

President's column: Looking forward to the coming year

By Stephanie Webster (swebster@tmwsystems.com)

As I step into the role of NEO STC president, I am extremely excited, but also anxious — let's be honest — I have some big shoes to fill!

I look back on the presidents from the past few years, the years of experience in both STC and their technical communication professions, and life in general and think — what do I have to offer?

I hope that the experience, perspective, and enthusiasm I bring to the NEO STC table will help me earn your respect as well as we move through this coming year.

I started my involvement with STC as a college student, gradually gaining the "STC passion." As soon as I moved to the Cleveland area, I knew that I needed to get involved with a local chapter or I would feel like a fish out of water as I had taken a job where I was the lone writer.

As circumstances would have it, I got thrown into helping with the Programs committee right away. Not having a clue where that would take me, I observed, listened, and learned from our veteran members. Here I am now, willingly taking a position that I would have scoffed at the suggestion many years ago — thinking that I would never have the experience or desire to handle. So — you are probably asking, why do it then?

Well, as I thought through the experience that I have gained through my involvement with STC and the jobs I have held in the NEO area, I realized that, combined with my passion for our chapter and the goals I have been mulling over the last several years, I realized this was the perfect year to take on the presidency of our chapter.

I am very excited to see what we can do together this next year!

My overarching goal for this year is to see each member add personal value as a technical communicator — both in your career and in STC. You will see many opportunities in the coming months where you can take advantage of your membership in NEO STC to increase technical communication value. These include Webinars, STC competitions, NOCA leadership seminars, full and half-day NEO STC-sponsored training sessions, monthly educational meetings, and networking opportunities.

Personally, I have found growth through STC by adding to my own knowledge of the industry, providing network contacts to my employers for training, research, and software help, and benefiting from the confidence each chapter position brings to the forefront.

I hope as we get to know each other better this year that I will hear many of your personal stories of where your value has increased in both STC and in your technical communication career!

Upcoming events

- ◆ 7/12/2006: Adding Panache to Your Procedures Webinar.*
- ◆ 7/13/2006: Vasont Webinar Series Presents: Content Management 103: How Does Global Change Work? Presented by: Bret Freeman, Senior Sales Engineer for Vasont Systems.* See <http://www.vasont.com/vasont/news/events.asp> for registration information.
- ◆ 7/26/2006: Working in Global Teams Webinar.*
- ◆ 7/26/2006: NEO Usability Professional Association meeting: "What we learned at the June 2006 UPA Conference." See <http://www.neoupa.org>
- ◆ 8/9/2006: Creating Training That Sticks Webinar.*
- ◆ 8/23/2006: GUI Doesn't Have to Be Messy Webinar.*
- ◆ 8/23/2006: NEO Usability Professional Association meeting: "Email Usability: What the Customer Wants." See <http://www.neoupa.org>
- ◆ 8/25/2006: Networking lunch: Don's Pomeroy House, 13664 Pearl Rd., Strongsville.

*** Note that the chapter is not sponsoring these Webinars.** If you would like to host a seminar, please e-mail us.

Adding more Webinar value

By Stephanie Webster (swebster@tmwsystems.com)

NEO STC recognizes the society-level Web-based seminars as a premium member-value. In order to continue offering these sessions and retain value in each session, NEO STC must add a small fee to cover the registration cost. The goal is to expand the availability of the Webinars.

By charging a registration price to members, we can offer more Webinars than the number originally

designated by the chapter budget, and also offer each Webinar at multiple host sites across the northeast Ohio area.

The chapter pays the STC registration price of \$99 for each on-site session. Starting with the July 12 Webinar, the NEO STC registration cost for members will be \$10 and \$25 for non-members (students will be charged the member price). The small member fee will help offset the incurred chapter registration and allow us to offer more sessions throughout the year.

We hope you will gain great value in each Webinar that is offered through STC this next year.

Members love to hear responses to how technical communication careers have benefited from the sessions you have attended. Feel free to write an article on your experience in the NEO STC Lines and Letters newsletter (contact Barb Philbrick at caslon@alltel.net), or write an e-mail note to the chapter through the STC listserv (sign up at neostc.org/official/listserv.htm).

Please note other Webinar registration facts:

- ◆ FREE! Any NEO STC member who hosts a Webinar will receive free registration.
- ◆ A minimum of six NEO STC members must be registered and attend the Webinar for the chapter to sponsor the session. If this number is not met, or a host site is not offered, the chapter will not be able to sponsor the event.
- ◆ NEO STC members retain the right to first come-first serve registration. If a non-member wishes to attend, they will be placed on a waiting list to reserve room for chapter members as we are offering the Webinars as a NEO STC member-value.
- ◆ DISCOUNT! If a host site wishes to invite other department employees (non-members), they may register at the member price of \$10. However, this is based on space availability. The host-site non-members will be placed on the non-member waiting list to guarantee room for all NEO STC members who wish to participate in the session.

For further details on the upcoming STC Webinars, see stc.webex.com/.

If you wish to host an upcoming Webinar session, are interested in attending a session, or have questions about the offered Webinars, please contact Education committee representative Denise Kadilak at denise.kadilak@blackbaud.com.

Introducing the 2006 – 2007 Executive board and committees

Please welcome the following NEO STC members who have volunteered for the 2006-2007 board and committees.

Executive Board:

- ◆ President: Stephanie Webster
- ◆ Vice President: Trish Spayer
- ◆ Secretary: Sarah Burke
- ◆ Treasurer: Heidi Emhoff
- ◆ Immediate Past President: Bob Young

Committees:

- ◆ Academic Relations: Jeanette Evans and Shannon Siwicki
- ◆ CIC SIG: Lori Klepfer
- ◆ Community: Bob Young, Kim Lindsey, (delegate open)
- ◆ Competitions: Rebecca Postupack-Slifer, Cheryl Bennett, and Heidi Emhoff
- ◆ Education: Denise Kadilak and Amy Vogt
- ◆ Employment: (Chair open), Nams Malik, Nick Bucur, (web search representative open)
- ◆ Networking Luncheons: Jill McCauslin and Angie Dianetti
- ◆ Newsletter: Barb Philbrick, Jeanette Evans, Jan Lowry, Lisa Mileusnich, Bob Clark, and Christina Chase
- ◆ Membership: June Muhic
- ◆ Programs: Jessica Hendricks, (co-chair open), Kim Lindsey, and Kris Henige
- ◆ Public Relations: Mario Morelos, (co-chair and press release editor open)
- ◆ Region 4 Conference: Stephanie Webster, Kim Lindsey, Bob Young, Lori Klepfer, Sherri Henkin, and Trish Spayer
- ◆ Web site: Brian Baddour and Candace Wintering

2005 – 2006 Chapter Awards and Recognition

NEO was honored with an Excellence Award during the STC Conference in May at Las Vegas, Nevada. The award is a fitting tribute to the excellent work of all the committees this year, including the PR group that received two STC honors in recognition of their superb efforts to communicate chapter events and meetings.

The chapter also honored three members during its year-ending meeting in May. Beth Williams received the Distinguished Chapter Service Award, Michelle Kastro was named the Volunteer of the Year, and Brian Baddour was honored with the President's Achievement Award.

Welcome our new members!

We are pleased to welcome six new members:

- ◆ Jamie Anderson
- ◆ Michelle Ellison
- ◆ Karen Hecker
- ◆ Sarah Hoyt
- ◆ Mary Peger

We look forward to seeing you at upcoming events!

Bob Dianetti goes half the distance to fight leukemia

By Rob Catalano (rcatalano@radcomservices.com)

RADCom CEO completes Cleveland Half-Marathon to support Leukemia & Lymphoma Society.

Bob Dianetti, president and founder of RADCom, a Northeast Ohio training and documentation consulting firm, walked the Rite Aid Cleveland Half-marathon May 21 in 3 hrs. 46 minutes while raising approximately \$2025 dollars for the Leukemia & Lymphoma Society's Team In Training® (TNT). Dianetti started training several months ago using the TNT system. While walking his way to better health, he was also helping a cause very near and dear to his improved heart.

"My son Mikey is the real hero in the family," said Dianetti. "He's been fighting leukemia since 2004, and he's the happiest 5-year old I know. I completed the walk to raise funds for the Leukemia Society and to get healthier so I can watch Mikey and my other sons grow

into strong, healthy, and caring adults. With Type 2 diabetes, I need to set the example for my children."

Team In Training, founded in 1988, is the world's largest endurance sports training program. Learn more by visiting the Team In Training® Web site at <http://www.teamintraining.org/noh> or by calling (440) 617-CURE (2873) or toll free at (800) 589-5721. Runners and walkers can find additional information on the Rite Aid Cleveland Marathon & 10K by visiting the Web site at <http://www.clevelandmarathon.com>.

Dianetti will continue to walk for health, fun, and family, and as part of RADCom's Mighty Mikey's Marchers at the Leukemia & Lymphoma Society's Light The Night® Walk on September 23 in Cuyahoga Falls. For more information, visit <http://www.lightthenight.org> and to sponsor the team go to http://www.active.com/donate/ltnClevel/1945_catalanor.

Member profile: Kim Lindsey

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

Kim Lindsey was president of our NEO STC chapter in the 2004-5 chapter year. She held other offices throughout the years, including vice president and secretary. In addition, she has responsibility for maintaining the online announcements for our monthly meetings. She also participated in our re-chartering process and, for the last two years, has submitted our community achievement award applications to International.

As for where she works now and how she got there, Kim explains, "I am a Technical Analyst in Corporate IT Technical Communications at Parker Hannifin Corporation, in Mayfield Heights. My team and I document IT functions that are internal to Parker, such as our ERP systems and e-Business applications. Parker is a leading worldwide diversified manufacturer of motion control technologies, and I work at the Corporate headquarters.

"But I wasn't always a technical writer. After earning a B.S. in Zoology from Kent State University, I completed a one-year internship and became a medical technologist (hospital lab). I worked in that field for over 17 years, at several area hospitals, and was a user of technical documentation. No one knows the value of good user manuals better than a lab tech! From the beginning of my lab career, I was known for writing 'cheat sheets' — simplified instructions for specific tasks, often color-coded, sometimes with hand-drawn illustrations."

While considering a career change, Kim attended "a workshop at InfoPlace (www.cuyahogalibrary.org/libraryservices/InfoPLACE/infoPLACE.htm) where technical writing popped up as a possibility. Networking at chapter meetings soon led to gainful employment, first at RADCom, then at MRI/Intuit, and now at Parker."

A native northeast Ohioan, Kim currently enjoys living in Twinsburg with its "fantastic library." Some of her past activities include writing and performing music at church, graduate-level studies in medieval history and literature (translating Beowulf herself!), ushering and providing informal security during concerts at Severance Hall, and singing in the Cleveland Orchestra Chorus for four years. As Kim puts it, she has "two Grammys ... OK, it was me and 300 other people, but I'm on there!"

53rd STC Conference: What happened in Vegas isn't staying there!

Some observations on this year's conference

from Amy Vogt

This was my first STC Conference. I was excited to go to Las Vegas, not for the gambling, but for the opportunity to learn. My colleagues were teasing me before I left Ohio that I would be "among my people" there. They were right; I was surrounded by hundreds of others with backgrounds like mine. With fourteen years of experience in technical communications, I wanted to see how my peers around the country — and the world — are using software, marketing their businesses, and finding solutions to similar industry challenges. I was not disappointed.

Some training sessions were more valuable to me than others. Sarah O'Keefe's presentation, Integrating Structured FrameMaker and DITA, was among the strongest I attended. The conversations I had with the vendors and other attendees were equally, or possibly more, important than the sessions though. It was amazing how making a connection with someone that might be able to help you or your company in the future could be as exciting as all of the noise from the slot machines and the glamour of the venue (well, OK, almost as exciting).

By 11:45 pm, my plane back to Cleveland was boarding in the airport. I had only arranged for two days off from work, so after the time change, I was planning to be at work approximately five hours after leaving Las Vegas. I had achieved a balance between meeting the direct

responsibilities of my job and growing on a personal and professional level. After two hours of sleep on the plane, I was (somehow) completely awake and ready to share my experience with the rest of my colleagues.

from Jonathan Vasko

The 2006 STC Conference certainly met my expectations. There was a wide variety of high-quality presentations, panel discussions and workshops each day. Many of the current themes and issues facing us as professional technical communicators were tackled. I enjoyed myself and look forward to returning to the annual event in the future.

from Trish Spayer

More pictures, fewer words!

That's what I learned from Patrick Hofman in both a conference session and a post-conference workshop. If you decrease your words, you can dramatically downsize your documentation, making it more usable. You (your company) will also save a lot of money in:

- ◆ Localization
- ◆ Printing
- ◆ Inventory and maintenance (of printed documents)

To make your visuals more usable, here are a few tips:

- ◆ Establish graphics templates.
- ◆ If you have printed documents, determine the maximum print size for a graphic.
- ◆ If you have on-screen documents, determine the maximum pixel size for a graphic.
- ◆ Create a template in your drawing tool (for example, CorelDraw or Adobe PhotoShop) that is formatted to the final output size. Use the proper resolution for print or on-screen.
- ◆ Each time you create a graphic or capture a screen shot, use the template to create the graphic's final output size. This will ensure all your text (if any) is at a consistent size, and all your objects (like arrows) are at a consistent size.
- ◆ Establish a style guide for your graphics.
- ◆ List font type and size for title text, primary text, secondary text, and annotation text.
- ◆ List line weight and style for primary focus, secondary objects, tertiary objects, and annotation lines.

- ◆ Reduce visual traffic.
- ◆ Remove unnecessary parts of the graphic.
- ◆ Ask yourself: Does the user really need to see each vent hole, screw, and bracket in your hardware drawing?

If you are creating a wordless document (or one with as few words as possible):

- ◆ Visualize what you are trying to convey. If you cannot visualize a particular word, visualize one that is a simile or perhaps a homonym.
- ◆ Be repetitive — use one graphic and make modifications to it.
- ◆ Be concise — if there is more than one way to open a window, only show one
- ◆ Use universal icons — do not use hands. Make sure your icons are globally acceptable. For icon reference, look up Google > images > icons and type a word you're trying to illustrate.
- ◆ Perform usability testing at an early stage, then make corrections and perform more usability tests. If creating documents for other languages, find subjects who speak the language.

There is a lot more meat to this subject, but I wanted to give you a taste of it. If you would like to learn more, perhaps suggest the subject to our programs committee!

More conference: Leave the clutter in the gutter

By Bob Young (ryoung1956@sbcglobal.net)

The next time you are asked to make a presentation, remember one thing: PowerPoint slides are optional. Yes, optional as in making sure they are useful. Poor visuals can do more harm than good.

Too often in our quest to share our knowledge of a subject and creative flair the result is slides that are a distraction rather than an enhancement. Slides that are too wordy or have clipart that blurs instead of focusing our attention end up competing with the presenter.

Jean-luc Doumont showed how to leave the clutter in the gutter and create effective slides during an entertaining session at the STC Conference in Las Vegas. Anyone who has had the pleasure of listening to Doumont knows that he is an effective, knowledgeable teacher. He let the "class" be the judge for this one as

Doumont critiqued slides that were originally provided by the presenters for their sessions at the conference.

Doumont emphasized that no one was being criticized for their slides. Rather, it was an excellent demonstration to show how easily one can let their verbosity get in the way despite best intentions. He spoke about style guidelines and graphic placement while slides were projected on a wide screen.

Doumont pointed out that headlines are okay as long as they are not proceeded with bullets, which are solely for differentiating line items. You also should not use wavy Wordart or colorful headlines that often make it harder to read. Graphics should draw the viewers eye into the slide rather than compete for attention and bar graphs should have easily identifiable (read clear) data.

Now, slides do not have to be boring to be effective. They simply should reinforce the message the presenter delivers during the talk. Otherwise, as Doumont noted, the brain cannot process text and audio at the same time. If the viewer is reading a lot of text or deciphering graphics then they are not listening to the speaker.

Doumont offers these additional guidelines:

- ◆ Use white space to ease the ability to read and comprehend the message. There must be distance between the bullet and first word.
- ◆ A person reads text 2 ½ times faster than a speaker can read out loud. If you must read specific information, provide the audience with a handout of the slides so as not to compete for attention.
- ◆ There is a difference between a visual slide and notes. Make a separate handout that has notes and additional information such as Web site addresses alongside the slides so the audience can read the follow-up information after the presentation.
- ◆ Highest contrast is black on white; use text in black font and bullets in color. Do not use boldfaced text for everything; bold is for contrast.
- ◆ Use bullets for lists, not sentences. Lists should not exceed five lines (items).
- ◆ Do not use long sentences. Two lines of text is okay visually; three lines is borderline.
- ◆ Watermarks do not work; shapes compete with the shape of letters.
- ◆ Do not put numbers on slides. A low number gives the appearance of a small presentation, while a high

number makes the audience think they are going to be there forever and focus wanes.

- ◆ WordArt rarely works; any graphic should aid text, not distract. Clipart lacks professional appeal.

And finally, review the completed presentation and judge as would an audience if the slides aid the presentation. Leave your audience wanting more instead of running to the door.

STC 53rd Annual Conference: Leadership Day review

by Stephanie Webster (swebster@tmwsystems.com)

STC energy is definitely contagious — and these people like to hug!

The Conference's leadership day generally takes place the full day before the educational sessions, has a more relaxed atmosphere with a lot less people milling about, and focuses primarily on what is happening at the society level.

The morning began with introductions, announcements, and transitioning of officers (this is where all the hugging came in ...). Congratulations to STC! We have hired a full-time executive director! After an unexpected resignation from the previous executive director, STC was able to hire interim Rob Moran last year. Rob has done a wonderful job leading the society in a risk-taking, yet positive, direction. Not having intended to stay full-time, Rob is now handing over the reins to Susan Burton. I noticed that Susan has a very willing ear to listen to member comments, take to task the STC board, and recognize the hard work that goes into running this organization. It will be a very exciting time during her tenure.

New president, Paula Berger, revved up the audience with her exciting delivery of the agenda for the coming year and presentation of charts depicting the reorganization of several society level committees. She also stressed how the STC Virginia-based office has now become a key player in participating in society events and committees.

The late morning and afternoon sessions focused on split track topics, allowing active and potential leaders the opportunity to ask questions, voice opinions, and learn tips and tricks on how to run chapter activities from experienced members.

If you ever go to the STC conference, make sure you start the event with this action-packed, passion-filled training day!

The New World of STC

*By Cindy Currie (dir1@stc.org),
STC Fellow and Region 1 Director, 603.488.5027*

It is a brand new STC year! Our new President, Paula Berger, has chosen the slogan "The New World of STC" for this year. And a new world it is!

We have a brand new Executive Director! She is Susan Allen Burton. Susan accepted the position just days before our Annual Conference earlier this month and was able to be in Las Vegas. She was introduced to attendees during the conference opening program on Monday, May 8. She is dynamic and engaging, with a wealth of association management experience. Susan is the new face of STC we have been hoping to find! She will officially join STC by early August. Visit www.stc.org/membership/initiatives01.asp for more information.

The new Board of Directors is now in place, effective Monday, May 8, 2006 during the annual Business Meeting, held at the Annual Conference. The Board is smaller and includes: President, First Vice President, Second Vice President, Secretary, Treasurer, Immediate Past President, and eight Directors: six Regional Directors (Regions 1, 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8) and two Directors At Large. Visit www.stc.org/about/board01.asp for details on who's who.

The Executive Director and the STC Office Management team, Maurice Martin, Merrick Bechini, and Peg Cottrell, all regularly attend board meetings to ensure tight alignment between the board, which sets strategy, and the office, which executes strategy. The Office Management team has a wealth of experience to add to the mix, so we are happy to have them working so closely with us. We are the better for it.

STC has a new Interim Strategic Plan for the 2006-07 year. This newly updated plan is available at www.stc.org/PDF_Files/StrategicPlan.pdf. I encourage you to read it to fully understand where STC is going. (And going there, we are!) The Microsoft PowerPoint at www.stc.org/ppt/orgChart0506.ppt shows our strategic priorities for this year and the specific strategies associated with them. You will see this graphic a lot! Get to know it!

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Your community strategic plan should reflect the priorities and strategies in the Society document. A good exercise will be to review your plan against the Society plan to ensure you are in alignment and working to help fulfill this year's STC goals.

All major initiatives have an overseer at the Board level (I am overseeing Communications with new Director At Large, Jeff Staples), and an STC office liaison (Maurice Martin for Communications) to ensure that there is a firm link between the board and the committees and how strategy is being driven through to execution and desired outcomes.

Visit www.stc.org/ppt/orgChart0506.ppt to view a presentation that shows how STC is organized this year and who is leading each committee. It is a very different model from previous years.

STC is now well positioned to meet our strategic goals for the year. We have a great team in place and a great plan to execute, so I am excited to get to work on this year's priorities.

Do not miss this one! STC Region 2 will host **Making Cents of Making Sense: Technical Communication and Business** in London, England, 13-14 October 2006. This regional conference is aimed at companies in need of technical communication and the people who produce it. The program is going to include speakers who can show the business value of quality technical communication. Visit www.stcuk.org/R2conf for more information. (The next Board meeting will be held on 12-13 October in London, so the full board will be in attendance at this conference.)

Community involvement with NOCA and CTSC

By Bob Young (ryoung1956@sbcglobal.net) and Kim Lindsey (klindsey@parker.com)

Over the last several years, NEO STC has had the opportunity to align itself with two local organizations, NOCA (Northeast Ohio Communication Affiliates) and CTSC (Cleveland Technical Societies Council). These outside organization memberships allow us to focus on outreach and training from the northeast Ohio area, and also expanding on marketing the industry knowledge that our own members can offer to our region.

NEO STC is among 28 communication organizations in Stark, Summit and Cuyahoga Counties that belong to NOCA (www.nocanet.com/).

As demonstrations of publicizing NEO STC to the Cleveland area, we will have an opportunity to showcase our chapter Award of Excellence and pair of Public Relations Awards as part of a submission by NOCA in the Ingenuity Festival, July 13 – 16 in downtown Cleveland. NOCA is also putting together a CD-ROM that includes our awards in the "Best of the Best," a compilation of the best work of its affiliate members for "award-winning advertising, graphic design, publishing, printing, direct marketing, sales promotion, public relations and more presented as a showcase." The Ingenuity Fest features organizations throughout Ohio.

NEO STC became affiliated with NOCA to broaden awareness of STC's purpose and the many talents of its technical communicators. NEO STC will not only gain greater exposure, but NOCA also plans to offer training sessions for all its associated members' officers and various committees. We will have the opportunity to offer training for NEO STC board and committee chair positions. Volunteers are more willing to contribute when they understand their roles and responsibilities.

NEO STC members are welcome to attend NOCA meetings, which, like our NEO STC, will resume in the fall. Each NOCA affiliate is allowed two delegates with voting privileges. Any member who wants to serve as a delegate with Immediate Past President and current Community committee representative Bob Young should send him an e-mail at [Bob Young](mailto:Bob.Young@ryoung1956@sbcglobal.net) (ryoung1956@sbcglobal.net).

NOCA has scheduled a golf outing for September 19 at StoneWater Golf Club in Highland Heights, Ohio. Contact Young for more information.

The chapter is also a member of the Cleveland Technical Societies Council (CTSC, www.ctsc.org/). The stated goals of this organization are to:

- ◆ Provide a forum for discussion and a vehicle for action on matters of mutual concern and interest
- ◆ Serve as a focal point for contact between industry and society at large with the technical and scientific community
- ◆ Promote intersociety communications, professional interchange of ideas, and coordination of society activities
- ◆ Promote interest in and encourage careers in the scientific and technical professions through career guidance and other educational programs

We joined the council several years ago and are looking to expand our involvement. The next activity will be their annual planning meeting in the fall. Contact Kim Lindsey (klindsey@parker.com) to be part of NEO STC's delegation to CTSC this year.

Membership benefits to our chapter include: access to their speakers' bureau, publicity for our meetings through the CTSC Web site, information about other societies' meetings, and networking with scientific and technical experts who could be our SMEs either now or in the future.

The council also coordinates a number of technically-oriented scholarships for its member organizations and local corporations — the organizations provide the funds and CTSC provides administrative support. Though the scale is larger than we are ready for now (\$1000 per year for four years), CTSC will be there to help us when the time comes.

Technical writing #13 on the Best Jobs list

Check out the results at money.cnn.com/magazines/moneymag/bestjobs/, the online home of Money magazine.

Web 2.0: Hype or Hope?

By Brian McCaleb, STC Associate Fellow

Web 2.0 is not a system you can log onto and use. It is not an international standard for markup, programming, or protocols. Neither is it a certification. You cannot buy a computer with "Web 2.0 Inside." Discussing Web 2.0 at Internet industry events generates controversy and may provoke an argument. Tim O'Reilly, publisher of those computer books with odd animals on the covers, thinks Web 2.0 is the next big thing. PC Magazine columnist John Dvorak calls Web 2.0 "baloney."

What is Web 2.0 and Why Should I Care?

Web 2.0 is a concept first described at an industry conference in 2004. The concept is based on seven principles derived from analyzing successful Web-based applications and businesses. Analysts asked, "What do successful Web businesses and applications have in common?" This question led to the compilation of a list that became the seven principles of Web 2.0.

These seven principles (and I will discuss them later) can be applied by anyone who is developing content or applications for delivery using the Web. They are

general in nature, prescriptive instead of descriptive. They provide goals for developers but do not provide standards, procedures, examples, or checklists. Because Web 2.0 is a conceptual framework, it can be interpreted in various ways and even hijacked by marketeers intent on lending credibility to their own hype.

The controversial and misunderstood collection of principles at the core of Web 2.0 is important to technical communicators because as these principles are adopted and find their way onto the Web, the terminology we use to describe electronic commerce, digital communications, and even information dissemination will change. The ideas we take for granted about collecting, reviewing, and publishing information, protecting copyrights, and obtaining user feedback are likely to be made obsolete by Web 2.0. Finally, you, as a technical communicator, can begin using Web 2.0 principles today to improve the quality, timeliness, and usability of your publications.

The Seven Principles of Web 2.0

The Web 2.0 concept has been organized into seven governing principles. A Web site or application need not embody all of these principles to be rightfully called "Web 2.0," but the more principles put to work, the greater the expected benefit.

1. The Web as Platform

The ready availability of advanced tools and methods (some proprietary, many open-source) allow today's developers to treat the Web as a powerful computing platform capable of delivering content and functionality in ways formerly available only through dedicated applications running on your computer. The platform serves Web applications directly to you, reducing reliance on proprietary operating systems and potentially eliminating the need to buy, install, learn, maintain, and upgrade costly application software.

Example: Not long ago, if you wanted to convert a document to a PDF file, you had to purchase a copy of Adobe Acrobat, install it, learn how to use it, and upgrade it when it became obsolete. Today, you can upload your document to a Web site (pdfonline.com) and in a few minutes receive a PDF file — and it is free! The pdfonline Web site uses the Web-as-platform approach to provide value and eliminates the need for you to buy and run Acrobat on your PC.

2. Harnessing Collective Intelligence

Today's Web permits users to harness the power of collective intelligence. From simple applications such as newsgroups, listservs, and online forums in which users can post questions and seek help from others in the community, to larger scale applications such as Amazon encouraging users to post book and product reviews, this Web 2.0 principle recognizes that a two-way exchange of information between Web site and user is the new paradigm. The days of static "electronic brochure" Web sites that merely display information are coming to an end.

Interactivity and dialogue with your audience is the new idea. The Web page is dead, long live the Wiki! The notion here is that the collective wisdom of a community has value and, with the tools and methods now available, Web sites can now be lively conversations and not boring monologues.

Example: Most blogs are designed to establish and effortlessly maintain a multiparty conversation among readers and the blog author. Blog software, often free, encourages two-way communication, often leading to discourse in the "comments" section that is more interesting than the posted entry that started the conversation. Five years ago, before the advent of blogs, you could publish a personal Web page and solicit reader comments by e-mail — a slow process that discouraged lively conversations and made reader-to-reader communication almost impossible.

Technical communicators can apply this principle by creating online documents and help applications that go far beyond e-mail lists, FAQs, knowledgebases, and other one-way information distributions. By creating and nurturing a community of product users, and fostering an ongoing conversation among them, you can harness the combined brainpower of that community and improve the quality of your company's products and documentation. Think about converting Web page-based help sites to active blogs or newsgroups organized by products or problems. Combine this with RSS syndication (whereby your users are notified instantly when information of interest to them is published on your site), and you can put your customers' collective intelligence to work for you.

3. Data is the Next "Intel Inside"

One of the keys to a successful Internet business has been ownership and maintenance of a

specialized database. Think about the database of street addresses that is the heart of Mapquest, or the enormous database of books in print at the core of Amazon. Management of these databases is one of the most critical elements of success in a Web 2.0 world.

The lesson for technical communicators is that content is still king! All the high-tech presentation methods, Flash animation, hyperlinking, embedded applets, and other eye-popping features of the modern Web will not deliver users unless there is valuable content.

4. End of the Software Release Cycle

Web 2.0 applications are constantly in a state of development and improvement. This has been called "perpetual beta," meaning that every online application and Web page is considered to be in beta-test. Beta testing assumes that users will find problems with the application. Effective beta testing provides a mechanism for users to notify the developers that a problem exists — the best testing efforts establish dialogues between developers and users. Applications are patched and new beta releases are distributed as testing continues.

This method differs from the current practice of collecting lots of fixes, adding new features (and some would say adding new bugs), rewriting the documentation, and then announcing a new release of the product every year or two.

Technical communicators can employ this principle in several ways. Begin by assuming that your company's products and your documentation have defects. Plan for users to discover these defects and have a mechanism in place for collecting "bug reports" from users, communicating with users (even if only to say thank you), fixing the problems, and distributing new documents quickly. Online documentation in the Web 2.0 world anticipates a conversation with users and recognizes that users' opinions have value.

5. Lightweight Programming Models

This principle recommends that Web-based applications be broken into simple (lightweight) tasks and functions that can be loosely coupled to produce powerful online applications. This is the programmers' equivalent of "chunking," a concept familiar to most technical communicators. By creating several simple tools and connecting them to

produce the desired result, you are building a toolkit that can be reused for other applications.

This Web 2.0 principle closely relates to the principles of single-sourcing, by which authors create content that is tagged and organized in a manner permitting it to be reused or seamlessly displayed in multiple ways.

Example: A document describing the history of your company can be created in a single-sourcing application such as AuthorIT. By appropriate chunking, XML-tagging, and linking, the paragraphs, sentences, or even single phrases from the source document can be displayed on the company's Web page, incorporated into the annual report, and inserted into a press release. Changes need only be made to the source document — they instantly propagate through the system to the target documents each time one is printed or displayed.

The essential idea from Web 2.0 is to design your documents for reusability and make it easy for users to take your work apart, modify it, reorganize it, and reuse it in ways that serve their needs.

6. Software Above the Level of a Single Device

Related to Principle 1, this principle suggests that it is no longer useful to develop applications that are limited to the PC platform. The ever-growing ranks of Web-connected devices such as pocket and tablet computers, cell phones, iPods, Blackberry PDAs, automobile display systems, and even TiVo make it necessary to consider the various ways users may wish to access your content and application.

Applications (and documents) that have a future in this world will actively embrace these alternative methods of access and display.

If you are creating an online help system for your company's products, you know what it looks like on Internet Explorer. Does it still work on a PDA? On a cell phone? On a television screen or in a car? You need to know, and if you adopt Principle No. 2 and carry on a conversation with your users, they will tell you.

7. Rich User Experiences

Modern programming tools and techniques have made it possible to create Web applications that are "rich experiences" for the user. This has come to mean providing the experience ordinarily delivered by an operating system (such as Microsoft Windows) and an application (such as Microsoft Excel or Access) on a Web page that looks and feels like a

genuine graphical user interface (GUI). There is now an effort to reimplement PC applications as Web applications. If this effort succeeds, the days of the Microsoft Office suite may be numbered.

Technical communicators can apply this principle by using the available tools to create that same rich user experience for readers. Instead of displaying captured screen shots, imagine recreating a program screen as part of your Web-based online help application. Buttons that click to produce realistic responses, sliders that slide, real data displayed in fields — data that the user can change! Instead of static screen-shots with callouts and footnotes, imagine being able to walk your user through an online simulation of the program. This would require a collaborative effort among Web programmers and technical communicators, but the possibilities are exciting.

Hype or Hope?

The answer seems to be a little of both. The prescriptive nature of Web 2.0 tells you what you should do but does not tell you how to go about it. Because there is no Web 2.0 standard and no certification, almost anyone can slap together some whiz-bang Web applets and call themselves Web 2.0-compliant. There is certainly going to be more than enough of that. On the other hand, if you look at Web 2.0 in the way the originators intended, as design objectives and business models for the next generation of applications, there is enough guidance here, in a coherent form, that will likely result in improved products, happier users, and more money in the pockets of those who get it right.

Because the Internet and the World Wide Web are so big and so fundamentally connected to our work as technical communicators, the architecture and organizing principles of the Web overlap into our daily work and the seven principles of Web 2.0 have meaning for us, as well. As the boundaries between text and data blur, as usability, content organization, and presentation methods such as XML, DITA, and single-sourcing overlap into both the Web world and the world of technical communicators, we can all profit by employing principles that assure the most efficient and highest quality experience for our users.

Brian McCaleb is an Associate Fellow of the STC and a member of the Orange County and New Zealand chapters. He is a Senior Consultant at Consulting Professionals United.

This article was originally published in the Orange County STC newsletter, Techniscribe.

Creating metadata — A quick checklist

By Suzanne Mescan

Metadata is your friend.

Too many technical writers consider metadata to be just one more thing they need to worry about. Used poorly, it is. Used well, it is a technical writer's best friend. It can make content more organized and more efficient to search and reuse.

Define Your Content

The key is to start big and work your way down. Define what type of content you have; then break it down into meaningful and reusable pieces of content. For example:

1. Lawn Mower Documentation
 - a. User Manuals
 - i. Model numbers
 - ii. Parts diagrams
 - iii. Procedures
 - iv. Cautions and warnings
 - b. Parts Catalogs
 - i. Part numbers
 - ii. Parts diagrams
 - iii. Assembly instructions
 - iv. Model numbers

Organize Your Content

Defining your content allows you to see your content reuse potential and to better organize your content. In this example, you may want to consider storing your parts diagrams and model numbers as a separate collection of content since they are used in both the user manuals and parts catalogs:

Parts diagrams	Model numbers
- Graphic 1	- Model A
- Graphic 2	- Model B
- Graphic 3	- Model C

Then this content can be stored one time, located easily for reuse, and managed for future updates and revisions. Remember to organize your content in the way in which it is reused, not the way in which it is published!

Apply Useful Metadata

Consider the following:

- ◆ How will you want to search for this content? By author? By model number? By the size of the engine? By the date it was written? Make sure key search criteria are included in the metadata.
- ◆ How does each piece of content relate to other content? If you change one piece, what else will need to be updated? Such relationships can be expressed in the content's metadata.
- ◆ " Do you need to process or calculate on this content? Maybe it is useful for your department to be able to count all of the part descriptions that go into a given manual. Add that number to the metadata ("part description = 12").
- ◆ What tool should your technical writers use to edit the content: FrameMaker or MSWord? What will the output be: Print, PDF and/or HTML? Clearly identify input and output in the metadata so there are no questions.

Tips

- ◆ Use naming conventions consistently! For example, use "Model number, retired" instead of "Retired model number" for better sorting and easier searching.
- ◆ Use metadata in a way that is useful for your department, not the organization next door.
- ◆ Make sure that everyone in the department is educated on and thoroughly understands your naming convention and metadata protocol.

Is it worth it to bring in an outside consultant? For many companies, yes it is. They find it very useful to have an outside expert opinion assist in strategy development. However, it is also possible to create your metadata strategy on your own if you do some research on how your content is used by your team and plan accordingly.

Suzanne Mescan is Vice President of Marketing for Vasont Systems and is responsible for the company's overall marketing and public relations efforts.

Good. Fast. Cheap. O'Reilly Launches PDF Guides

By Marsee Henon

As part of O'Reilly Media's commitment to delivering vital technology information to people who need it, when they need it, O'Reilly is launching an ongoing series of

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This month's PDF offerings are available now:

- ◆ "Build Tag Clouds in Perl and PHP" by Jim Bumgardner.
 - First popularized by the Web sites Flickr, Technorati, and del.icio.us, these amorphous clumps of words now appear on a slew of Web sites as visual evidence of their membership in the elite corps of "Web 2.0." This PDF analyzes what is and is not a tag cloud, offers design tips for using them effectively, and then shows how to collect tags and display them in the tag cloud format. Scripts are provided in Perl and PHP.
 - ISBN: 0-596-52794-2, 46 pages, \$9.99 US, \$12.99 CAN www.oreilly.com/catalog/tagclouds/
- ◆ "Web Services on Rails" by Kevin Marshall.
 - In recent years, Web services have become increasingly useful to smaller Web site developers. Thanks to standards like SOAP and XML-RPC, as well as frameworks such as Ruby on Rails, developers can easily create Web service clients and servers with fewer errors. This guide looks at how Ruby on Rails makes building Web service clients and servers simple and fun, with plenty of working examples and code details so you can see just how everything works.
 - ISBN: 0-596-52796-9, 32 pages, \$9.99 US, \$12.99 CA www.oreilly.com/catalog/websor/
- ◆ "Atlas UpdatePanel Control" by Bertrand Le Roy and Matt Gibbs.

- The key to making ASP.NET applications more responsive to user input is the UpdatePanel control. In this tutorial, you will learn from the experts: Bertrand Le Roy, UpdatePanel control's architect and developer, and Matt Gibbs, Atlas dev team manager. This PDF document contains all you need to get started implementing AJAX functionality in existing ASP.NET applications.
- ISBN: 0-596-52747-0, 56 pages, \$9.99 US, \$12.99 CA www.oreilly.com/catalog/atlasupc/
- ◆ "Search Engine Optimization" by Harold Davis.
 - SEO — short for Search Engine Optimization — is the art, craft, and science of driving Web traffic to Web sites. Whether your Web site depends on broad, general traffic, or high-quality, targeted traffic, this PDF has the tools and information you need to draw more traffic to your site, and build your bottom line. You will learn how to effectively use PageRank and Google itself — effective use of SEO means understanding how Google works: how to boost placement in Google search results, how not to offend Google, and how best to use paid Google programs. You will also learn how to best organize your Web pages and Web sites, apply SEO analysis tools, establish effective SEO best practices, and much more.
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Other PDFs from O'Reilly can be found in the O'Reilly Store at: <http://pdfs.oreilly.com>

Handy hint: Layer Navigation in Photoshop

By Lisa Mileusnich (lmileusnich@parker.com)

Instead of selecting layers in a Photoshop document using the Layers palette, you can click an element in the image to find and select layers more quickly. This tip works in Photoshop version 5.0 and later.

1. Select the **Move** tool (or type **V**).
2. Place the cursor over an element in the layer you want to activate.
3. Right-click the element (Windows), or press <Control> and click the element (Mac). A pop-up list appears with the names of all the layers directly beneath the element you clicked.
4. Select the desired layer from the list. That layer is now active.

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Hot jobs

[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!>

Technical and scientific communication

- ◆ Datavantage Corporation of Solon is seeking a Senior Technical Writer to develop and maintain technical documentation, including online help, for its Xstore point-of-sale system.
- ◆ Work Performance Services, Inc. of Solon is looking for a Technical Writer to gather procedural information at nationwide manufacturing sites and to develop manuals and training and testing materials.
- ◆ Invacare of Elyria is seeking a Technical Writer to write, edit, and proofread product documentation for its company products.
- ◆ Brulant, Inc. of Beachwood seeks an Information Architect to design and develop information architectures and user interface designs for Web sites and rich Internet, multimedia, and software applications.

Web design and development

- ◆ Philips Medical Systems in Highland Heights, one of the world's top three medical device companies, is looking for an E-Learning Media Developer to support TRI course developers by creating illustrations, graphics, video clips, and animations for use in eLearning courses and visualization projects.
- ◆ Brulant, Inc. of Beachwood is seeking a Web Designer to work with other senior design professionals on the design, development, presentation, and delivery of interactive design solutions for its clients.

Training and instructional design

- ◆ Gables Search Group of Cleveland is looking for an Instructional Designer to design and develop learning solutions, including Web-based learning, instructor-led training, blended instruction, and virtual sessions.
- ◆ Proforma of Independence, a North American leader in the graphic communications industry, seeks a Director of Training to develop and manage sales

training and coaching programs to its existing and new franchise owners.

- ◆ Progressive Insurance of Mayfield Village seeks an Instructional Designer III to determine training needs and create, design, develop, and maintain new training materials.
- ◆ Progressive Insurance of Mayfield Village seeks an Instructional Designer IV to serve as a dedicated resource for the creation and development of the University of Finance for Progressive.

Graphic design and technical illustration

- ◆ ERICO of Solon is looking for a Graphic Designer — E-Marketing to design electronic marketing communications and to produce artwork and illustrations for company use.
- ◆ Merchant & Associates of Twinsburg is seeking an entry-level Graphic Designer to conceptualize and design content for promotions, advertisements, brochures, catalogs, flyers, and trade show exhibits.
- ◆ Knotice of Akron is looking for a New Media Designer/Specialist with superior HTML and style sheets skills for projects, including e-mail template design, Web design, and collateral and multimedia presentations.

Editing

- ◆ American Greetings Corporation of Cleveland is looking for Associate Editors for its Spanish Team and Derivative Planning groups to edit greeting cards and non-card materials.

Marketing communications

- ◆ The Sherwin-Williams Company of Cleveland seeks a Corporate Communications Manager to assist with the development, implementation, and management of communications strategies to support the company's business objectives.
- ◆ Edgepark Surgical of Twinsburg is looking for a Marketing Communications Coordinator to develop plans and coordinate the production of promotional and product marketing programs and materials.
- ◆ Jenne Distributors, Inc. of Avon is seeking a Catalog and Marketing Production Specialist (temporary with the opportunity for a full-time position) to support the production of its annual printed catalog.

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If your company has a job opening, please contact any member of the NEO STC Employment Committee:

- ◆ Sarah Burke (sarahwilsonburke@hotmail.com)
- ◆ Nams Malik (nmalik@software.rockwell.com)
- ◆ Sherri Henkin (sleah47@juno.com)
- ◆ Rebecca Martin (rrm3@sbcglobal.net)

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

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