Lines & Letters

Northeast Ohio STC Newsletter

President's column: Looking ahead to the 2007 – 2008 year

By Tricia Spayer (tspayer@yahoo.com)

As I prepare to take the reigns of President of the NEO STC community, I first look back and thank Stephanie Webster for her leadership and unfailing enthusiasm for our community. On top of her responsibilities as president, she added a new member to her family — her adorable son Brandt! Thank you, Stephanie, for all your hard work and dedication to our community.

A little bit about me: I've been a technical writer/ illustrator for Pressco Technology Inc. for the past 11 years. I joined STC in 2000, after attending a couple of Technicom events. While at these events, I learned that members actually enjoyed what they do, and I soon realized that I could learn a lot from this group. I've served on the membership committee, was VP this past year, was Secretary for 3 years, and did other committee work. I've also entered a couple of chapter competitions, and learned a lot about improving my work.

We have some mighty big plans for the upcoming year! Under Bob Young's energetic leadership, we will host the Crucial Communicator — an STC Regional Conference.

So what is a Crucial Communicator? It is basically my theme for the upcoming year — making yourself indispensable. Now to be realistic, we all know that there is no such thing as being indispensable in your job. But just perhaps, by learning a few new skills, and applying them in creative ways, we can prove that there is much more to being a technical communicator than what many companies think.

I have several goals, such as making more use of technology within our community. For example, I hope to encourage the use of our NEO STC Wiki for collaborative work in our committees. I would also like to encourage mentorship within our community. We have a lot of incredibly talented people. It would be nice for members, especially new members, to know who can help.

I have great confidence in the members of our community — there are people I have met who are brilliant, dedicated, and enthusiastic about the future of our community as well as our profession. I look forward to meeting and working with even more of you this upcoming year.

If you have any comments or suggestions for community activities, please e-mail me at the address listed above.

And please note: we can use help in several committees. If you can help out for a few hours here and there, or would like to serve on a committee throughout the year, please let me know!

Past President's column: Reflections on the 2006 – 2007 NEO STC year

By Stephanie Webster (swebster@tmwsystems.com)

As the "changing of the STC guard" deadline approaches, I look back on this last year and beam with pride at each accomplishment that we as a chapter were able to make together.

First and foremost, congrats to all of us on our Chapter of Excellence recognition! This is a difficult status to achieve from the STC International level. We were able to submit many STC-oriented initiatives for evaluation and received applause for the volume of work our community generated. Special kudos to the NEO STC board and committees and all individual volunteers who had given up their personal time this year to make our chapter a success! Thank you all for the beautifully engraved crystal given to me at the awards banquet last month.

My overlying goal was to see each member add personal value as a technical communicator both in their career and through STC. I hope you felt growth this year through the many opportunities our chapter was able to present: Webinars, competitions, a software Saturday session, monthly educational meetings, and networking opportunities.

I have personally felt growth in leadership, networking, and understanding what each of our members has to offer. I hope I can contribute for years to come by returning my learned skills back to our NEO STC community.

It seems like yesterday that I was nervously accepting the baton from Bob Young at last year's end-of-year banquet. Now, I step aside to allow Tricia Spayer to take the lead. She will do an outstanding job next year and I encourage you to give her your full support!

Be safe and have fun during these next few months - but also remember to continue to learn and grow - and add value as a technical communicator this summer!

Enjoy your summer!

This is the last NEO STC newsletter until September. Enjoy your summer!

Introducing the 2007-2008 NEO STC Board & Committees

Please welcome the following NEO STC members, who have volunteered for the 2007-2008 Executive board and committees. Note that several positions are still open — please contact Tricia Spayer (tspayer@yahoo.com) if you would like to volunteer for a position.

Executive Board:

- President: Tricia Spayer
- Vice President: Amy Vogt
- Secretary: Sarah Burke
- Treasurer: Denise Kadilak
- Immediate Past President: Stephanie Webster

Committees:

- Academic Relations: Jeanette Evans, Sarah Burke, co-chairs
- Competitions: (chair open), Rebecca Postupak-Slifer — representative, (another representative needed)
- Education: Anne Paczula, Amy Vogt, (open)
- Employment: (chair open), Traci Billingsley — representative, (another representative needed)
- Networking Lunches: Angie Dianetti, Jill McCauslin, co-chairs
- Newsletter: Barb Philbrick — chair, Jeanette Evans, Sherri Henkin, Jan Lowry, Lisa Mileusnich, Bob Clark, Paul Holland, Sharon Resar, representatives
- Membership: June Muhic — chair
- Programs: (chair open), Kris Henige, Sharon Jendrisak, representatives, (another representative needed)
- Public Relations: Mario Morelos — chair, Jean Church — representative, (another representative needed)
- Regional Conference: Bob Young — chair, Stephanie Webster, Kim Lindsey, Sherri Henkin, Tricia Spayer, representatives (plus many more!)
- Web site: Brian Baddour — chair, Candace Wintering, representative

Upcoming events

- 7/17/07: Networking lunch. Eddie's Creekside Restaurant, 8803 Brecksville Rd., Brecksville
- 8/16/07: Networking lunch. Fox & Hound 1479 SOM Center Rd., Mayfield Hts
- 9/18/07: Networking lunch. 356th Fighter Group, 4919 Mt. Pleasant St. NW, North Canton
- 10/12/07: Region 4 Conference. Watch for details!

Call for competitions help

By Stephanie Webster (swebster@tmwsystems.com)

NEO STC is looking for volunteers to assist with STC Competitions for the 2007-2008 year. Tasks for the competitions committee include publicizing events, organizing entries from STC members, and delegating judging materials. Volunteers are needed as soon as possible to begin in June 2007.

Instructions, schedules, and guidelines will be provided to identify the tasks needed to be completed by the committee. If you are interested in being on the committee, please contact incoming president, Tricia Spayer (tspayer@yahoo.com).

Help needed for Regional Conference preparation

By Stephanie Webster (swebster@tmwsystems.com)

As the summer is starting to unfold, we all seem to take a little bit of a breather from work and dive into vacation mode. Well, before you bring out your flip flops and plant that beach umbrella, can I ask your attention for one more STC-related event?

The Crucial Communicator Regional Conference for STC is going to be hosted by the NEO STC chapter in October of 2007. What does that mean for us as a chapter? Lots of preparation! As you know, our chapter does not run on just a few volunteers. We need everyone's help!

We are looking for help in the following areas for the conference:

- Marketing: Create banners and posters for the conference; create programs

- Public Relations: Identify sponsors (locally and internationally); create promotional advertisements; write articles and take photos during the conference

- Hospitality: Assist with Rock 'n' Write event (Thursday evening welcome reception); greet and direct during conference; organize gift bags and door prizes

If you are interested in helping prepare the chapter for this momentous event, please contact Bob Young (ryoung1956@sbcglobal.net), Stephanie Webster (swebster@tmwsystems.com), or Mario Morelos (mario@localingua.com).

Thank you to those who helped label postcards for the Crucial Communicator!

Thank you to all members and friends who volunteer at our recent Save the Date! Postcard Party. What otherwise would have been the mundane but important task of labeling and stamping all of those postcards announcing our Regional Conference was accomplished quickly while sharing a nice slice of pizza and a few laughs.

Crucial Communicator news: Dr. Melvin Smith to deliver keynote on emotional intelligence

By Mario Morelos (mario@localingua.com)

Not everyone is a natural leader, but anyone can manage and engage emotions in a team using the key concepts and powerful strategies of emotional intelligence. Learn how you can tap into hidden talents to assist your career development when Dr. Melvin Smith of Case Western Reserve University presents a unique keynote address on Emotional Intelligence at the STC Regional Conference on October 12, 2007, in downtown Cleveland, Ohio.

Emotional intelligence is an intellect regarding the emotions, especially the ability to manage one's own or others' emotions. Dr. Smith will share his study on motivational and leadership strategies during the special morning session at 9:00 a.m. at the Hilton Garden Inn and Gateway Conference Center.

Dr. Smith will unveil the importance of emotional intelligence in the workplace and social settings and demonstrate its potential to an organization. He is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Organizational Behavior and a Faculty Director of Executive Education

at the Case Weatherhead School of Management. The Department of Organizational Behavior at Case is internationally recognized as a leader in the field of organizational analysis and development. This department has the nation's largest doctoral program in Organizational Behavior with alumni and students from all around the world.

Dr. Smith has provided training and consulting on leadership development to major corporations. For more than 15 years, he has helped Fortune 500 companies, including IBM, Pepsi-Cola, and H.J. Heinz, achieve impressive results through marketing management and organizational development. His widely recognized research and teachings reveal the relationship components between leaders and employees and how these tactics contribute to personal and organizational success. Dr. Smith's studies have produced real-world results in public education, healthcare, and a variety of other fields. Come and learn how you can tap into your hidden talents to become more indispensable in the workplace!

Congratulations to the newsletter team!

Lines and Letters won an STC Award of Merit this year. Comments from the judging included: "I love the articles. The book reviews were excellent, and I enjoyed the handy hints column. The writing is clean and free of self-indulgence. Possibly because of the relatively free-form format, the articles are in general no longer or shorter than they should be. There is a generous amount of material on both chapter-specific and wider-interest matters." Positive comments on the use of color and font were also made.

The judges also recommended some improvements, mostly concerning scrolling and printing issues. We will be working on those issues over the summer. If you have any suggestions (or better yet, templates!), please let us know. You can contact us at newsletter@neostc.org.

Meeting review: Implementing structured documentation

By Tom Duggan (tsduggan@ra.rockwell.com), Rockwell Automation

On May 4, 2007, NEO Senior Member Denise Kadilak of Blackbaud shared with STC members her company's efforts to implement structured documentation.

Because its projects had become too large and complex for standard FrameMaker to manage, two years ago Blackbaud decided to evaluate the feasibility of structured documentation. Blackbaud selected a core group of writers to review existing documentation and, after completing some initial training, apply the new structure to a couple of pilot projects. Last year, Denise's company introduced more writers to structured authoring and began work on a larger project using this new approach. In March 2007, Blackbaud released its first large structured-documentation project.

Denise explained that structured documentation allows a company to reuse content, exchange content between incompatible applications, and keep up with industry trends. However, to realize these benefits, Blackbaud had to take training seriously and accept the fact that:

♦ implementing a structured workflow is not easy

♦ participating writers must be dedicated to the process

♦ professional training is expensive

Denise noted that the participating Blackbaud writers reviewed structured-documentation Web sites, white papers, and journal articles and studied the workbook Introduction to Structured FrameMaker. By completing this pre-training, Denise's team was able to begin formal training with Scriptorium Publishing at an intermediate level, saving her company time and money.

Her Blackbaud experience showed Denise that any organization seeking to implement structured documentation must first analyze current content, consider legacy documents, determine documentation design, and determine how output will be generated. To analyze current content, Denise's team identified content elements and content that could be reused. The review of legacy documents posed a greater challenge for the Blackbaud writers. Conversion tables allowed them to automate a good portion of this task. However, Denise admitted that creating these tables is quite difficult and requires a solid understanding of structured documentation and existing documents. To maintain consistent document design, Denise had to determine whether more than one writer would be working on a project. She focused especially on consistency in the beginning and ending of procedures, placement of graphics and definition of fields. Finally, Denise's Blackbaud team learned everything it could about using XML to generate output.

Finally, Denise advised that structured documentation is not suitable for every organization and urged those considering it to realize that it is expensive, time consuming, and difficult to learn. For those who decide to make the transition, Denise urged them to follow Blackbaud's example and:

♦ pre-train

♦ train

♦ plan

♦ test

♦ implement structured documentation slowly

Member profile: Jill Goodland

By Jeanette Evans (jeanette.evans@sbcglobal.net)

Jill Goodland recently won an award in the NEO STC Technical Publications Competition for her ControlLogix DH485 Communication Module entry. At her alma mater, Kent State, she recently attended an NEO STC meeting on translations. She also attended the awards banquet and meeting at Rockwell Automation that featured Denise Kadilak presenting a case study of implementing structured documentation.

Working as a senior technical communicator at Rockwell Automation, Jill has been with Rockwell for about 10 years. She has her MEd from Kent State University, with a specialization in instructional design and adult learning. Her work background ranges from a medical/professional photographer, computer trainer/manager to multimedia developer.

Jill has a 14-year-old daughter and enjoys attending and volunteering at her church, Community of Hope Lutheran Missouri Synod in Brecksville. In her spare time, she likes to spend time with her family and friends, work around the house, garden, walk her three dogs, play the guitar, and paint.

Lori Klepfer quoted in *Crain's Cleveland Business*

To check out her words of wisdom in the article "Time out for training," see http://www.tiny.cc/RPlz2.

Thanks to Kris Henige for passing this information along!

What's a pangram?

Have you ever wondered what to call sentences like "The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog" that use every letter of the alphabet? Now you know: (In case you haven't guessed yet) they are called "pangrams."

For more detail on pangrams, see
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pangram

Thanks to Brian Baddour for sending in this interesting tidbit!

Book review: *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*

Reviewed by: Jeanette Evans
(jeanette.evans@sbcglobal.net)

Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary. Publisher: Springfield, Mass. : Merriam-Webster, 2006. $26.95. SBN: 0877798079 9780877798071 9780877798071 0877798079 # OCLC: 66262588

This collegiate dictionary includes fewer words than M-W's unabridged international edition and more words than the corresponding paperback. Called a desktop version, the collegiate dictionary includes about 100 new words not found in the previous edition, which holds a 1993 copyright and was called "groundbreaking" by its publisher because it merged paper, CD, and online versions when it was first published.

The M-W Web site states this collegiate dictionary has more then 225,000 entries. In comparison, M-W also publishes the *Webster's Third New International Dictionary, Unabridged* with more more than 472,000 entries, at $129.00. *The Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, at $12.95, with more than 75,000 definitions is the paperback subset of the collegiate dictionary.

From the Web site, here is a sampling of some of the new words in the 2006 version:

- Business and industry — agritourism, big box
- Computers and technology — mouse potato, spyware, ringtone
- Entertainment and leisure — labelmate, ollie, wave pool
- International — manga, qigong
- Nature — aquascape, coqui
- Popular culture — soul patch, supersize
- Science and medicine — biodiesel, gastric bypass, avian influenza
- The Human Condition — drama queen, unibrow
- Miscellaneous — sandwich generation

Overall, this edition of the collegiate dictionary is what you would expect. It would be a welcome addition for anyone who wants to have a current edition of this reliable and respected source of information, attractively packaged, with easy-to-access information and relevant illustrations.

Here are some related FAQs adapted from the Web site at http://www.m-w.com/info/faq.htm:

What is Merriam-Webster?

Merriam-Webster is a publisher of language-related reference works. The company publishes a diverse array of print and electronic products, including Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, Eleventh Edition (which the company says is America's best-selling desk dictionary) and Webster's Third New International Dictionary, Unabridged.

Does Merriam-Webster have any connection to Noah Webster?

Merriam-Webster can be considered the direct lexicographical heir of Noah Webster. In 1843, the company bought the rights to the 1841 edition of Webster's magnum opus, An American Dictionary of the English Language, Corrected and Enlarged. At the same time, they secured the rights to create revised editions of the work. Since that time, Merriam-Webster editors have carried forward Noah Webster's work, creating some of the most widely used and respected dictionaries and reference books in the world.

When was Merriam-Webster founded?

In 1831, brothers George and Charles Merriam opened a printing and bookselling operation in Springfield, Massachusetts which they named G. & C. Merriam Co. The company, which was renamed Merriam-Webster, Incorporated, in 1982, has been in continuous operation since that time.

How long has Merriam-Webster been publishing dictionaries?

The first Merriam-Webster dictionary was issued on September 24, 1847. It cost $6.00 per copy and earned the praise of such notable figures as President James K. Polk and General Zachary Taylor.

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Which dictionary is used on Merriam-Webster Online?

The Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary is based on the print version of Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, Eleventh Edition. The online dictionary includes the main A-Z listing of the Collegiate Dictionary, as well as the Abbreviations, Foreign Words and Phrases, Biographical Names, and Geographical Names sections of that book. It also includes 1,000 illustrations and 25 tables. Selected sections of the print Collegiate Dictionary, notably the Signs and Symbols section, are omitted from the online Collegiate Dictionary because they include special characters and symbols that cannot readily be reproduced in HTML.

Are all Webster's dictionaries alike?

No. After Noah Webster's death in 1843 and throughout the 19th century, Merriam-Webster produced the finest American dictionaries, building the reputation of the name Webster's to a point where it became a byword for quality dictionaries. But in the late 1800s and early 1900s, legal difficulties concerning the copyright and trademark of the name Webster arose, and eventually many different publishers, some rather unscrupulous, began putting dictionaries on the market under the Webster's name. The net effect of the proliferation of Webster dictionaries is a reference-book marketplace in which consumers are unaware of or confused about what differentiates one Webster from another.

In an attempt to draw attention to the issue, in 1982 our company changed its name from G. & C. Merriam Company to Merriam-Webster, Incorporated. Other publishers may use the name Webster, but only Merriam-Webster products are backed by over 150 years of accumulated knowledge and experience. The Merriam-Webster name is your assurance that a reference work carries the quality and authority of a company that has been publishing since 1831.

Handy hint: Filler text in Microsoft Word

By Lisa Mileusnich (lmileusnich@parker.com)

Did you know that you can insert filler text in Word? This allows you to add text to your documents while you are in the design phase and the actual content is not available yet. To insert the text:

1. Place the cursor where you want the text to appear.

2. Type =rand (p,s), where p is the number of paragraphs and s is the number of sentences per paragraph.

3. Press <Enter.>

Word creates the text automatically!

Another great way to get filler text is through the Web site http://www.lipsum.com/. *Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetuer adipiscing elit…* (which was sung to the tune of Supercalifragilisticexpialidocious at the Conference Open Jam, if you can imagine it!)

Annual conference reviews and highlights

The following articles are reviews and comments from some of our members who attended the 54th Annual Conference in Minneapolis this May.

Presentation materials (such as Microsoft PowerPoint slides) are available online to members at http://www.stc.org/54thConf/sessions/sessionMaterials01.asp

Local members honored at Annual Conference

By Bob Young (ryoung1956@sbcglobal.net)

Congratulations once again to Barb Philbrick and Bob Dianetti for recognition for their commitment and service to NEO STC and the Society during the STC 54th Annual Conference in Minneapolis.

Barb was feted at center stage to accept her recognition as Associate Fellow during the awards banquet. She entertained the crowd with her patented wide smile and "princess" wave (cupped hand moving slowly side-to-side) walking across the stage to applause. It's a much-deserved honor for Barb, who currently spends countless hours each month on the newsletter and is always willing to volunteer for chapter projects, besides the many chapter-related activities she has helped with in the past.

Barb is only the second NEO STC member and first since 2002 to receive the Associate Fellow honor. Bege Bowers is our other respected recipient. To be considered for associate fellow, a member must have been active in the professional or educational fields related to technical communication for at least fifteen years and a must have been a member of the Society for at least ten years. Candidates must also have done at least one of the following:

- Made measurable or demonstrable contributions to the professional or educational fields related to technical communication.

- Done original work that contributed to the advancement of technical communication.

- Made significant contributions to the Society at multiple levels.

Bob Dianetti received praise for his accomplishments during a three-year tenure as Region 4 Director. He completed his post in May.

Bob has been instrumental in rewriting the STC bylaws, as well as diligently working with NEO STC and other Region 4 chapters.

We salute Barb and Bob for their tireless efforts to NEO STC and our profession!

Leadership Day — May 13 in Minneapolis, MN

By Tricia Spayer (tspayer@yahoo.com)

In May, I had the privilege of attending the STC 54th Annual Conference in Minneapolis, MN, and attended my first Leadership Day.

Boy, did I feel overwhelmed when I first walked into the room! It was a large ballroom, filled with dozens of tables and STC leaders. There were people there I'd only heard of through the Society magazines and the STC Web site. But throughout the day, I met many of them, and no, they don't bite.

Throughout the morning, we heard updates on what is happening in the Society. One of the exciting activities is that STC is working to change the description, through the US Department of Labor, of Technical Writer, to Technical Communicator. If you have not done so already, check out Susan Burton's article on page 4 of the June 2007 Intercom.

Another exciting thing that is happening is the opening of the LCR (Leadership Community Resource). What this means to us as a community is that if we want to know how to do something, we have a single entry-point into the Society that can funnel our questions to the right people.

In the afternoon, we split off into roundtable sessions. I gained insight into what the Society does for communities, as well as insight into how other communities operate.

If you find yourself at the next Annual Conference, I would recommend attending this event, which is held the day before the technical sessions. You will see a bigger picture of the Society, and learn what other people are doing outside of our region.

Session review: How to write an effective white paper

By Jean Church (Jean.Church@wgint.com)

Of all of the sessions I attended at the Annual Conference, I liked this session the best. Manuel Gordon was a good speaker and gave clear instructions for constructing 5 types of papers. His logic seemed sound and founded on his past successes. I feel I am much better prepared to write a white paper now that I took his session, and I hope to have the opportunity to write one where I work. Some of my notes from this session follow.

A White Paper is a pre-sale document that is designed to educate and inform potential customers who have not yet made up their minds.

A White Paper:

- Contains useful information

- Intended to generate leads; build trust; build credibility

- Form and content is not quite:

  o A technical manual — not dry

  o A research paper — not academic

  o An article by a journalist

  o A glossy brochure

- Definitely NOT marketing fluff

- No Name of Product in title

- Sound authoritative, but not worldly — do not talk down — no clichés

Explain your technology:

- Why we chose to do it this way

- Why it's efficient

- Why it's robust

- Why it will improve their ROI

- Why they should use our product

Types of White Papers:

- When buyers are doing their research on a problem (Technology Guide, Position paper, Business Benefits)

- When buyers are making their selections (Competitive Review, Evaluator's Guide)

- Technology Guide:
  - Explains the Business/Technology problem
  - Explains the product's underlying technology
  - How technology solves a problem
  - How OUR technology is better than the competitors'
  - May NOT mention the product's name — not trying to sell
  - Trying to educate the customer
  - It's about you, the customer, and about the customer's problem

- Position Paper:
  - Explains and advocates a standard, trend, or technology
  - Explains why this standard, trend, or technology is important to the customer and the benefits of this business/technology
  - Says why the world, and the customer, should move in this direction to stay competitive
  - Do NOT mention the product name
  - Best Practices: state that our products can do these "things" for YOU!

- Business Benefits Paper:
  - Explains the Business/Technology problem
  - Explains the product's underlying technology
  - How technology solves a problem
  - How OUR technology is better than the competitors'
  - MAY mention the product's name
  - Must use "ROI" on every page
  - Aimed at non-technical people
  - This is a "How to Sell Your Boss"-type of paper
  - Should be short — 5 pages max

- Competitive Review Paper:
  - Positions your product
  - Differentiates it from others
  - Try to create a checklist that favors your product
  - Usually describes your product

- Evaluator's Guide:
  - Provides thorough explanation of features and functionality
  - How to quickly install and deploy
  - Outline the Getting Started tasks
  - Focus on the product
  - Geared toward the IT Manager

Pitfalls:

- Don't write for everyone - choose your audience
- Limit the scope to one of these document types
- Length: 4-24 pages, 10 is typical
- Tone: neutral, authoritative - NO HYPE!!!!!

Success Factors:

- Mandatory strong in-house support, preferably from a VP or higher
- Short deadline that is unmovable — to make people act
- Company has something to say
- Writer has good understanding of the product
- Ready access to SMEs
- Everyone shares ownership and a sense of urgency

Web sites for the Speakers:

- www.gordonandgordon.com/downloads/State_of_the_White_Paper_2004.pdf
- http://www.thatwhitepaperguy.com
- Frequently Asked Questions: http://www.thatwhitepaperguy.com/faq.html
- How to use white papers to grow a healthy crop of leads: 20 tips from Bitpipe and KnowledgeStorm http://www.thatwhitepaperguy.com/article_bitpipeandknowledgestorm.html
- White papers help Vircom Build mindshare, win awards, and sell software (case study and 19+ tips you can use to follow their lead)

http://www.thatwhitepaperguy.com/article_vircom.html

Web sites where you can find White Papers:

- http://www.knowledgestorm.com/
- http://www.bitpipe.com/
- http://www.itpapers.com/
- http://www.itworld.com/whitepapers/
- http://www.softwareceo.com/white_papers.php
- http://www.forrester.com/
- http://www.aberdeen.com/ (these are expensive - you are buying their name & company letterhead)
- http://www.idc.com

Session review: Will Web 2.0 revolutionize the way we view and prepare online content?

By Bob Young (ryoung1956@sbcglobal.net)

Is it a fad, a marketing scheme, or will Web 2.0 revolutionize the way we view and prepare online content?

Scott Abel, a veteran STC presenter, a.k.a. the "Content Wrangler," believes it is the latter and provided a convincing discussion at the STC Annual Conference in Minneapolis. He emphasized that user expectations are driving corporate plans for better ways of providing and locating information.

What intrigues me is that the focus is on content rather than the medium. There is less emphasis on the ability to just read "stuff" on the web and a greater concentration on providing content that is manageable, useful, and reusable. Wikis offer a unique collaboration between writers and users although companies, Abel noted, are cautious of misinformation.

Crisp, concise writing remains our purpose and structured authoring appears to be the vehicle for delivering client-specific information in various formats. That requires writers, like me, to hit the books to hone up on XML and structured FrameMaker. In that sense, perhaps it is a marketing effort to boost sales of content management software. Still, tags and self-contained topics can limit redundancy, improve search capabilities, and reduce labor and translation costs.

Abel also noted that structured content makes it easier to share information on the web. Syndication and subscription provide semantic value to content that is written once and offered as a service where, when, and how the user wants to use it. For example, Really Simple Syndication (R.S.S.) is borrowed content that disseminates information to a wider audience. Our NEO STC site uses R.S.S. links to articles on Society news and happenings.

Abel showed the difference working with an unstructured document using, perhaps appropriately, dinosaurs as the topic. The content explained the history of dinosaurs in different time periods. In the unstructured document, it was difficult to add and move information around without dismantling the entire document. He then showed a structured document, moving elements within a "tree" (DTD) format, to reformat the stand-alone topics without compromising the flow of the documentation.

It appears we, as technical communicators, will have a greater role in online communication. Now, if only I had time to read the XML book …

A note from Jeanette Evans: At http://techwritervoices.com, Tom Johnson concludes after many interviews that Scott Abel's presentation on Web 2.0 was the most popular presentation of the entire conference.

Many eyes were on Northeast Ohio at the STC Annual Conference in Minneapolis!

By Bob Young (ryoung1956@sbcglobal.net)

A colorful presentation board, which featured a large picture of Terminal Tower with fireworks bursting in the background, drew attention to NEO STC's preparations to host an STC Regional Conference on October 12, 2007, in downtown Cleveland. The full-day conference will be in the Gateway Conference Center of the Hilton Garden Inn, located across from Jacobs Field. The conference is called the "Crucial Communicator" to emphasize how writers can become more indispensable in the marketplace.

The presentation board was designed by members of the Public Relations committee for the Regional Conference. Special thanks to Michelle Kastro from Datavantage and the employees of Radcom for their efforts to have the presentation ready and displayed on a table in the vendors' area for all four days of the STC Annual Conference.

Kastro requested and prepared the beautiful graphics of Cleveland from the Downtown Convention and Visitors

Bureau. Radcom employee Ginny Haas transported the tri-fold cardboard presentation to Minneapolis.

While conference attendees reviewed the information on the presentation board, NEO STC representatives handed out postcards with a reminder of the date and conference Web site (http://www.neostc.org/conf). The postcards were professionally designed by incoming NEO STC president Tricia Spayer and printed in color by our friends at Master Printing at no cost to our chapter.

Postcards also have been mailed to all Region 4 members to publicize the regional conference, which features special guests from the ISO JTC 1 SC7/WG2 group. These international experts in standards and user documentation will conduct a three-day working meeting at the Hilton Garden prior to our conference. The Programs Committee is planning to have an ISO representative available for a presentation among the three tracks during the conference. Each track of the regional conference will have three different presentations or a choice of a software demonstration.

Dr. Melvin Smith of Case Western Reserve will give the keynote on Emotional Intelligence (see separate story).

Star Group and MadCap Software have stepped forward as our Platinum Sponsors. Other sponsors helping to defray conference costs include Quadralay, Diebold, Cuyahoga Community College, Parker-Hannifin, Radcom, and MAXIMUS. If your company is interested in being a sponsor, please contact Ginny Haas (ghaas@radcomservices.com).

NEO STC does not have monthly meetings during the summer but we could use volunteers to help with activities for the conference. (See the corresponding article in this newsletter for the list of tasks.) Contact Bob Young at Bob Young (ryoung1956@sbcglobal.net) or PR chairman Mario Morelos (mario@localingua.com).

Some highlights: Nine million bicycles and if you're so smart, why does your writing stink?

By Barb Philbrick (caslon@alltel.net)

While receiving my Associate Fellow award was definitely the highlight of this year's conference for me, there were some other entertaining and thought-provoking sessions.

The keynote speaker, Simon Singh, Ph.D., is a particle physicist turned TV producer specializing in science and mathematics. He was an engaging and entertaining speaker. One of the parts of his presentation I really enjoyed was the section where he discussed an upcoming book. He discussed how we become protective of the knowledge we gain while doing research, and how we want to set the world straight on that knowledge. To that end, he rewrote some lyrics for British singer Katie Melua. The original verse in Nine Million Bicycles was this:

♦ We are 12 billion light years from the edge

♦ That's a guess

♦ No one can ever say it's true

♦ But I know that I will always be with you.

The new, more scientifically accurate verse by Simon Singh:

♦ We are 13.7 billion light years from the edge of the observable universe

♦ That's a good estimate with well defined error bars

♦ Scientists say it's true, but acknowledge that it may be refined

♦ And with the available information, I predict that I will always be with you.

A BBC radio program picked up on the changed lyrics and brought Simon and Katie together in a session where she sings the revised lyrics. If you would like to hear it, see http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/today/listenagain/ram/today1_melua_20051015.ram

I was surprised and pleased by Paula Berger's announcement that she awarded the President's Award to Al Gore's documentary An Inconvenient Truth. This award honors communications that show the ultimate example of the mission of the Society: To convey complex technical concepts in ways that people can understand and use. An Inconvenient Truth is an example of how still images, video, illustrations, and audio can come together to enlighten an audience. Al Gore didn't show up to accept, though :-)

One of my favorite sessions was by Karen Schriver called "If you're so smart, why does your writing suck?" She discussed the fact that experts tend to do knowledge telling instead of knowledge transforming. She also discussed how experts become socialized in their own domains, to the point that they have such deep tacit knowledge of their domain that it can make articulation difficult. Therefore, they leave out information, assuming that other people have the same tacit knowledge. She

also pointed out that we are all guilty of the knowledge effect: She discussed some studies that show that we assume that other people know the same information we do, sometimes within five minutes of learning the new piece of knowledge. She put out a call to research why some people can overcome the knowledge effect (you know, those SMEs that we love that can explain things!) and why some people cannot (I am sure we have all run into a few of those as well).

Job news

[NOTE: As of 2014, employment resources have shifted to the chapter's LinkedIn presence. Please refer to the current chapter website for details.]

Check out just a few of the hot jobs from our Web site at http://www.neostc.org/jobs/openings.php!

♦ Process Documentation Specialist II (Temporary), AmTrust Bank, Downtown Cleveland, Ohio

♦ Process Documentation Specialist II, AmTrust Bank, Cleveland, OH

♦ Technical Writer, Beacon Hill Technologies, Akron, Ohio

♦ Technical Writer, Murtech Consulting, Akron

♦ Contract Instructional Designer, Radcom, Inc., Northeast Ohio

♦ Editor, Advanstar Communications, Cleveland, Ohio

♦ SENIOR EDITOR — AUTOMOTIVE BODY REPAIR NEWS, Advanstar Communications, Cleveland, Ohio

If your company has a job opening, please contact Namrata (Nams) Malik at Nams Malik (nmalik@ra.rockwell.com)

Job listings on the NEO STC Web site are free and reach a targeted audience!

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See something interesting? Tell us about it!

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You can also submit articles directly through http://www.neostc.org/lines/submit.html.