

President's column

Last Tuesday, February 22, I had the opportunity to address some of the tech comm students at Cedarville University in western Ohio. I described my own background and career path and the insights it has given me, which sparked some ideas on recent issues in our field.

Many of you know that I entered technical communication as a career-changer, having spent almost 20 years in healthcare. I was a medical technologist - degreed and licensed to run diagnostic laboratory tests.

When I entered that field, 25 years ago now, our internship advisors warned us that laboratory medicine was "going away as a career field." Testing would soon be so easy to perform that hospitals would lay off degreed professionals and assign our job to anyone off the street who was cross-trained to do it.

Instead, the testing has become more and more complex, demanding higher expertise, not lower. And new statistics show that, within three to five years, many labs are facing the retirement of 50 to 80 percent of their staff as the baby-boomers age with no next generation to replace them.

Back to technical communication.

I've heard recently that tech comm is "going away as a career field."

You can imagine my knee-jerk response to that idea.

Our field will surely evolve and change. As writers, we know that living languages evolve and change - when that stops, the language petrifies and dies, like Latin.

But as long as we're willing to adapt our skillsets and our perspectives on work, more likely than not there will always be a place for us in the big scheme of things.

Plus, we do have a next generation coming after us. What changes they will see, we can't even dream of.

Technology will always need to be explained - count on it!

~ Kim Lindsey

Meeting March 10: Translation: A writer's guide

Our speaker Georgia Roeming will teach us tips and technical guidelines for preparing communications projects with foreign language in mind. Find out writing and formatting tips that affect the cost and timelines of translated projects in any medium.

Georgia is an Owner/Partner of The GEO Group, which is headquartered in Madison, Wis., with offices in Chicago, Ohio, and the Twin Cities. The Geo Group provides translation, interpretation, desktop publishing, audio/video services, Web site localization, and technical writing in virtually every language.

See you on the 10th!

We'll be meeting at the Holiday Inn, 6001 Rockside Road, Independence.

For more information, including preregistration, see <http://www.neostc.org/calendar/20050310.html>.

Bring your business card to enter a drawing! This month's prize is a free April or May meeting.

The Consultant and Independent Contractor's Special Interest Group will meet at 5:30 p.m.

Upcoming events

- ◆ 3/9/2005: Webinar, "That's a Good Question!"*
- ◆ 3/10/2005: Monthly meeting, Georgia Roeming on "Translation: A Writer's Guide" at the Holiday Inn in Independence
- ◆ 3/18/2005 - 3/19/2005: The Internet User Experience 2005 conference is being sponsored by the Southeastern Michigan Chapter of STC and the Michigan chapter of the Usability Professionals' Association See <http://www.iue2005.com/> for more information.
- ◆ 3/18/2005: Networking Luncheon, Houlihan's at 3750 Orange Place, Beachwood
- ◆ 3/19/2005: Philadelphia Metro Chapter STC will hold its annual conference. See <http://www.stcpmc.org/index.php> for more information.
- ◆ 3/23/2005: Webinar, "Breaking into E-learning"*
- ◆ 4/6/2005: Webinar, "Building Brand into Your Product or Web site"*

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- ◆ 4/8/2005: The Rochester Chapter STC will hold Spectrum 2005. See <http://www.stcrochester.org/spectrum05.html> for more information.
- ◆ 4/8/2005 - 4/9/2005: The Carolina Chapter STC will hold Tri-Doc 2005. See <http://www.stc-carolina.org/conference/TriDoc2005/index.shtml> for more information.

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

February meeting wrap-up: Usability for technical communicators

by Karla Fitch (Kfitch@parker.com)

Despite traffic woes on I-271 South, a good-sized group turned out for Scott Butler's presentation, Usability for Technical Communicators. Butler, a Usability Consultant at Progressive Insurance and owner of OVO Studios, left attendees with a better understanding of usability and four effective usability techniques.

Butler began his presentation with an introduction to usability and the reasons why, as technical communicators, the field is relevant to us. He highlighted the skills and qualities usability professionals and technical communicators share, including:

- ◆ our practice of conducting a user/task analysis
- ◆ our comfort level with editors and an editing cycle
- ◆ our sympathy for users (as opposed to technology)

His overview also included a usability hierarchy to help attendees put their usability goals in perspective. At the most basic level, Butler explained, a usability professional ensures that the product adheres to standards for presentation. An evaluation for presentation standards can often be completed using an inexpensive process called a checklist review.

At the next level, the product being evaluated should incorporate best practices. This is also the type of evaluation that lends itself to a checklist review, or if time and budget allow, a heuristic review. In a heuristic review, three to five reviewers with design experience evaluate the product based on established principles, like Jacob Nielson's Heuristics (http://www.useit.com/papers/heuristic/heuristic_list.html).

To determine whether the product is optimized for the task it is designed for, Butler recommended another type of usability technique, called a cognitive walkthrough (or "cog walk"). In the cognitive walkthrough, experts simulate users walking through the interface to carry out typical tasks.

Finally, usability professionals are called upon to evaluate whether a product is optimized for task and users. Evaluations at this level typically require formal usability testing; however, Butler offered several suggestions for conducting a usability test with no usability lab and a smaller budget.

Butler's presentation is available online, and can be accessed at: http://www.ovostudios.com/other/neostc_2005-02-10

Welcome new NEO STC members!

Welcome to new members, James Collins and Sherry Tolley!

We would also like to welcome transfers from other chapters, Christopher Lukachko, Meghan McGuire, and Kari Howell.

We look forward to meeting you at an upcoming event!

National conference is coming soon!

Experiencing Technical Communication, STC's 52nd Annual Conference, will be held May 8-11, 2005 in Seattle, Washington.

The preliminary schedule is available online at <http://www.stc.org/intercom/PDFs/PrelimProgram-2005.pdf>.

More detail is available at the official conference site at www.stc.org/52ndConf.

Achieving an Award of Excellence

by Trish Spayer (tspayer@pressco.com), NEO STC Secretary

I was thrilled and humbled to have won the Award of Excellence - Best of Show award for this year's NEO STC Online competition. My entry was Pressco web site: www.pressco.com.

Our company had a web site in place for about six years, but it had been getting stale, and it needed a new look. In my spare time (ha!), I took my copy of FrontPage and designed a new template, including the buttons, background, and other graphics. Several of the

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graphic elements match those used in our marketing materials that I also create. Amazingly, it went through very few changes during the approval process. So in June 2004, with the help of our IT guys, I published our new look.

Microsoft FrontPage is what my company had for publishing the previous version of our site, so I became familiar with it back in 1999. I learned most all its pains and quirks, and how to work around a lot of them. I also bought a huge reference book: *The Complete Reference, FrontPage 2002* by Matthews & Poulson. It helped a lot to work through code in the background - you can manipulate the pages in HTML behind the scenes.

I learned a few things about publishing this site (someone else had been webmaster for our old site). At first, I was scared because I had never done this before. But our IT guru Thomas gave me some sage advice: "It's just a computer, what are you afraid of?" How true. I also learned that if you publish through FrontPage and need to update the site, you must update through FrontPage. Your internet service provider must have FrontPage Server Extensions loaded to make certain features work. If you do not update your site through this program, for instance, you ftp your information to the host, these links will break, and you must call your ISP to have them re-loaded. Been there, done that. A nice feature, though, is the fact that FrontPage compares the files on my computer to what's out there on the site and publishes just the pages that have changed, and removes old pages if you want it to.

Now for a word from our sponsor

Director-sponsor, that is. Bob Dianetti (ds4@stc.org) provides some answers to questions about the STC Transformation and Bylaw changes.

Hello NEOSTC!

There have been lots of questions, information, and misinformation floating around regarding the upcoming bylaw changes. You have probably heard all the hype and controversy surrounding the proposed changes, so I thought I would just give you a high-level view of how it will impact everyone should the changes be approved.

- ◆ **Change in Director-Sponsor role.** Currently, each region has a Director-Sponsor. When the position was originally created in the 1970s, it was a reaction to the rapid growth of the society at that time.

Administratively, the office could not meet the needs of the membership, so an additional layer of administrative support was created with the DS. The past decade, however, has seen almost 100 percent of the administrative duties go back to the office, leaving the DS with really just a Director role. The Sponsor role does not go away with this bylaw change as Directors are responsible to all of the membership, including chapter leaders. If this passes, the Director-Sponsor title will change to Director, and the chapter leaders will now have the opportunity to contact ANY Director or the office with their questions and concerns. A Leadership Community has been created under Judy Glick-Smith that will assist with this role as well.

- ◆ **Deregionalization.** Regions were likewise created for administrative purposes. With the office taking on a pivotal administrative role, this artificial layer of organization becomes a moot point. The impact will be that chapters will begin to feel closer to those chapters who are geographically closest to them. For example, Northeast Ohio will feel close and be active with chapters in Buffalo and Rochester, NY. Currently NEO is not because they are in a "different region" and are somehow perceived to be different.
- ◆ **2VP change in responsibilities.** The 2VP job description specifies that the 2VP direct the actions of the Director-Sponsors. The reality is that the DS's have been autonomous and reporting to the entire board for the most part. The 2VP has not really directed the DS's in years, as it was unnecessary. So this bylaw change just changes the job description to reflect reality.

So there you have it NEO folks. As always, feel free to contact me with any questions or concerns you have regarding the society and board activities. Hope this helps a bit.

Behind the scenes: Getting published in *Intercom*

by Karla Fitch (Kfitch@parker.com) of Parker Hannifin

Editor's Note: Congratulations to Karla on the recent publication of her article "Developing Successful Quick References" in the December 2004 issue of Intercom. We asked her to talk a bit about what happens behind the scenes. Her article is online at http://www.stc.org/intercom/pdfs/2004/2004012_12-13.pdf.

About a year ago, I took a class on planning and prioritizing to meet my business and personal goals. In one of the class activities, we were asked to develop a plan for meeting a personal goal within the next year. I was recently engaged at the time, and needless to say, had plenty of personal goals. But there was one goal in particular that had been clinging to my subconscious since my first days of graduate school: I wanted to have an article published.

At the time, I had no idea what the article would be about. I only knew that I wanted to share some of my own experience with the technical communications community. It wasn't until a few months after the class, when I was beginning to collect information on writing/designing quick references, that the idea for an article popped into my head.

From that point, I worked with the staff of *Intercom* to publish *Developing Successful Quick References* in the December 2004 issue. It was very easy to follow the process outlined in their author guidelines (<http://www.stc.org/intercom/writingGuidelines.asp>), and the staff did a great job of helping me polish my article. After only a couple months of sending manuscripts back and forth, the Assistant Editor informed me that the article was ready to go!

What did I learn?

Publishing in *Intercom* really isn't as intimidating as it sounds. If you have always dreamed of having an article published, I encourage you to check out author guidelines and contact *Intercom* with your article idea today.

Complimentary STC membership for non-member conference attendees

If you know any non-STC members who will be attending the Annual Conference, let them know that they can get free STC membership for the remainder of 2005.

Non-members who register at the full conference rate for STC's 52nd Annual Conference (to be held May 8-11, 2005, in Seattle, Washington) will be invited to join STC—free—for the remainder of 2005. The STC office will include an application for a complimentary membership with the conference registration confirmation receipt letter.

A non-member can return an application to the Society office by mail or fax; a drop box will also be available at on-site registration at the conference. The deadline to

return the application to the STC office by mail or fax is June 30, 2005. The sooner non-members forward their applications, the sooner they can take advantage of STC's many services and benefits.

Information about candidates and issues for the STC national elections now available online

The annual STC election is coming up soon. If you would like to review candidate profiles, see http://www.stc.org/intercom/PDFs/2005/200503_29-39.pdf.

Procedures for STC's 2005 Election

The annual STC election will be held early 2005, and only members who paid their dues by February 28, 2005, will be eligible to vote. An option on the dues renewal forms and new membership applications for 2005 allows members to receive their election materials through e-mail. In March, members who selected this option will be e-mailed the slate, candidate biographies, and voting instructions. Members who did not select this option will receive these materials by first-class mail. The election closes April 15.

Helpline: Mouse tricks

Saving your place while scrolling

In a long document (web pages, Word documents, Excel spreadsheets, and so on), you can scroll down. Sometimes you want to refer to two disparate parts of the file together. This trick will help, even if your interface doesn't have a split-screen feature (as MS Word does). Get to one of the parts of the document you want to see. Use your mouse to drag the scroll box (the elevator-looking thingie in the scroll bar) down to the other part you want to see. Don't release the mouse button. Instead drag your mouse LEFT into the document. At some point, about 1.5" in, most Windows applications will jump back to the former part of your document. Drag left and right to jump back and forth.

Second thoughts while clicking

Started clicking that drop-down menu item, and didn't mean to? Didn't let go of the mouse button yet? It's probably not too late. Hold down that mouse button, and drag your mouse off from the drop-down menu, THEN release the mouse button. It will have no effect.

NOTE: Windows Start menu is a special case. Dragging off the start menu will actually try to move the shortcut

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FROM that menu to wherever you dragged (like the desktop). To delay that kind of menu selection, start dragging your mouse off the menu, then back ONTO it. Windows will interpret that action as moving a Start menu item/shortcut to... exactly where it was, and do nothing.

Thanks to Brian Baddour for sending these along!

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.]

Every month, we highlight a few of the job listings from the NEO STC job site (<http://www.neostc.org/jobs/index.htm>).

- ◆ Master of Science degree candidate seeking an editor, preferably versed in engineering writing (structurall/civil a plus), for 75-page masters thesis for defense at the end of March 2005.
- ◆ RADCom, Inc. in Hudson has an opening for a Writing Assistant. This position will be responsible for writing technical materials, editing, and formatting documents.
- ◆ Hyland Software Inc. in Westlake has an opening for a Technical Proposal Specialist to respond directly to technical RFIs (Request for Information) and RFPs (Request for Proposals).
- ◆ Bird Technologies Group in Solon has an opening for a Technical Writer. The writer needs to provide accurate, understandable, and easy to follow service manuals for RF technology.
- ◆ Invacare in Elyria has an opening for a Technical Writer. This person will produce documentation for home medical equipment.
- ◆ eMergent Marketing in Beachwood has an opening for a Search Engine Optimization (SEO) Specialist.
- ◆ Sherwin-Williams in Cleveland is looking for a Training and Development Manager.
- ◆ Cleveland State University in Cleveland is looking for a Coordinator/Developer, Online Course & Materials.
- ◆ Darice, Inc., in Strongsville is looking for a Catalog Graphic Designer who specializes in the creation of wholesale marketing materials, including catalogs, ads, signage, flyers, brochures, etc.

- ◆ Cleveland Jewish News in Beachwood seeks an editor with magazine experience to manage jstyle, a glossy quarterly lifestyle magazine.
- ◆ Sisters of Charity of St. Augustine (CSA) Health System in Cleveland is looking for a Director of Communications to oversee the development and implementation of a strategic communications program for a nonprofit health and human service organization dedicated to continuing a faith-based mission.

If your company has a job opening, let Sarah Burke (sarahwilsonburke@hotmail.com) or Nams Malik (nmalik@software.rockwell.com) know. Job listings on the NEOSTC web site are free and reach a targeted audience!