Lines & Letters

Northeast Ohio STC Newsletter

On the Front Lines

President's Notes

by Beth Williams, NEOSTC President

I want to take this opportunity to express my thanks to the Technicom organizers and attendees. The conference was very informative, and I believe an enjoyable event for everyone involved. Angie Dianetti, Maria Hlas, and Jill McCauslin planned the day, and they did a great job finding a location and a group of speakers that presented timely, interesting presentation.

In addition, Stephanie Webster and Bill Wigglesworth were the winners of the drawing for the STC Conference in Dallas. Congratulations Stephanie and Bill. Please let us know what you learn at the conference.

Also at Technicom, Jill McCauslin was presented with the Distinguished Chapter Service Award for the Northeast Ohio STC chapter. As Immediate Past President of STC, Judy Glick-Smith commented, "The DCSA is the only society-level award that is voted on by the STC executive board." The citation on Jill's award read, "For sustained contributions to the Northeast Ohio chapter through your efforts, wisdom, experience, and sound advice." Congratulations Jill. Thanks for your hard work and dedication to the chapter, and thanks to everyone involved in making the Technicom conference a success.

I am currently gathering the required documentation to submit our application for this year's chapter achievement award. To give you a little background information, the chapter achievement award program recognizes chapters for exceptional accomplishments in meeting STC goals. "The awards not only acknowledge that the obligations of a properly functioning chapter have been met, but that the winning chapters have performed well beyond expectations. The award program recognizes, in a visible and meaningful manner, chapters that demonstrate outstanding, innovative, and sustained performance in advancing the goals of the Society." There are three levels of chapter achievement awards: Merit, Excellence, and Distinguished. Of all the chapters in a specific size category that have received a Chapter of Excellence award, one chapter is presented with the Chapter of Distinction award. For the past two years, our chapter has received the Excellence award, each time placing us in the running for the Chapter of Distinction award. These awards will be presented to chapters at the STC International Conference in Dallas, Texas in May. If there are any special projects or initiatives that you have done for the chapter, either individually or as part of a committee, and you have not personally discussed this work with me, please contact me. I want to make sure I represent all the efforts of our chapter over the past year, and that we are properly recognized for those efforts.

Finally, please plan to attend the last two meetings of the year - April's Rascal Software's new XML-based help authoring tool, and May's Nine Steps to Independent Contracting, a follow-up to the January 2002 Becoming a Consultant & Independent Contractor panel discussion. The May meeting will also be a wrap-up meeting for the year, where we will present Volunteer of the Year awards, recognized committee members, and announce new officers for the 2003-2004 STC year.

Congratulations to NEOSTC Award Winners

by Jeanette Evans, NEOSTC Competitions Committee Member

We are pleased to announce this year's winners in the 2002/2003 NEOSTC Technical Publications Competition.

Award of Merit

Robin Boldt

♦ Logix 5000 Import/Export Reference Manual

Robin Boldt

♦ ControlLogix Selection Guide

Award of Excellence

Margaret Znidarsic

♦ PSO Training Guide

Margaret Znidarsic accepts an
Award of Excellence from Lori Moreland.

Award of Distinction

Brett Lilley and Katie Stibora

♦ Maintaining and Troubleshooting Advanced SLC
   Applications using RSLogix 500 Software

Brett Lilley accepts an
Award of Distinction from Lori Moreland.

Award of Distinction/Best of Show

Wendy Majikas and Katie Stibora

♦ ControlLogix Controllers Troubleshooting Guide

Wendy Majikas recieves the
Best of Show Award from Lori Moreland.

Winners received their award notifications earlier in the
year than usual so that they were aware of which
entries were eligible for further judging at the
international level. NEOSTC-level winners received their
awards and plaques in March at a luncheon at Moxie's
restaurant.

Congratulations are in order to all who won these highly-
competitive awards. Entries this year were of very high
quality.

I hope that you will continue your participation in this
event, in future years, as entrant, judge, and committee
member. For information about next year's 2003/2004
judging events, please watch the http://www.neostc.org
and http://www.stc.org Web sites, or contact someone
who has worked on the committee this year - Doug
Kepp, Lori Moreland, and Cheryl Bennett, or last year -
Cheryl Bennett, Carole MacKay, Lori Klepfer, Gail Pogue,
and myself.

Returning judges this year were Bob Dianetti, Doug
Kepp, Lori Klepfer, Lori Moreland, and Barb Philbrick.
New judges this year were Sarah Burke, Kristen Jackson,

and Erika Weliczko. Doug Kepp organized the consensus
judging sessions at Lakeland Community College. Lori
Moreland held the training session at a Rockwell
International site. We exchanged with the Mid-
Tennessee chapter.

We are always looking for judges and committee
members for future events. Judges get to see examples
of what participants send as examples of good technical
communication. Judges also develop experience and skill
at identifying publication strong points and areas for
improvement. Committee members organize training,
distribution of material, judging (on-site and distance),
recognition, and evaluation activities. Participation in the
committee is not always as great a time commitment as
some of our other chapter activities. It is a great way to
support this worthwhile experience, while networking
and having fun.

*If you know of other chapter news or volunteer
opportunities, e-mail the editors at
lleditors@hotmail.com.*

February Meeting Wrap-up: E-Learning Solutions — Web-Based Manufacturing Classes

by Nora Ebie, NEOSTC Member

On Feb. 13, NEOSTC members assembled at the Clarion
Hotel in Middleburg Heights to hear Tooling University's
Greg Herlevi, Senior Content Developer, along with Chad
Schron, Senior Software Engineer, discuss their
company's e-learning solutions for industry. With today's
manufacturers facing an uphill battle to educate their
employees without disrupting operations and
accumulating travel expenses, Tooling University offers a
unique solution with their online industrial classes.

Greg Herlevi began the presentation with a brief history
of Tooling University (Tooling U) and an overview of the
company's products. Tooling U offers customized, full-
featured, on-line training in manufacturing/industrial
technologies. Tooling U's training is available anytime,
anywhere, and on any device, including PDAs. Each
training site is customized and has the look and feel of a
customer's own Web site. All classes are offered online,
24 hours-a-day — seven days-a-week (24/7), with
access from a student's home or office. Some of the
tools, features, and functionality provided by Tooling U's
customized classes include:

♦ Classes consist of 12 to 20 brief lessons.

Lines & Letters

Northeast Ohio STC Newsletter

- Illustrations, photos and full-motion video can be added to the lessons.
- Students are able to add notes to an online notebook simply by highlighting text in a lesson.
- A customer's own reference materials, catalogs, and other aids can be downloaded as Microsoft™ Word, Excel or Adobe™ Acrobat PDF files.
- Pre-tests can be included prior to a student taking a class.
- Final exams are graded automatically in real time.

Herlevi also discussed how we, as technical writers, fit into e-learning. He answered the question "What does this type of writing demand?" To write content for Tooling U's curriculum one must:

- Collaborate with subject experts
- Write in an approachable, clear, and concise style
- Have technical precision
- Have a background or experience in instructional design (very helpful, but not required)

Herlevi identified the specific learning levels for which content is written and he discussed the numerous and detailed stages of class development — from the identification of a class department and title, through researching the topic and writing the first draft, to creating test questions, beta testing and launching the class.

Screen shot from a Tooling U sample lesson.

Chad Schron, Tooling U's Senior Software Engineer, demonstrated a typical Tooling U class. Schron showed how a student would take a class and how various tools and features functioned. A class was loaded onto a PDA and passed around to demonstrate the "any device" aspect of Tooling U's online training.

Operating on a proprietary software platform and learning management system (LMS) built on .NET, and with class data, student records, and Web services stored as XML data, it is obvious that Tooling U employs cutting-edge technology to train tomorrow's manufacturers today.

Greg Herlevi and Chad Scron adequately demonstrated that delivering training through the Web offers:

- Students a way to develop skills that will allow them to advance to other opportunities
- Management a way to track employee performance and eliminate travel expenses
- Manufacturing companies a way to develop a skilled employee base they need to increase productivity

For more information on industrial/manufacturing training technologies, check out Tooling U's Web site at http://www.toolingu.com.

Technicom Session Wrap-ups

If you missed Technicom on March 14, you can still share the experiences your fellow chapter members had at the conference.

Technicom 2003, held at the Twinsburg Hilton on March 14, was well-attended by NEOSTC members and guests from all over the midwest. After attending the all-day event, some of your chapter members have offered to share their experiences at the different sessions. Sharon and I hope you enjoy these unique perspectives. We would also like to join with the other attendees to thank the Technicom committee, Angie Dianetti, Maria Hlas and Jill McCauslin, for another great conference.

Conference attendees provided the following session reviews.

Applying Instructional Design Principles: An Introduction for Technical Communication Professionals

by Janean Voss NEOSTC Member

Mary Beth and Mark Larsen of Larsen Learning delivered an interactive session that served as a great forum to discuss and learn more about instructional design. Mrs. Larson explained to us that instructional design relates to both art and science. As an art, it relates to using our creative skills in designing materials, writing, building rapport, facilitating, and using dialogue methods and

questions. On the science side, this field delves into the disciplines of education, organizational behavior, and behavioral and cognitive psychology.

With this established as the foundation, Mrs. Larsen then explained to us the five principles of instructional design.

- Learn about the audience through assessments and analyses.

- Examine the current and desired skill and knowledge levels of the audience through job or task analyses.

- Determine the appropriate level for communicating the content material to the audience.

- Develop appropriate instructional materials and strategies based upon the data gathered in the first three steps.

- Develop a feedback and evaluation method for ongoing improvement.

Throughout the session, both Mr. And Mrs. Larsen gave us interactive e-learning scenarios where we gave our recommendations based upon the instructional design principles.

Life Planning Workshop

by Sarah Burke, NEOSTC Member

Judy Glick-Smith, STC Immediate Past President and senior member of the Lone Star chapter, motivated us to establish personal visions, set goals, and systematically monitor and revise our goals during the Life Planning Workshop.

Throughout much of her workshop, Glick-Smith walked us through a series of thought-provoking life planning exercises. The early exercises focused on defining who we are and included developing a personal mission statement and understanding the many roles we play. Subsequent exercises challenged us to set lifetime goals for every component of our lives (individual, home, work, education, and professional development) and recognize the competencies and activities that make us unique. Glick-Smith pointed out that effective life planning consists of setting small, incremental goals and regularly revisiting the goals we set (Glick-Smith herself works through life planning exercises every six months).

In addition to teaching us various life planning techniques, Glick-Smith encouraged us to tend our creative sides by participating in at least one creative activity, such as gardening, painting, or acting, that is completely unrelated to work. Lastly, she emphasized the important role of lifelong learning in life planning.

According to Glick-Smith, we must keep an eye on the future, think beyond our experiences, and read voraciously and across disciplines. She closed the workshop with a diverse reading list covering topics from leadership and wealth to positive thinking and spirituality.

E-Learning in NEO: Our Very Own Success Stories and Panel Discussion

By Sharon Ambro, NEOSTC Newsletter Co-Editor

The Technicom afternoon session about e-Learning in Northeast Ohio featured a panel discussion about the successes of local companies employing e-Learning. The panel was moderated by Curtis Stokes and included:

- Brad Bickel of Parker Hannifin Corporation, Fluid Connectors Group

- Stacey Harris of Management Recruiters International (MRI)

- Kevin Mickle of Diebold, Inc.

- Rodger Frantz and Rich Williams of Philips Medical Systems

During the session, the panel members answered several questions about their specific e-Learning projects, each of which differed in size, staffing, audience, and tools. The panel members discussed who started their companies' e-Learning projects and why, and concluded that it is important for the project to have the backing of upper management.

The panel members were also asked about project size and costs and how they presented these costs to management. Rodger Frantz of Philips stated that his management was impressed with the money saved by Computer Based Training (CBT) because employees no longer had travel and living costs for out-of-town training classes.

Each e-Learning project used a variety of tools, including Adobe™ Acrobat, HTML, Macromedia™ Authorware, Dreamweaver, and Flash, for examples. The panel members also discussed how their e-Learning projects were delivered to their audiences. Stacey Harris of MRI stated that her project was delivered on CD-ROMs (instead of the World Wide Web) because all of her users were not Web savvy.

Each panel member had different experiences and advice to share about embarking on an e-Learning project, but all agreed that using a blended approach

(mixing a complement of classroom and e-Learning training) contributed to their success.

Single Sourcing Parts I and II

by Nora Ebie, NEOSTC Member

Jerilynne Sander, CEO of Simply Written, Inc. spoke at the two-part workshop on single-sourcing. During the workshop, Sander exuberantly discussed the key components of single-sourcing solutions, the pitfalls, and how to design and implement a single-sourcing solution.

The Single-Sourcing Dream

Sander began the workshop by asking us what our single-sourcing dream would be if money, time and resources were no object. As expected, we had no shortage of answers! In short, we would want:

♦ A way to write content once and use that same content several ways easily

♦ To have to edit only one source

♦ One conversion process between multiple formats, platforms, languages

♦ To know who writes what within the organization

♦ Graphics formats to convert effortlessly

♦ Tools to work every day

♦ A way to record and search on meta data

♦ Content Management Systems (CMS) talk to each other

Types of Single Sourcing Solutions

♦ To focus on content and usability

The Pitfalls of Single-Sourcing

Although we, as technical communicators, have the technology to make our single-sourcing dreams come true, Sander was quick to point out that single-sourcing is not a magic bullet — it is not that mother-ship of solutions: "write once, use everywhere." She prefers to use the broader definition: "write once, use many." A more precise definition would be: Single-sourcing is a methodology for planning, creating and maintaining content using a structured document manufacturing process to create reusable "chunks" of information instead of whole documents.

While average single-sourcing projects can save an organization 20 to 60 percent over the traditional approach for creating information, creating a true single-sourcing solution cannot be accomplished overnight. Many companies can't afford the costly financial investment and the 18 to 24 months for implementation of a high-end solution that is database- and XML-driven. However, this is only one of three types of single-sourcing solutions identified by Sander. Her company focuses its efforts on mid-range solutions, which give clients the structure and cost savings needed for single-sourcing, yet allow them time to step into a longer-term, high-end solution. The following table outlines the characteristics of the three types of solutions:

Low-end	Mid-range	High-end
♦ Lowest cost (< $1,000)	♦ Moderate investment (< $50,000)	♦ Most expensive (> $250,000)
♦ Least complex	♦ Moderately complex	♦ Most complex
♦ Easiest implementation	♦ Relatively easy to implement	♦ Most time-consuming to implement (18-24 months)
♦ Least flexible	♦ Relatively flexible	♦ Most flexible
♦ Simple tools	♦ Should use rigid, structured writing approach	♦ Database driven
♦ Single person	♦ Must define templates	♦ XML data
♦ Use full documents; can't reuse parts and pieces	♦ Work within limits of the tools (Adobe™ FrameMaker, WebWorks™ Publisher, and Omni™ Mif2Go.	♦ Use chunks of data
		♦ Cross-platform
		♦ Cross-departmental
		♦ Need management buy-in
		♦ Added costs: 1) learning to write for reuse; 2) training on new tools

Compromising in the Middle

Implementing a mid-range, single-sourcing solution allows companies to compromise by stepping into a high-end solution without breaking the bank. To implement this type of solution a company must:

- Analyze its information/content needs, including those for users, technical employees, customers, vendors and management.

- Develop a detailed and structured plan to manage those needs.

- Gain a strong understanding of organizational change management.

- Calculate their return on investment (ROI).

In calculating an ROI for a single-sourcing solution, one should keep the following factors in mind:

- Hard costs: Costs that are quantitative in nature (hours, wages, supplies, benefits, shipping, production, etc.). The biggest cost is labor, which is two to three times base salary.

- Soft costs: Subjective costs that are difficult to measure (customer satisfaction, inefficiency, usability).

- Hidden costs: Such as developing a plan, interruptions, stylistic decisions, research, and costs associated with training such as: learning to write for reuse and training for new tools.

Common thinking is that if you use a single-sourcing solution, where you have three types of output, you can reduce costs by 2/3. Realistically, however, the costs for producing the largest product is more likely the real cost. Based on the example below, the cost associated with moving to a single-sourcing solution would be closer to the $60,000 amount.

Examples of Single-Sourcing Solutions at Work:

Traditional non single-source:

DOCU-MENT	WORK HOURS	QTY	RATE*	TOTAL COST
Training document	3 hrs/ task	75 pages	$50 /hr	$11,250
Help document	6 hrs/ topic	75 topics	$50 /hr	$22,500
User's Manual	6 hrs/ page	200 pages	$50 /hr	$60,000

*rate is an approximate hourly rate for a contracted technical writer.

Single-Source Solution by Simply Written, Inc.

- One 300-page source document,

- using Simply Written's Clustar System™,

- plus the right tools: FrameMaker templates, Mif2Go for help files,

- and 2 writers,

- produced 4 accurate manuals and one help file within 36 hours from project sign off.

Key Components: What it takes to do single-sourcing well:

In order to return costs of a single-sourcing solution, companies should have a 40 to 50 percent overlap of information. This overlap doesn't need to consist of entire documents, but "chunks" of same or similar information used by multiple deliverables, such as a help file, web pages and a product brochure. Single-sourcing is best used at the high-end, the enterprise or cross-departmental level.

The content development team needs to have firm understanding of the main components of documents, incorporate a flexible yet rigid, structured writing methodology, and have an analytical mind to accomplish this type of structured writing. Two other components that are "must haves" are management support for developing upfront work and a great development toolkit, such as FrameMaker, Mif2Go, WebWorks, etc.

Developing a Single Source Solution

Single-sourcing is a methodology for planning, creating and maintaining content using a structured document manufacturing process to create reusable "chunks" of information instead of whole documents.

That said, how does a company go about developing a single-source solution? Sander offers four development steps to get your company started on their own single-sourcing solution:

- Develop a highly-structured approach; plan everything.
  - Analyze your end-users.
  - Analyze your communications goals.
  - Analyze all the documents/deliverables/information your company produces, and who produces them.

- o   Define, then prioritize, deliverables.
- ♦ Select the tools that will enable you to accomplish your goals and requirements. While there aren't many choices to date, some of the more notable ones include:
  - o   FrameMaker, for document composition and modular content.
  - o   Mif2Go, for automated conversion from FrameMaker to HTML, help and other HTML-based formats.
  - o   WebWorks Publisher, for automated conversion from FrameMaker to HTML, help files and other HTML-based formats.
  - o   Adobe Acrobat, for conversion to PDF.
- ♦ Organize your data.
  - o   Technical communicators must learn to separate content from format and format from structure. Picture content, format, and structure as three separate "containers."
  - o   Define a clear-cut set of rules for what equals a container of information, the type of information that can go into each container, and where each container can be used.
  - o   Define the elements (tags) you want to use for each container and use explicit names.
  - o   Specify groups of content designed for a specific purpose, for a specific audience, and having a specific tone (i.e. specifications, procedures, overview, concepts).
  - o   Identify patterns. The more patterns there are, the more you can customize, and the easier the source document can be transformed to XML.
- ♦ Build very rigid templates using the tools you've chosen.

For more information on anything you've read in this article, visit Simply Written, Inc., on the Web at http://www.simplywritten.com.

Calendar

When	What	Where	RSVP
Sat 3/20/2004, ~9:00am - 5:00pm	Joint Meeting with Pittsburgh professional and Youngstown State University professional chapters, focusing on FrameMaker and RoboHelp, with RoboHelp X5 demo Joint Meeting Agenda	Youngstown State University campus	Programs Committee by 3/15
Wed 3/24/2004 1:00pm - 2:30pm	Winning New Business: Preparing the Proposal 101 (Part II)	Local host site pending (offers encouraged)	
Thu 4/8/2004 12:00pm - 1:00pm	Networking Luncheon	Agostino's Ristorante 4218 Ridge Rd Brooklyn	Angie Dianetti by 4/5
Sat 4/17/2004 9:00am - 5:30pm	Region 4 Conference: Writers Without Borders: Trends in Technical Communication	Holiday Inn Select, Oakland/University Center Pittsburgh, PA	Registration info on the conference web site. Save $20 if you register by March 15.
Mon 4/19/2004, ~6:00pm - 8:00pm	Seminar: What do Technical Communicators do in Northeast Ohio? Focus: employment	Local college campus TBD (offers encouraged)	Programs Committee by 4/12
Tue 5/4/2004 12:00pm - 1:00pm	Networking Luncheon	Firehouse Grill & Pub 1677 E Market St Akron	Angie Dianetti by 5/3
May 9-12, 2004	International conference	Baltimore, MD	
Fri 5/21/2004, ~6:00pm - 8:00pm	Seminar: STC 50th Anniversary Party/Chapter Recognition	TBD	Programs Committee by 5/17
Tue 6/1/2004	Deadline: Ohio College Student Tech Comm Competition		
Wed 6/9/2004 12:00pm - 1:00pm	Networking Luncheon	Max & Erma's 33675 Solon Rd Solon	Angie Dianetti by 6/7
Sat 6/19/2004, 11:00am - 3:00pm	NEOSTC Family Picnic	Brecksville Metropark Reservation (check back for more specific site)	Programs Committee by 6/15
Thu 7/15/2004 12:00pm - 1:00pm	Networking Luncheon	Hoggy's 5975 Canal Rd Valley View	Angie Dianetti by 7/12
Wed 8/11/2004 12:00pm - 1:00pm	Networking Luncheon	Mad Greek 2466 Fairmount Blvd. Cleveland Hts.	Angie Dianetti by 8/9
May 8-11, 2005	International conference	Seattle, WA	

You Already Do Information Architecture, You Just Don't Know It Yet

by Mir Haynes, Information Designer & Writer

User experience, a term used by Web and software professionals, describes users' successes and failures-and their thoughts about these events-as they interact with Web sites or while they use software or Web-based applications.

Positive user experience happens when good interface design, solid programming, and thoughtful information design work together to create functionality that's "transparent" to the user. That is, we are able to focus on the task at hand without having to think too hard. It's the seamless experience of adding an item to a shopping cart, perusing the morning's headlines, downloading the trial version of software, posting to a community bulletin board, or any number of for-work or for-pleasure activities.

When a Web site is structured well, we usually don't even notice. But when we can't find what we're looking for, when labels are misleading or confusing, when navigation doesn't work in the way we expect it to, when it's not easy to see where we've already been — we're left feeling annoyed, incompetent, or even angry. (If you've ever observed or moderated a Web usability test, you've seen, first-hand, how emotional people can get.)

Enter the Information Architect. She lives to draw order out of chaos. Starting with a mess of project notes, client interviews, goals and audience definitions, existing marketing collateral, competitive research, and existing Web content, the information architect teases out an

orderly and elegant site structure that meets audience information needs, satisfies business and marketing agendas, and adheres to usability principles. Before any visual design or programming ever takes place, the information architect maps out the entire site and makes recommendations on user interface design, copywriting, and workflow.

"But I'm a technical communicator — not an information architect," you say.

Thinking About Thinking About Using the Web

Fact is, as a technical communicator, you already "think" like an information architect — whether you know it or not.

You already think about the principles of solid information design, both at the macro-level (such as chapters, sections, and subsections) and at the micro-level (such as levels of headings, content chunking, and type treatment). These principles carry over to designing for the Web.

Designing at the macro-level means defining the primary, secondary, and tertiary sections of a Web site and supplying the navigational aids required to move at will between them. And at the micro-level, it means consulting with visual designers and peer-reviewing throughout development to ensure that individuals pages of the site are easy to scan, easy to interpret, and easy to use.

> *"Maintaining that user-centered perspective grows out of our recognition of the classic rhetorical tenets of audience, purpose, and scope."*

As a technical communicator, you are accustomed to thinking about the user. This ability is as key to designing intuitive organizational hierarchies, labeling systems, and navigational aids as it is to writing software manuals or help systems or quick reference guides. Maintaining that user-centered perspective grows out of our recognition of the classic rhetorical tenets of audience, purpose, and scope. These tenets form the foundation for any information architecture project, much as they do for any technical communication project.

Clearly, today's technical communicators are ideally positioned to become tomorrow's information architects. However, in my experience, information architecture

isn't registering as a potential career with most technical communicators.

All Roads Lead to Information Architecture

Certainly, talented information architects can come from a variety of industries, educational disciplines, and backgrounds. Personally, I have met information architects — either online or face-to-face — who've entered the field by various means, including computer science, industrial design, graphic design, usability engineering, journalism, human-computer interaction, and marketing.

For me, my job as a usability specialist was never as exciting as when I conducted tests on Web sites. For whatever reason, the satellite receivers, DVD players, automobile dashboards, and various other products my company tested for its clients just never had the allure that Web sites held for me. Motivated to find a career in which I could use my expertise as a technical communicator and apply what I'd learned on-the-job about users and how they interacted with the Web, I searched for my niche. I knew I wanted to be involved in the early stages of Web development, though not as a visual designer or technical engineer. It wasn't until I stumbled across a job description for an information architect that I knew I'd found what I'd been searching for. Usability engineering and technical communication have, together, equipped me with a user-centered, theoretically-sound perspective that infuses each Web development project on which I work.

Making Change

Recent trends in the Internet industry have changed the face of Web design and development. While this list isn't all-inclusive, it provides a glimpse into what's shaping the field of information architecture today.

- Since 1997, the trend in business has been for companies to allow their separate departments to create and post content to "their little corner" of the corporate site. The result has been sprawling, inconsistent, poorly edited and expensive sites that are difficult to navigate.

- Recent studies found that Internet users have high expectations when it comes to Web site usability: 78% think ease of use is the most important feature of a Web site and 83% say they are likely to leave a Web site if they feel they have to make too many clicks. Meanwhile, Internet users can't find what they're looking for approximately 60% of the time,

according to User Interface Engineering, a leading Web usability research company.

♦ When people have a positive user experience on a given site, they're likely to return to that site, increasing revenue and providing further exposure. When a site works well, that's good for business. Clearly, crafting positive user experience through sound information architecture is a corporate imperative.

Because the value of solid information architecture is beginning to be quantified, because "selling it" to clients isn't as difficult as it was a few years ago, and because sites continue to get larger and more complex as technologies progress, now is an ideal time for the emergence of information architecture as an integral part of corporate Web initiatives.

Introducing technical communicators to information architecture can only continue to introduce positive changes-for the IA field and for individuals looking to make a career-shift in that direction.

Much has been written about the importance of proactively increasing your value at the workplace by identifying areas where you can branch out and take ownership. If your company's Web site needs help, take the initiative to apply your skills as a technical communicator. Chances are, the Web team (or lone Web person) will appreciate the fresh perspective and enthusiasm you bring to the table. Many information architects get their start this way, by being brave enough to say, "Hey, our Web site has problems!" and then, exhibiting even greater courage, saying, "Why don't I try to fix it?" Very often, these folks can move into the role of Information Architect, even though their company might never have placed an ad for that position.

Conversely, realize that outsourcing an informational reconstruction of a spaghetti-site may be your best option, and then sponsor this idea to your managers. By doing so, you position yourself to become the team leader or project manager for the new Web initiative.

Caveats and Closing Thoughts

There are, of course, some important differences between technical communication and information architecture. For some, thinking of information as dynamic, rather than static, is a leap. You'll have to learn new, Web-specific principles of "document design." And maybe some HTML, if you don't already know it. A well-rounded Web firm will offer not just design, but

application development and integration, e-commerce functionality, community interaction (such as mailing lists, bulletin boards, and chat functionality), and user interface programming (such as JavaScript and Dynamic HTML); while you won't have to become an expert in any of these areas, you will have to learn enough to work with other, more technical, team members.

Like all of you, I hope that we're seeing the beginning-of-the-end of this present downturn. In the meantime, continue to champion "the user's experience" in your area of specialty. And if you just haven't found your niche yet, or are craving a new challenge, consider information architecture. You already posses a strong foundation from which to build a new, marketable skill set.

Mir Haynes is an Information Architect and Writer. She serves as Communications Manager for the Carolina Chapter of STC and holds an M.S. in Technical Communication from North Carolina State University. Mir can be reached by email at mir.haynes@mindspring.com or online at http://www.mirhaynes.com.

Suggested Reading

♦ Kimen, Shel. "10 Questions about Information Architecture." Builder.com. http://builder.cnet.com/Webbuilding/0-3881-8-5113200-1.html.

♦ Krug, Steve. 2000. Don't Make Me Think: A Common Sense Approach to Web Usability. Indianapolis, Indiana: Que, A Division of Macmillan USA.

♦ Rosenfeld, Louis, and Peter Morville. 2002. Information Architecture for the World Wide Web. 2nd ed. Sebastopol, California: O'Reilly & Associates, Inc.

♦ Wurman, Richard Saul, David Sume, and Loring Leifer. 2000. Information Anxiety 2. Indianapolis, Indiana: Que, A Division of Macmillan USA.

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Write Thinking for Business and Technical Writers: A Web Site Review

by Jeanette Evans, NEOSTC Senior Member

In a recent article in Lines and Letters, I read about the Write Thinking http://www.writethinking.net Web site. So, I visited. What I found at the site, among other items of note, was an impressive summary of job listings.

When I entered the site, I saw headings for Articles, Resources, Jobs, and Classifieds. I also found the site clean, with thankfully, content being the most important part of the site. Clicking on Jobs, I found The WriteThinking Weekly Jobs Lists. Included were the headings Copywriting, Freelancing (general), Grant Writing, Marketing Communications, Medical Writing, and Technical Writing. I wondered where these headings would lead me.

I was surprised that each heading took me to a listing by state (and Canada) of job openings by search utilities such as careerbuilder.com, computerjobs.com, monster.com, operationit.com, tech-engine.com, and workopolis.com. On Feb. 20, under Technical Writing, I found over 50 openings listed in over 24 states including Ohio.

WriteThinking's site author and publisher Michael Knowles, in a recent correspondence, mentioned that WriteThinking was voted into this year's *Writer's Digest 101 Best Web Sites for Writers*. The list will appear in the May 2003 issue, or view the 2002 list now. However, areas for improvement always exist. In this case, not all jobs are still available, which could cause a visitor frustration. I think most people realize this is not unusual for sites of this kind, and not under Knowles's control. Plus, I figured that this is just one person's effort to keep up. It is a pretty impressive solo effort. I wondered how one person could do so much.

Knowles says he "started the site in Aug. 2001 as a way to give something back to the writing community." He says that he plans "to start offering courses on business and marketing planning for writers, among other things." Knowles calls himself "a technical business writer and e-business coach who helps small businesses and professionals improve their businesses and their writing."

What I found most impressive about my visit to WriteThinking was how interesting a person's work can be. I was amazed at how much the author accomplishes with his work. I kept wondering if Knowles himself is anything like his site. If so, I imagine him as hard-working, friendly, competent, and trying very hard to make sense out a massive amount of employment information on the World Wide Web, while making his own contribution.

Nominations for the NEOSTC Board

by Kris Henige, NEOSTC Immediate Past President and Nominating Manager

It is time to announce a new slate of candidates for the chapter's board for the upcoming year, which runs from July 1, 2003 to June 30, 2004. The executive positions (President, Vice President, Secretary, Treasurer, and Immediate Past President) are all uncontested, so no ballot is being sent. Instead, as directed by our bylaws, the candidates are announced here in the chapter newsletter. Any opposition to these candidates must be recorded within 21 days from the publication of this newsletter.

President: Lori Klepfer has been designing and developing information products for the past 15 years. She was the first student to graduate from the Youngstown State University Professional Writing and Editing program, even before it was approved by the Board of Regents!

Lori moved to Cleveland to work for Allen-Bradley. She later became a training and technical communication consultant for CCS and Associates and then for marchFIRST. In 2001, she started her own training and technical communication company, LJK Consulting.

Lori joined STC as student member and is now a senior member. Her service to the chapter has included:

2002-03	Vice President
2001	NEOSTC Technical Publications and Online Communications Competition Committee Member
1997	NEOSTC Technical Publications, Technical Art, and Online Communications Competition Chair
1997	STC Region 4 conference committee
1994-1996	NEOSTC Technical Publications and Technical Art Competition Chair
1993 & 1996	International STC Publications Competition Judge
1989-1994 & 2001	NEOSTC Publications Competition Judge

Lori has also presented at many chapter, regional, and international conferences.

Vice President: Kim Lindsey served as chapter secretary for two years. and has been a member of STC since 2000. Kim is currently a technical writer at Parker Hannifin, and has also worked at MRI/Intuit and RADCom. Under the chapter bylaws, Kim automatically becomes the chapter's president in July 2004.

Secretary: Tricia Oleksy has been a member of STC since 2000. She served as Membership Committee manager this year, and was a member of the committee last year. She is currently a technical writer/illustrator for Pressco Technology Inc., where she's been since 1996.

Treasurer: Ken Rogers served on the chapter Web Site committee in 2002-03, and has been a member of STC since 2001. He is an information technology documentation specialist, and is currently working for Spherion Technologies.

These candidates will serve on the executive board with Beth Williams, who becomes Immediate Past President and will head the nominating committee next year.

I'd like to thank the following people who have agreed to work on our committees:

- **Programs:** Stephanie Webster and Danette Thompson
- **Newsletter Editors:** Erika Weliczko and Nora Ebie
- **Membership/PR:** Jessica Hendricks, Candace Wintering, and Beverly Peterson
- **Employment:** Myron Shawala and Sarah Burke
- **Web Site:** Brian Baddour
- **Networking Lunches:** Angie Dianetti
- **CIC SIG:** Bill Beadle

A new committee this year is **Academic Relations**. Each committee member will serve as a liaison between the chapter and the communications-related departments at a local college. I am currently seeking liaisons for Cleveland State and John Carroll, so if you are interested, contact me at khenige@parker.com.

If you would like to volunteer for any of these committees, please contact me or the committee manager.

Interesting Times, Interesting Measures

by Mike Bates, Region 4 Director-Sponsor

We've been living in "interesting" times, as the saying goes, and many of us feel that we've had about as much interest as we can tolerate, thank you very much. Chapter meeting attendance has been down, and the popularity of technical presentations has decreased while the popularity of career cafes and career management days has increased. In any conversation between three technical communicators, at least one is unemployed, about to be unemployed, or thinking about a career change.

"Demand seems to be on the rise"

So after attending the first STC board meeting of 2003, I've returned with renewed hope about the employment scene, and have chosen to pass along a little good news to start the year off. Between meeting sessions, we (board members from the various corners of North America) greet one another with the usual gambit, "Hi, how have you been? How's business?" We trade notes on the health of our local chapters, the chapters in our region, and the status of our own employment situations. My conclusion is that things are getting better.

My optimism is cautious. Companies tend to stay battened down, and their willingness to spend on technical communication is a tenuous commitment, at best. Some companies are outsourcing their work. Others are looking for writers to work at bargain-basement salaries. A number of companies are looking outside of North America for their technical communication needs. Yet despite these trends, I hear stories that encourage me. A writer mentions that her temporary contract is rolling over to regular employee status. A contractor has lined up work for the first time in months. Someone else mentions that their company is stabilizing and may add a new person during the coming year. Demand seems to be on the rise.

The job market won't be the same as the heyday of the 90s. In fact, the job market may never look the same again. It may get better, but in a different way, a changed way. How we cope with those changes will indicate our success in responding to the new marketplace. Are we willing to look beyond our core skills to our extended skill sets? Can we look at the trends and determine how we can fit? If we've let our skills fall behind, are we ready to do what it takes to catch up? Can we make the switch to being free agents?

Lines & Letters

Northeast Ohio STC Newsletter

Do we have a personal "brand" that identifies us? Are we broadening our horizons in what we read, in where we look for contacts, with whom we network? In other words, do we know how to re-invent ourselves for this new market? Are we willing to learn?

This column is far too short to be helpful in setting out a roadmap for participating in the recovering economy. Besides, there are a vast number of existing resources available for the taking: Fast Company (http://www.fastcompany.com), Career Lab (http://www.careerlab.com), and Career Intelligence (http://www.career-intelligence.com) are just a few of the online resources that turned up as the result of a simple Google search. The idea is to actually have a roadmap, to study the new landscape and determine where you want to go and how you're going to get there. The rest, they say, is a matter of interest.

Mike is the Region 4 Director-Sponsor. He can be reached at mikebates_cle@msn.com.

The Esoteric Editor

by Sharon Ambro, Esoteric Co-Editor

Karla and I would like to announce that we are not continuing as *Lines & Letters* editors next STC year. We greatly enjoyed our three-year tenure and hope that our contributions made *Lines & Letters* a little better for our readership.

We appreciate your support, feedback, and submittals over the years, and we encourage your participation to continue to increase in the coming years. I know Karla and I plan to support the growth and improvement of *Lines & Letters* and will continue to contribute to the newsletter. We will also try to ensure a smooth transition to the new editors. In our last issue (May/June 03), we will introduce our predecessors.

Thank you,

Sharon and Karla

Membership News

Welcome New Members

In January, the NEOSTC welcomed the following new members:

- Laurie Beringer
- Catherine Caldwell
- Tracey L. Spears-Forte

- Paulette J. Ziegfeld

February brought us three new members and the return of an old friend. They are:

- Sara J. Arnold
- Traci N. Billingsley
- Neal F. Naughton
- Michelle L. Poore (reinstated)

If you see these people at our upcoming meetings, make sure to welcome them to Northeast Ohio.

Congratulations, Sandy!

NEOSTC member Sandy Williams co-authored the article, "Writing Well for the Web," which recently appeard in *Craine's Cleveland Business* online. Congratulations to Sandy on a great job!

Chapter Membership Counts

The membership count as of Feb. 28 was 198 for the NEOSTC.
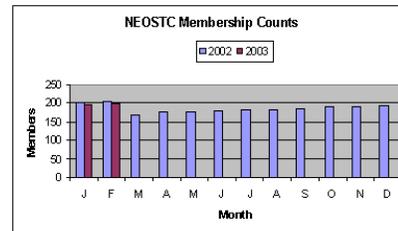
Total membership for STC International reached 22730.

If you or someone you know in the chapter has good news to share, e-mail the editors at lleditors@hotmail.com.

Regional Opportunities

Writing for the Web

Barbara Payne, Cleveland-area business writer and marketing consultant, will tell us how to write and lay out effective copy for the Web. Barbara helps high-tech, manufacturing, and other companies get high search engine rankings and grow their businesses with the Internet. Check out her Web site at http://www.reallygoodfreelancewriter.com.

Special Guest: Suzan Erem of the National Writers Union, will be on hand to fill us in on current issues affecting our livelihood, as well as answer questions about NWU. Have you wondered about NWU? Go to http://www.nwu.org.

- Date: April 8, 2003

- Location: Mayfield Regional Library

For more information: Contact Sandy Woodthorpe at 440-639-0819 or sandyleew@earthlink.net

Writing the Breakout Novel

The Northeast Ohio Romance Writers of America are hosting NY literary agent, Donald Maass on Sat. April 19, 2003. Maass will present a workshop called "Writing the Breakout Novel." Beginners and writers with works in progress are welcome.

- Date: April 19, 2003

- Location: Embassy Suites Hotel in Beachwood

- Cost: $45.00

For more information: Contact Nancy L. Schuemann at wesnap@juno.com

Lines & Letters Editors

- Sharon Ambro (sharon.ambro@grc.nasa.gov)

- Karla Caldwell (kcaldwell@parker.com)