Lines & Letters

Northeast Ohio STC Newsletter

President's column: Giving credit where credit is due

By Bob Young (Ryoung1956@sbcglobal.net)

Think back on a project that required a lot of work with little time to make a deadline. A simple "thank you" before being handed the next assignment would have been worth a million dollars.

Of course, we are professionals so our paychecks are supposed to signify our good work, right? Yeah. We are the invisible fire extinguishers putting out fires on a moment's notice. A little recognition now and then would certainly make a big difference.

The same is true when one volunteers time and effort. Too often the thanks are overdue or your reward is being handed another task because you handled the previous one so well. One tends to get burned out or pull away rather than feeling like an important part of the overall process.

So, I have decided, after talking to numerous chapter officials at the STC Conference, to start a program that provides a unique opportunity to boost local involvement and recognition at the same time. The Recognition Program is based on a point system; with a benchmark set by your Board of Directors to earn a year-end gift. The board has determined that 15 points are necessary for the gift, which still is being discussed at this writing.

This program is open to all NEO STC members, including officers. A point is earned for attending an NEO STC monthly meeting, serving on a committee, writing a newsletter article, attending a STC networking luncheon, and various other approved tasks. The point of all this (excuse the pun) is to get members involved with chapter events while working toward a mutual goal.

Suggestions for the gift when a member accumulates 15 points have been golf shirts embroidered with our NEO STC logo or gift cards for a bookstore or coffeehouse. The Board will decide on the choice of gift as it evaluates the budget throughout the course of the year. However, what I have heard from the officers is that it would be better to present a gift with lasting value rather than something that gets used once and eventually forgotten. Any suggestions are appreciated at (Ryoung1956@sbcglobal.net), especially if it is a contact to someone who embroiders shirts at a reasonable price.

Speaking of accolades, there are many members that could be thanked in this space. The hesitation to do so is that someone may be accidentally omitted. However, I would be remiss not to praise four members — Sarah Burke, Bob Dianetti, Tricia Spayer, and Beth Williams — who went the extra mile to make recent events successful.

Beth took several outdated membership sheets and compiled everything into one master list. She then divided the list into former and active members so we could contact these respective groups during the two-day membership drive in August. It was a smooth, successful start to our recruiting goals thanks to Beth's hard work. Tricia, in fact, is using the master membership list to track each member's points to determine the year-end recognition gift.

Tricia also was responsible for getting the chapter gift for Neil Perlin's September presentation on emerging technologies. Neil, who was making his first trip to Cleveland, received from us a miniature replica of a guitar from the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame. Dianetti, our Region 4 Director, and I took Neil to a spicy barbecue lunch and a tour of the U.S.S. Cod, a World War II submarine docked downtown. Neil, who is a naval history buff, sent a thank you to everyone for his memorable trip.

Sarah, who is our Employment Committee chair, has put together an impressive group of panelists for our October 13 meeting. The four managers are from different technical disciplines and will offer members a diverse and comprehensive discussion on what constitutes an effective job portfolio. Sarah will serve as the moderator. Whether you are seeking a new employer or new responsibilities in your current position, you will want to be at this meeting to learn some secrets from the ones who are doing the hiring. RSVP today at http://www.neostc.org.

October meeting: Portfolio Perspectives: A Panel Discussion

A portfolio is an important tool for all practitioners in our field, entry-level or experienced. At our October meeting, you'll have a chance to hear communication professionals from a variety of industries discuss how a well-assembled portfolio can give you an edge, whether you're seeking a new employer or new responsibilities.

Our panelists and their specialties include the following individuals:

- Scott Arnold (Penton Media), technical publishing
- Kris Henige (Parker Hannifin), manufacturing/IT

♦ Jill McCauslin (RADCom), consulting/contracting

♦ Stephanie Mohar (National City), training/instructional design

Moderating the discussion will be NEO STC Employment Committee chair Sarah Burke of Booz Allen Hamilton.

Date: Thursday, October 13, 2005

Place: AmeriSuites Hotel, Independence

The Consultants and Independent Contractors Special Interest Group (CIC-SIG) will meet immediately before the main meeting.

Upcoming events

♦ 10/13/2005: Monthly Meeting: Portfolio Panel.

♦ 10/19/2005: Networking Luncheon: The Winking Lizard, 1615 Main St., Peninsula.

♦ 10/19/2005: Webinar: Project Planning and Quality Checks: Part 1. No local host site yet.

♦ 10/26/2005: Webinar: Project Planning and Quality Checks: Part 2. No local host site yet.

♦ 11/7 to 11/9/2005: Conference: Adobe FrameMaker 2005 Chautauqua, in Raleigh, NC.

♦ 11/9/2005: Webinar: FlashHelp, WebHelp, Web Help… Help! No local host site yet.

Reminder: If you RSVP but do not show up for a meeting, it costs the chapter money — we have to pay up-front for meals. Please remember to let the Programs Committee know in advance if you have registered but cannot make it to a meeting.

Non-NEO STC events

♦ 10/18/2005: Northeast Ohio Chapter of the Usability Professionals' Assocation (http://www.neoupa.org/) presents a panel discussion on page content.

Adobe FrameMaker 2005 Chautauqua — STC Chapter Discount Program

The Adobe FrameMaker 2005 Chautauqua is fast approaching. The conference takes place November 7-9, 2005 in Raleigh, NC, on the heels of Adobe's release of a new version of the popular software Adobe FrameMaker 7.2. The event is expected to attract FrameMaker users from around the globe. Representatives from Adobe Systems, FrameMaker users with amazing publishing projects, certified FrameMaker experts, and other

content industry luminaries will deliver presentations of value on topics, including the following:

♦ Content management

♦ Darwin Information Typing Architecture (DITA)

♦ S1000D

♦ XML and FrameMaker

♦ Content reuse

♦ Translation issues

♦ Migrating to structured authoring

♦ And more!

Adobe's product management team will provide details on the future of FrameMaker, making it a worthwhile trip for most FrameMaker users. Additionally, Adobe will showcase its internal content management system that uses FrameMaker and a DITA-based DTD for publishing!

Bright Path Solutions, producers of the Adobe FrameMaker 2005 Chautauqua, is pleased to offer STC chapter members $50 off the regular admission price for a limited time. Members who register by October 27, 2005, may attend the conference for $645.

To take advantage of the offer, conference registrants must register online and enter their organization acronym and chapter name in the "discount code" field. The discount will be confirmed through e-mail. Online registration: http://www.travelthepath.com/confreg.html. The Web site also contains a presentation schedule and a list of presenters.

What is Adobe Framemaker?

Adobe FrameMaker is an enterprise-class authoring and publishing solution that combines the simplicity of word processing with the power of XML. FrameMaker provides WYSIWYG authoring in both a familiar word processing, style-tagging mode, or a fully structured environment optimized for the editing and production of valid XML or SGML. Today, hundreds of thousands of technical writers, editors, trainers, and engineering professionals rely on Adobe FrameMaker to create and deliver content traditional word processors are ill equipped to handle.

September Meeting Review: Neil Perlin

By Lisa Mileusnich (lmileusnich@parker.com)

NEO STC started off a new year with an exciting and informative presentation by Neil Perlin on short- and long-term technology trends. The main theme of the presentation was the importance of XML. In today's environment, there is little demand for XML-based documentation because HTML still suits most people's needs. However, we need to keep up with emerging technologies because those who don't will fall behind.

Unlike HTML, XML is not a fixed language. It is a set of rules that can be used to create new languages. While HTML rules are like Boston traffic laws (following them is optional), XML rules are enforceable. XML authoring tools include Arbortext Epic Editor, Blast Radius xMetal, Adobe FrameMaker, and Microsoft Word tools and add-ons. Macromedia RoboHelp is another option, but the future of that program is uncertain. Madcap Flare may also be an up-and-coming tool.

Structured information design and content management are other technologies that Neil recommends for short-term consideration. However, there is no one meaning for structured information, and simply defining the term could be problematic for many groups.

Neil discussed many long-term technologies, including Longhorn/Vista Help, Flash and Flash Lite, scalable vector graphics, metadata, blogs, wikis, RSS (Rich Site Summary), podcasting, mobile devices, "visual help," and virtual people.

According to Neil, the content and material that we create will need to work on different devices (such as PCs, laptops, and mobile phones) and be compatible with different modalities (such as voice or touchscreens). If your audience includes mobile users such as service providers in the field, you should think about mobile devices when you create content.

"Visual help" is graphic documentation with little text, including demos or interactive simulations that are based on screen "movies." The user learns by viewing, then doing. Visual help is created with tools such as Captivate and Camtasia.

The presentation concluded with an emphasis on content and business. We don't know which technologies will take off in the future, so technical communicators need to look at business issues for clues. Neil said that you should familiarize yourself with your company's strategic direction and be involved in setting that direction. Involved writers can demonstrate their value by explaining how documentation goals fit with the company's goals. "Cool" technologies like content management might be seen as replacing documentation, but you should not invest in and learn a technology just because it's considered cool. Focus on your users' information needs, not on a new tool's capabilities.

We are very appreciative that Neil could share his knowledge with us, and we hope to lure him back to Northeast Ohio someday with the promise of an excellent barbecue!

Congratulations to new senior members and welcome to new members!

Congratulations to these members for earning senior member status. Senior members have belonged to STC for five years:

♦ Mark Blake

♦ Robert E. Clark

♦ Leslie Gordon

♦ Denise Kadilak

♦ Christopher Lukachko

♦ Thomas Schmidt

♦ Amy Vogt

Welcome to our new members! We hope to see you soon.

♦ Susan A. Ceracky

♦ Paul G. Happoldt

♦ Ben A. Johnson

♦ Gail E. McKay

♦ Sandy Williams

Member profile: Sarah Burke

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

Sarah Burke makes a great contribution to our chapter, serving for the second year as the Employment Committee Chair. She heads up the effort you see when you go to the http://www.neostc.org/jobs/openings.php Web page. [NOTE: As of 2014, employment resources have shifted to the chapter's LinkedIn presence. Please refer to the current chapter website for details.]

Sarah devotes several hours a week to keep the NEO STC employment pages up-to-date. Part of her work is

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to line up volunteers who search an assigned Web site for technical communication-related jobs that are posted each week to our Web site. She personally searches two of these jobs Web sites weekly! Now that the jobs database, which helps automate the process of entering job openings into the Web site, is up and running, her committee will focus on other initiatives, like connecting with local employers and updating and expanding the employment resources on our Web site.

Holding a Master of Technical and Scientific Communication from Miami University (Ohio), Sarah also has a BA in history with a minor in English from the University of Dayton. Since graduate school, Sarah has worked as a technical writer at a Web software company in Washington, DC, and is currently a technical editor for Booz Allen Hamilton.

For the past three years at Booz Allen Hamilton, a large management and technology consulting firm, Sarah has supported internal staff, virtually, across the firm. She edits client deliverables of all kinds — from government proposals and marketing presentations to business case analyses and reports. Sarah also designs graphics, develops templates, and lays out documents. Organizationally, she is part of an economic and business analysis team that serves federal government clients. In this role, she has learned much about federal financial management practices, government funding and budgeting processes, and legislation and compliance issues.

To prepare herself for the technical communication field, Sarah completed internships in the corporate communication department of a wholesaling company and for a freelance technical communicator. Sarah also learned a lot about the technical communication field through her graduate teaching assistantship. At Miami, she taught two semesters of an upper-level technical writing class to students in applied scientific and technical fields.

Before moving to Cleveland and joining NEO STC, Sarah was a member of three other STC chapters. She served in various capacities — from newsletter editor to Vice President to Education Committee member — in the Miami University Student chapter, the Southwestern Ohio chapter, and the Washington, DC, chapter.

Currently living in Fairview Park, Sarah and husband, Brian, own a house they are remodeling. Sarah likes Irish, classical, and jazz music and plays the piano. She and her husband also participate in Irish set dancing.

Announcing this year's competition

Thanks to Candace Wintering and Cheryl Bennett for offering to manage the chapter competition.

Have you or your company produced technical communication products that you think are worthy of awards? Would you like your work to be recognized by your peers? This is your invitation to participate in the following Society for Technical Communication (STC) competitions being held by the Northeast Ohio (NEO) chapter:

♦ Online Communication Competition

♦ Technical Publications Competition

The deadline for both competitions is Friday, October 28, 2005.

Entry forms and additional information are available online at http://www.neostc.org/comp/index.htm.

Member-only content on NEO STC Web site

[NOTE: As of 2016, the current NEO STC website does not have password-protected content.]

Brian Baddour has added a great new feature to the NEO STC Web site: premium content. This content is only available to STC members.

So what is premium content? Here is a sampling:

♦ The Microsoft PowerPoint slides from Neil Perlin's 9/8/2005 presentation

♦ eDoc Alphabet Soup — a glossary of acronyms, neologisms, and other "gibberish" from Neil Perlin

♦ Mike Bates' Usability Live presentation

Coming soon will be a list of employers in the region who hire technical communicators. We are also looking for ideas for the type of content you would like to see in this area.

Here's how to get to the premium content:

1. Open the Web site at http://www.neostc.org.

2. Click Premium in the left-column menu.

3. If you did not receive a user name and password, contact the Webmaster at webmaster@neostc.org

4. Click OK.

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Web site news

Our Web site is really shining these days! Webalizer reports that our chapter Web site served 12,698 Web pages — just during August. The Job Openings page was served 2,251 times. The Calendar page was served 298 times and the page detailing Mr. Perlin's talk was served 204 times. Sometimes those pages are bookmarked, other times they are referred by search engines — Google sent about 350 visitors our way; Yahoo sent us 89 more.

Web usage is just one measure of the vibrancy of our Web site. Another is e-mail: In the last 8 weeks, the Web committee has clocked 233 messages on topics from Web updates and corrections, to advice for our community, to enhancements.

The last Webinar was a good one! Brian Baddour and Candace Wintering's employer, Quadax Inc. locally hosted a Web/phone seminar on the Web site editing software tool, Macromedia Dreamweaver®. NEO STC members attended free, thanks to a local education initiative from our community.

The "Really Simple Syndication" of news that Mr. Perlin talked about is now available on our home page. International STC news is blended in with our community's own news and events. Google reports that only a dozen other STC communities in the world are using this technology. To accommodate this enhancement, our new home page needed a slightly new address — www.neostc.org/index.htm is now http://www.neostc.org/index.php. Don't worry though — www.neostc.org by itself still works just fine.

A new Web site design template, including a reengineered cascading stylesheet (CSS), has been applied to most of the NEO STC Web site. You shouldn't notice too much change. Things should just plain work better. However, style gurus are welcome to review the stylesheet and offer suggestions, and others are encouraged to study it. The Web committee humbly recommends that technical communicators use style sheets for any document set (example: Web site) over 10 pages, with larger document sets deserving more structure, and thus more detailed stylesheets.

Each year, with the changing of the guard, our ...@neostc.org e-mail addresses change. The changes to the addresses went smoothly, and have been documented as part of the current administration's internal procedures initiative.

Site content continued getting updates (and a couple of corrections, too). The Jobs pages, Lines & Letters newsletter, and Calendar continue to be the most dynamic.

Extended reduced rates for STC's new Training Program

Save on registration for STC's new Training Program, Oct. 20-21 in Arlington, Virginia. The rates offered for advanced registration have been extended--there's still time to register at the lower price!

Everyone who attends will choose from one of five courses, each taught by a leader in the technical communication field.

You can register for the program at the lower rates until October 18.

For more information, please visit www.stc.org/training.

Handy hint: Retro organizing with PocketMod — The Free Disposable Personal Organizer!

By Kim Lindsey (klindsey@parker.com)

I stumbled across a little gem on the internet: the PocketMod (http://www.pocketmod.com/).

What is a PocketMod? In the words of its creator:

> "The PocketMod is a new way to keep yourself organized. Let's face it, PDAs are too expensive and cumbersome, and [planner]s are bulky and hard to carry around. Nothing beats a folded up piece of paper. That is, until now. ... The PocketMod is a small book with guides on each page. These guides or templates, combined with a unique folding style, enable a normal piece of paper to become the ultimate note card."

Here's how it works:

The Flash application on the Web site guides you through three steps to create and print a customized eight-page notebook not much bigger than a business card.

1. Select the layout of each page from the dozens of layouts available - anything from calendars to shopping lists, storyboards to music staffs.

2. Print.

3. Follow the special folding instructions. (There's even a video demo for the fumble-fingered.)

And voilà! — your own PocketMod.

Maybe you are doing just fine with your planner or PDA, but I'll bet you've got a friend or family member whose life could be revolutionized by this wonder of minimalism.

You have to applaud the PocketMod's creator for his/her ingenuity: an idea so simple it seems obvious, that is generating a lot of interest on tech-oriented blogs.

So print yourself a book of mods - "Happy organizing!"

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/openings.php).

Technical writing

♦ Hyland Software in Westlake is seeking a Technical Writer to research product functionality for its OnBase software and write content for online help files and user manuals.

♦ ECRM — an industry leader in conferencing services — has an immediate opening for a Technical Writer in Cleveland. Duties will include working with software developers, systems engineers, and marketing personnel to develop system design specifications, user manuals, and training manuals for distribution and web applications.

Web Design

♦ Streetrod Stuff of Ohio (Akron) is looking for a Website Software Developer/Webmaster to develop and maintain an Internet sales company (Classic Car Parts) Web site.

♦ GovTech Solutions an Akron-based Internet design and development company, is seeking a qualified Web Graphic Designer to join its development team on a contract or full-time basis. The position requires experience in concept design, web composition, professional design style, and understanding of graphic optimization.

Training/Instructional Design

♦ Progressive is seeking an Instructional Designer III to determine training needs and create, design, develop, and maintain new training materials. Position is 50% instructional design/curriculum development, 20% curriculum implementation, 20% project management, 5% research/needs analysis, and 5% continuous learning.

♦ The Cleveland Clinic Foundation has an opening for a Multimedia Instructional Designer to design and develop interactive learning programs delivered via the web.

♦ WVIZ/PBS and WCPN 90.3 ideastream are looking for an On-Line Learning Coordinator responsible for developing a new strategic business of online learning and coordinating the WVIZ/PBS Teacherline online initiative.

Graphic Design

♦ Hospital Specialty Company, a leading manufacturer and marketer of high quality personal care and odor management products, has an outstanding opportunity for a Senior Graphic Designer in its Highland Heights office.

♦ The Cleveland Clinic, one of the nation's top four hospitals, is seeking a Senior Designer to join its Marketing Communications Design team. Designer will design a wide variety of print material for both consumer and medical audiences.

Editing

♦ ASM International in Geauga County is seeking an Editorial Assistant to acquire, track, and process content for electronic and print publications developed by ASM International.

♦ Leader Publications, publisher of the West Side Leader and South Side News Leader newspapers in Fairlawn, is looking for a Copy Editor with excellent editing and proofreading skills.

Communications/Marketing

♦ Aqua Ohio, Inc., a subsidiary of Aqua America, Inc., the nation's largest investor-owned water utility, is seeking a Communications Coordinator to develop internal/external communications, execute a media relations program, plan special events, and coordinate the company's sponsorship and participation in philanthropic initiatives.

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- Edgepark Surgical in Twinsburg is looking for a Marketing Copywriter/Proofreader to develop all sales and marketing material content and create brand and corporate standards to achieve consistent messaging across all media.

- WHITTMANHART Interactive, a digital agency that focuses on helping clients leverage and optimize interactive marketing, is looking for a smart, energetic Senior Copywriter who understands the Internet and is ready to take his or her copywriting skills to the next level for the Cleveland office.

If your company has a job opening, let Sarah Burke (sarahwilsonburke@hotmail.com), Nams Malik (nmalik@software.rockwell.com), or Sherri Henkin (sleah47@juno.com) know. Job listings on the NEOSTC Web site are free and reach a targeted audience!

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Love it? Hate it? Let us know! Contact us: newsletter@neostc.org