS membership, and Google indexed pages. Here are three blogs that caught my eye.

Digital Inspiration at <http://www.labnol.org/> tops some of the lists. In existence since 2004, this blog is a tech and how-to blog. Author Amit Agarwal calls himself a personal technology columnist. Holding a degree in computer science, Amit also earned a Most Valuable Professional award (from Microsoft) for five years in a row. His blog is a listing of useful tips on topics as diverse as how to take screen shots, managing documents in Google docs, Drop Box, and Project Gutenberg.

Anne Gentle's Just Write Click at <http://justwriteclick.com/> tackles topics such as collaborative authoring, Facebook, Twitter, and content strategy. She gets a fair number of comments on her postings. Her realm of interest involves in part her work on a project that allows for collaborating on community documentation and cloud computing using open source software. She is the author of Conversation and Community: The Social Web for Documentation. She notes in her bio that she is "interested in people ... who adopt social web methods for technical documentation, customer support, and Agile documentation." She has presented at events such as South by SouthWest, DocTrain, and STC Summit.

Tom Johnson's blog at <http://idratherbewriting.com/> is one I have visited before to download a file from an STC presentation he gave. Wordpress, tech writing tools, Flare, and podcasts were some of the topics I saw on his blog when I visited. While this blog does not always fall in the top 10 of the list of technical writing blogs, it can prove to be valuable to someone who is working in the

field of technical communication. His sponsors I always find especially impressive.

NE Ohio Communications Pros are on Kelly Blazek's Job Bank – Are You?

It started out sharing random job openings with a few friends via a Yahoo Groups – and 10 years later has grown to the largest distribution list of communications, marketing, media, creative and nonprofit professionals in the region who receive nearly 100 fresh new job openings monthly from Kelly Blazek.

A manufacturing communications consultant (www.gembacomms.com), Kelly's goal is to "keep great creative, communications, and marketing strategy talent here in NE Ohio," and she has posted over 5,700 jobs via what she calls her "goofy hobby."

There's no fee to subscribe, although she does require potential members to explain in one sentence the industry in which they work. Her Job Bank comes out twice a month, packed with new jobs and internships in marketing, PR, events, fundraising, non-profit management, media, journalism, and graphic design.

"Employers value the exposure on my Job Bank because they know it's a screened, filtered list. All subscribers are in our specific industry, and I need to ensure that out-of-work folks in other fields aren't signing up to apply to every job they see."

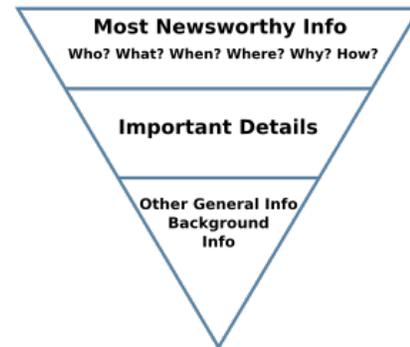
To request membership on the Job Bank, send an e-mail (but no resumes, please) to ClevelandJobBank-subscribe@yahoo.com with a brief, 200 character statement about what you do.

Hiring managers and HR departments send open postings to her directly, but she also has over 200 local company career pages bookmarked, and sleuths through them twice a month to find new positions in the market. She shares her job search insights and pointers from being on global HR senior leadership teams for GE, Eaton Corporation and Ingersoll Rand on her blog, <http://kellyblazek.wordpress.com/>.

Popular articles have included "Five Helpful Thank You Note Samples for Job Seekers After an Interview" and "In a Job Search? How It's Just Like The Dating Game." In addition, she Tweets hot new job openings between the regular Job Bank schedule at twitter.com/neohcommjobs. Kelly is available for one-on-one resume consults, and is a regular job search blogger on numerous AOL/Patch.com sites in the region.

On Article Writing and the Inverted Pyramid

If you could use information about writing articles or could use a refresher, looking at the **inverted pyramid** could be a good place to start.



Wikipedia notes about this metaphor that journalists and other writers use the pyramid to show the "placing of the most important information first within a text." Journalism students often learn about this technique for news writing.

"Summary news lead" style is another way of explaining the technique. "The format is valued because readers can leave the story at any point and understand it, even if they don't have all the details. It also allows less important information at the end, where it can be removed by editors so the article can fit a fixed size..." appears also in Wikipedia as does a great example of inverted pyramid writing. Other writing techniques of note include the:

- ◆ "kicker" at the end of a feature article
- ◆ anecdotal lead that draws the reader into the text
- ◆ question and answer formats

As always, we look forward to your submissions at newsletter@neostc.org.

January Presentation Slides

Did you attend Mary Knepper's presentation "How Personality Type Effects Negotiating Style and Tone," and you want more information?

Were you not able to attend the January meeting, and you are curious about the topic?

You are in luck! Mary kindly shared her presentation slides with us. Look under "Professional Resources" on the NEO STC website home page for January 2013

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Program Presentation Slides. The presentation is a PDF. You do not need PowerPoint to open it. Please note that the slides are available for personal use only.

Book Review

Painting with Numbers: Presenting Financials and Other Numbers So People Will Understand You, by Randall Bolten

*Reviewed by Patrick Lufkin
(reprinted with permission from Patrick Lufkin)*

Have you ever looked at a quantitative chart or table where the numbers seemed accurate enough, but where their meaning was confusing? Did you have difficulty finding the information you needed, understanding how the numbers related to each other, or identifying which might be the most important? If so, you experienced what Randall Bolten calls poor “quantation.”

Derived from “quantity” and “communication,” “Quantation” is Bolten’s coinage for “the act of presenting numbers, such as financial results, electronically or in written form for the purpose of informing an audience.” Far too often, it is done poorly. Bolten has spent more than thirty years as a financial executive for high-tech companies in Silicon Valley, where he has both produced and consumed quantitative information. In *Painting with Numbers* he passes on what he has learned.

Bolten stresses that quantation is a communications skill that can be learned. He covers the rules and principles that one must master to effectively design, format, and present quantitative information to maximize its readability, effectiveness, and suitability for its intended specific audience. Bolten says that small changes in the way numbers are presented can make a huge difference in how well they are understood, whether an audience finds them convincing, and even the conclusions the audience draws about you and your personal credibility.

Organized in four major sections, the book covers rules, tools, real mastery, and a wrap up. Rules covers the “nuts and bolts” of designing and laying out numerical tables, and, to a lesser extent, visual charts and graphs. It covers such things as selecting headings, units of measure, degree of precision, alignment, and a myriad other matters that can make or break quantitative presentations. Throughout, Bolten presents alternative layouts to illustrate how each change impacts communication.

To make the most important points easy to grasp and remember, he categorizes them as laws, deadly sins, and pieces of strong advice. For example, “Deadly sins” includes using “unclear, imprecise, or (worst of all) incorrect row or column captions,” and “using visual effects for any reason other than clarifying, distinguishing, or adding meaning to information.” For Bolten, it is all about communication, never about adding unneeded visual sizzle. Bolten also covers production issues, and includes tips on leveraging tools like Excel to improve your work. True mastery covers issues related to content and audience, including selecting what to present, and delivering it in a form that will maximize its usefulness to a specific audience. The board of directors may need a different set of numbers or level of detail than managers setting production targets.

The wrap up brings it all together with a review, and discusses such things as ethical issues and the rare situations in which a true master might find it appropriate to break specific rules. *Painting with Numbers* is an important guide to an aspect of technical communication that is too often overlooked. Anyone who must present quantitative information would benefit from reading it, probably more than once.

Randall Bolten runs Lucidity, a consulting practice in Menlo Park, California focused on short engagements with specific deliverables, including business models, reporting packages, and incentive compensation packages. His 30-year career as a financial executive in Silicon Valley includes nearly 20 years as chief financial officer for both public companies (BroadVision and Phoenix Technologies) and startups. He has also held senior financial management positions at Oracle and Tandem Computers. He received his AB degree from Princeton University and his MBA from Stanford University.

Patrick Lufkin is an STC Associate Fellow with experience in computer documentation, newsletter production, and public relations. He reads widely in science, history, and current affairs, as well as on writing and editing. He is VP for Membership of the Berkeley chapter. He chairs the Gordon Scholarship for technical communication and co-chairs the Northern California technical communication competition.

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In the Spotlight: Stirring Up Storytelling Skills in Kids

Reprinted by permission from Writer's Week, the newsletter of the Society of Professional Journalists of the Cleveland Professional Chapter.

Frank W. Lewis is a man on a mission. His goal: to demystify writing for kids, teach respect for the craft, and encourage a lifelong passion for creating. In order to achieve this, he founded a non-profit youth creative writing center called Ohio City Writers. The former Cleveland Scene and Free Times editor is now involved in organizing programs to help youth in grades 4 through 12 hone their skills with the written word, which in turn will bolster their imaginations, critical thinking abilities, and self-confidence.

According to Lewis, "a writing coach is a personal trainer for your literary muscles." He is looking for volunteers to be writing coaches. Ohio City Writers is building alliances with members of the local writing, journalism, arts and music communities, as well as the increasingly vibrant Near West neighborhoods.

If you are a writer looking to pass on your skills and passion for writing to others, here's a wonderful opportunity.

Social Media Courses from OvernightGeek University

OvernightGeek University in Chagrin Falls is offering social media courses and a certificate program. You can take the individual courses you need, or get on the Social OGRE certificate program track.

Courses are available in Social Media Basics, Facebook, Twitter, Metrics and Metrics Planning, Blogging, LinkedIn, and YouTube.

For more information, visit the OvernightGeek University website (<http://www.overnightgeekuniversity.com/>).