Lines & Letters
Northeast Ohio STC Newsletter

President's Corner

Hi all,

The 2013-2014 year got off to a terrific start at Case Western Reserve University where Jennifer Loudiana presented "Google Apps: Stay organized in your office, at home, or on the go." We had terrific attendance, and the presentation provided information we would be able to use and apply on our job the next day.

NEO STC Competitions are now open. Competition entries receive detailed evaluation and are a great opportunity to get feedback from your peers and recognition for your work. You have until October 18 to turn in your submissions.

We are looking forward to our 2013 NEO STC Workshop Content Lifecycle and Topic-Based Authoring Workshop. This workshop will share information on how to define a content strategy, use the content lifecycle as a strategic collaboration tool, define and meet single sourcing challenges, understand topic-based authoring, prepare for structured authoring, use methodologies and solutions for content management. For additional information, download the flyer here: http://www.neostc.org/cms/download/NEO_STC_Workshop_Oct2013.pdf. Thanks so much to Amy Vogt and Tricia Spayer, who are organizing the workshop.

As always, if you are interested in getting more involved as a volunteer, please feel free to contact me.

Paul Holland

PS. This month's lady is the Queen Elizabeth. Some consider her the greatest liner, though there are three ships eligible for that honor, and perhaps a fourth. She was launched during the heat of the war and her initial voyages carrying troops between the war zones were without escort, as were her sister's, the Queen Mary. Her last duty during the war was bringing home "the most precious cargo of all," war brides to America. Here are three brides (France and Belgium), with a Red Cross worker, beneath their new flag. To give you a sense of the scale, there were four major liners and a host of smaller liners engaged in this operation. The Queen Elizabeth alone conducted seven voyages in 1946 bringing brides and children to North America. She could carry more than 2,000 passengers in one trip.

NEO STC Competition Winners: Experiences at the International Competition

By Barb Philbrick and Nicole Derr

Three of the submissions to the 2012-2013 NEO STC Competitions were sent on to the STC International Competition. At International, two of them won even more accolades!

Both of the submissions were produced by Brad Lindamood, Dave Howell, and Theresa Marchwinski of Quest Diagnostics.

♦ The Care360 Linking and Single Sign-On Programmer Reference, which received the Distinguished award from NEO STC, received an award of Excellence at International.

♦ The Quest Diagnostics Data Exchange Services Orders and Results Programmer Reference, which received an award of Distinguished from NEO STC, received an award of Merit at International.

Brad, Theresa, and Dave were kind enough to share some of their experiences with us:

"First of all, the Quest Diagnostics Technical Communications team would like to thank the NEO STC chapter for hosting an excellent competition last year!

"We decided to participate again last year, after having not participated in the STC competition for several years. Most of our team members have both submitted and judged entries in the past, but due mostly to the economic climate (which resulted in the cancellation of our local chapter's competition), it was becoming increasingly difficult to justify the funding. Since we've always considered our STC involvement to be important to our profession and to our own careers, we decided to give it a try again this year. We submitted five separate entries, and were fortunate enough to have four of those entries receive Distinguished or Excellence awards, making them eligible for the International Summit competition.

"As a team, we decided to submit the three Distinguished entries for International Summit judging, and we were fortunate to have two of those go on to win International awards — one Excellence and one Merit! The competition format and submission process has evolved a bit over the years, but the importance of the competition and what we learn from it is always very beneficial to us. We participate in the competitions, both regional and international, for several reasons:

- It helps build a team bond, since the entries we submit reflect upon everyone on the team, not just those who choose to submit. A large part of each entry is built upon our corporate brand and format guidelines, but is also driven by our team's ever-evolving styles, templates, and procedures.

- It helps us learn how our team's work measures up against our peers, as well as the industry in general. Following each competition, we thoroughly review each judge's comments, and then meet to decide how we can implement across-the-board changes to improve the quality and usefulness of our end products.

- It instills a sense of pride in our team, which then motivates us to continue to strive to improve the quality of our work.

- It reflects very well on our team within the company, as reflected in congratulatory corporate emails that are distributed within our division. We've all struggled in the past to earn the respect of ourselves and our department, and the awards are one way that we have managed to build a very solid reputation and respect within the company.

- It demonstrates the support and confidence of our team's Manager and Director, who understand the importance of the competition, and are willing to "go to bat" for us to fund the entry fees and allow us the time to prepare our entries.

- Beyond the company, it also instills pride and confidence in the individuals who helped create the product, and helps each person solidify his or her own career. While we all love our jobs and appreciate the company, we also understand the importance of continually expanding our own skill sets to remain viable in an increasingly competitive workplace.

"After a positive experience and result in this year's competition, we definitely look forward to continuing our participation in the STC, as well as in the regional and (hopefully) international competitions in the future!"

The complete list of STC International Summit Award Competition Winners for 2013 is available at http://www.stc.org/component/content/article/5-recognition/1385-2013-intsummitaward-winners

WritersUA Special "Twofer" Offer

By Denise Kadilak

WritersUA is offering a special two-for-one (http://www.welinske.com/a-two-for-one-register-for-writersua-east-and-west-is-free/) registration deal for its East (http://writersua.com/conference/about-the-conference/) and West (http://www.welinske.com/writersua-west-2014/) conferences. For $995, you can buy a registration to both this month's eastern conference in Newport, RI, and next year's western conference in Palm Springs, CA.

The WritersUA mission, as stated on its website, is "to continue to provide an event with the most comprehensive and timely information specifically designed for user assistance professionals." To this end, organizer Joe Welinske offers a number of diverse and timely topics. For example, the eastern conference includes topics ranging from content reuse, to CSS3, to SEO for user assistance. Presentations for the western conference are still being arranged, but to date, I know I will be hosting a MadCap Flare workshop (intermediate level) and presenting a case study on how my company uses the Global Project Link feature in Flare to help manage a very large content library. Additional details of the western conference should be available on the website (http://www.welinske.com/writersua-west-2014/) in the coming months.

Membership Points – Recognition

By Janean Voss and Claudia Thompson

Did you know that you can earn points as a member of the NEO STC chapter, and earn recognition from the chapter?

The vitality of NEO STC depends on the efforts of its members and volunteers, and the Membership Points Program is one way the chapter can show its appreciation for those efforts.

Methods for earning points:

- Attending chapter events (program meetings, workshops, book club, networking lunches, networking socials): 1 point each

- Volunteering on a chapter committee (programs, academic relations, newsletter, website, sponsorship/advertising, book club, networking, membership, and educational workshops/webinars): 3 points for each chapter committee

- Volunteering to be on the chapter Executive Board (Vice President, Treasurer, Secretary, and Immediate Past President): 3 points for each board position (Note: The chapter President is exempt from receiving a chapter award)

- Volunteering at the STC International level: 3 points

- Writing/submitting a unique newsletter article to the NEO STC newsletter or STC International publication: 1 point for each article submitted (no more than 1 point per month)

- Starting and maintaining a new initiative within the chapter: 1 point

- Representing the chapter at a third-party event (for example, speaking at a local college about NEO STC): 1 point

- Submitting an entry to the NEO STC Annual Technical Communication Competition: 1 point

- Judging for the NEO STC Annual Technical Communication Competition: 1 point

- Presenting a topic for a program meeting: 1 point

- Submitting a speaking proposal to present a topic for a program meeting: 1 point

- Judging scholarship entry applications: 1 point

- Donating an item to the annual raffle: 1 point

- Additional points may be awarded by the chapter president at his/her discretion for contributions not identified above.

Volunteer and contribute benefits:

- Get personal fulfillment by giving back to the profession

- Practice leadership skills and techniques to share with colleagues

- Meet others from your community and industry

- Stay up-to-date on industry trends and best practices

- Contribute to your chapter's success

Program period:

- Earn points from July 1 through April 30 each year

- Members with the highest number of points are recognized by the chapter president and community at the NEO STC Annual Awards Banquet and Election each May.

Recognition awards:

- Volunteer of the Year:

- Number awarded each year: 1 (or 2, if there is a tie)

- Description: Chapter member who achieves the highest number of points during the program period overall. Awarded by the chapter president for the member's outstanding efforts to help the chapter achieve high goals during the year.

- A chapter member may receive this recognition more than once as a member.

- Committee of the Year:

- Number awarded each year: 1 (or 2, if there is a tie)

- Description: Awarded by the chapter president to chapter committee volunteers for the committee's outstanding efforts to help the chapter achieve high goals during the year.

- A chapter committee may receive this recognition more than once as a committee.

- Rookie Volunteer of the Year:

- Number awarded each year: 1 (or 2, if there is a tie)

- Description: A first-year member/volunteer who achieves the highest number of points amongst their peers during the chapter year. Awarded by the chapter president for the individual's outstanding efforts to help the chapter achieve high goals.

- A chapter member that qualifies may only receive this recognition once as a member.

- Volunteer Recognition Achievement:

- Number awarded each year: Varies (usually 3 – 5)

- Description: Recognition for chapter members who achieved a high number of points in the chapter, but did not receive the Volunteer of the Year, Committee of the Year, or Rookie Volunteer of the Year awards. Awarded by the chapter president for their volunteer efforts and active participation during the year.

- A chapter member may receive this award more than once as a member.

- President's Achievement Award:

- Number awarded each year: 0 – 2. This award may not be given each year.

- Description: Awarded by the chapter president to a member that has provided consistent contributions

to keep the chapter running smoothly over the years.

♦ A chapter member may only receive this recognition once as a member.

More information about our awards, including awards from STC International, are identified here: http://www.neostc.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=25&Itemid=29

Our current chapter secretary, Claudia Thompson, receives notification from the respective committees and logs the points during the year for STC-related activities. If you represent the chapter at a third-party event (for example, speaking at a local college about NEO STC), notify Claudia about the activity so that she knows to log it.

If you are interested in volunteer opportunities and contributing to the chapter, contact our current chapter president, Paul Holland.

A New Template for Branching Scenarios

by Kim Lindsey, e-Learning & Instructional Design Manager, Cinecraft Productions; STC Senior Member, 2013-14 NEO STC Sponsorship Chair

Over the past several years, e-learning thought leaders have increasingly recommended the use of branching scenarios and simulations in business training.

Courses based on branching scenarios expose the learner (i.e., the user) to a situation or task that mimics what they face on the job; their responses trigger consequences similar to what happens in the real world, moving the action forward.

In essence, they learn by "virtually" doing. Although branching scenarios are no longer cutting-edge, it's still difficult to find document-based storyboard templates that align well with this instructional format. This article addresses this need and provides a downloadable MS Word template file.

The "Branching Storyboard" template begins with "Instructions for Reviewers" and a clickable Table of Contents.

Non-branching content is presented in a table format common to many e-learning storyboard templates. Since reviewers might be unfamiliar with a scenario-based learning strategy, the template provides guidelines for reviewers before the first branching element.

A high-level flowchart of the whole scenario comes next. Labels on the shapes and connectors use abbreviated text to save space, and the "Success" path is indicated in red.

The table layout for the branched content is different from that for non-branching parts of the course. Following an optional descriptive "Setup" for the story of the scenario, numbered "Challenges" are grouped with the "Choices" available to the learner, as well as the "Consequences" triggered when they select that Choice.

"Feedback" is provided for Choices where the Consequence is the end of a path, including the Success terminus.
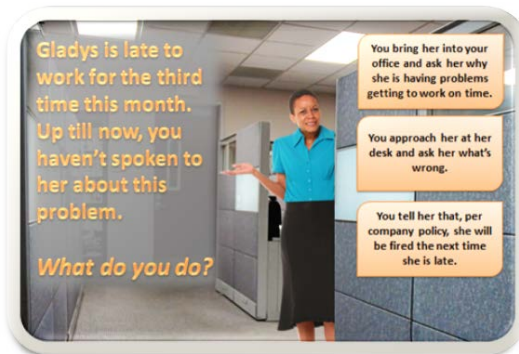
Throughout, there are spaces for development notes, questions directed toward reviewers, etc. My team has used this template successfully on a number of projects, but it will always be a work in progress, continually being refined and improved.

Please download the file and adapt it for your own purposes – and be sure to let me and the rest of NEO STC know about your experience and any improvements you make! *[This file is no longer available online; please contact the author of this article if you'd like a copy of the template:* kim@cinecraft.com*.)*

Five Questions with the NEO STC PR Committee

The newsletter is featuring a different committee each month (using a Q&A format) to learn about what they do and how they help our chapter.

The highlighted committee for this month is Public Relations, represented by Sharon Jendrisak. We asked her five questions:

1. What is the PR Committee?

The PR committee is in charge of the communications that go out to the members of the community, as well as others who would have an interest in its events and communications.

2. Why is the PR Committee important to the chapter?

The PR committee informs the general public and its members of all upcoming events in the chapter. We use Constant Contact for a way to communicate via email to many of our audience members, and we also utilize social media such as LinkedIn and Facebook to talk about upcoming events and discussions.

3. What tasks do you work on as part of the PR Committee?

We work with several other committees (programs, socials, networking lunches, website, etc.) to gather pertinent information about upcoming events; we create Constant Contact messages and send them out; we post to Facebook and LinkedIn.

4. How did you get involved with this committee?

I wanted to get on a committee that would help me dust off some of my communication skills that I learned while in college. It has given me a way to use my creative outlets, while still maintaining the integrity of the chapter.

5. What is your favorite PR method?

I think Social Media is a great way to communicate in today's business world. It allows for quick hits that have the potential to reach very large audiences in a broad range of generations.

Thank you to the PR Committee for your hard work and dedication to STC! If you would like more information about this committee, please contact Sharon Jendrisak. If you would like to volunteer with the PR Committee or any of our other chapter committees, please contact chapter president Paul Holland.

Trends in Documentation – 2012 Research (Part 1 of 2)

By Tricia Spayer

Last year for my position at Pressco, I was tasked to look into what other companies have done with documentation over the last 10 years and to get an idea of where they're headed in the future. I researched through online sources, through STC's publication archives and Summit proceedings and recordings, and I interviewed several individuals. I reported my findings to my company and am summarizing this report for you, leaving out names to protect copyrights and privacy rights.

How technical documentation was created over the last 10 years

Documentation trends of technical communicators over the last 10 years have included:

♦ Producing linear, single-use content. These were written in Word, FrameMaker, Ventura, and other software. One long document was designed to flow from beginning to end.

♦ Switching from printing manuals to producing them in PDF format and/or CD distribution.

♦ Moving manuals online, with help topics replacing manuals.

♦ We went from paper, to PDFs, to online help, from "next to the product," to "directly in the product" interface (context-sensitive help and descriptions).

♦ Becoming part of the development process by contributing user-friendly options to user interface terminology.

♦ Advocating for users and becoming user experience professionals.

♦ Focusing on Single Sourcing and Content Management. This means that instead of writing linear books, we began to create topics, and started using tools that used XML and database technology.

♦ Separating content from format through SGML/ XML. When you write in Word or PowerPoint, for example, and make something bold, that format becomes part of the content. When you write in SGML/ XML-based tools, things like bold, Heading 1, etc. are separate from the content. This means that content can be

published for print, for web, and other purposes, without re-formatting. It also allows translators to just translate content without touching format.

♦ Moving to XML as an authoring source, structured authoring as an approach, and automating publishing tasks.

♦ Moving documentation to a wiki. This means that companies can allow appropriate contributors to update the documentation as needed. For example, a field service engineer encounters a problem, identifies a solution, and wants to share that information with the remaining engineers. He simply adds content to the wiki.

Part 2 of this article will be published in November. Tune in to the next newsletter to find out where documentation is going in the next 10 years and what it means for you!

In the Spotlight: Kathleen Ruggeri

By Lynn Nickels

Kathleen Ruggeri has been a member of STC for more than a quarter of a century! She began her student membership status 27 years ago, while a student at Bowling Green State University, where she obtained a B.A. in Scientific and Technical Communication. She then went on to get her M.B.A at John Carroll University. Kathleen's professional career spans 25 years.

She started at Allen-Bradley, Inc. as a technical communicator in 1988, and has worked in several supervisory and management positions up through to the present, where she currently manages information developers, information architects, and editors in the Mayfield Heights office of Rockwell Automation.

Rockwell eventually purchased the Allen-Bradley brand and Kathleen was able to continue her career path without interruption in the industrial automation field. Kathleen's career has crossed over both technical and marketing disciplines. She has been a marketing manager, as well as a commercial programs manager, in addition to her current role as a technical communications manager. In 2009, Kathleen was recognized by Rockwell Automation with an Internal Patent Award of Merit for her work on "Content Scope and Content Plan Documents: a means to identify content reuse and plan information deliverables." This was a way to further solidify the recognition of technical communications as a technical discipline within the company.

Her work with STC has been just as extensive as her professional accomplishments. She has participated in the STC International Summit several times, and has been a frequent presenter for the local NEO STC Chapter, presenting for the following programs: Advantages of a Technical Communication Department SharePoint Site in 2012, Project Tracking and Metrics Using SharePoint in 2010, Creating a Controlled Vocabulary in 2008, STC NEO Chapter Program: Timely Topics in Technical Communication in 2006, and STC NEO Chapter Program: Corporate Culture and Technical Communication, also in 2006. She is viewed as a subject matter expert in the use of SharePoint to define metrics in the management of technical documentation. Her service roles for NEO STC are many.

She has been a Publications Competitions judge several times and served on the Advisory Committee and as an editing instructor for Tri-C's Technical Communication Certificate Program. She has received numerous STC awards, and in 2000, received the NEO STC Volunteer of the Year Award. She received an Award of Achievement and one of Merit from the International Publications Competition, Best of Show from the Southeastern Michigan chapter, and an Award of Excellence from the NEO STC chapter. She also continues servicing STC by encouraging her employees to participate at the local and international levels, and ensures that Rockwell Automation supports their efforts as well.

On a personal note, Kathleen enjoys playing the saxophone and has been a regular musician in the Rockwell Automation Christmas Band. And, although her professional roles are very important, Kathleen views her role has mother to daughters, Tess and Margaret Ann, and wife to husband, Rich, as her most fulfilling.

Considerations in Creating a DITA Style Guide (Part 1 of 2)

By Kevin Tousey

Preface

Discussions centering around the Darwin Information Typing Architecture (DITA) standard are instructive in learning the basics of topic-based authoring. For those who've never worked in a DITA environment, as I have not, they provide insight on a model for understanding the work-flow and difficulties associated with module development and writing styles in a disjointed, but coordinated environment. This article suggests one way of overcoming these difficulties.

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Creating topics for your DITA content management system requires consistency and adherence to a common style. To ensure compliance with this principal, create a company-wide DITA style guide with input from authors and stakeholders. Tony Self, in his book, "The DITA Style Guide: Best Practices for Authors," describes the role of this document as promoting consistency in the "semantic identification of content elements."

At first glance, you might think of this step in your DITA implementation as a minor detail. When tempted to skip this step, however, stop and consider the consequences of reviewing all of your content later on, then having to modify it to meet updated style guide requirements.

Formatting

Typically the format of your text, headers, front matter, glossaries, etc. is dictated by a style sheet. So these details are omitted from this guide. Instead, formatting considerations might include things like:

♦ Approximate module length should be from a few paragraphs to the length of a short magazine article

♦ Flesch-Kincaid readability rating should yield an eighth-grade level

♦ Elements and attributes for content indexing should include:

♦ <Sectiondiv> and <Bodydiv> to index-related tasks

♦ <Shortdesc> to organize any information used for web content (including audience type)

♦ <related links> connect related information

♦ Content classifications and their applicability as task, concept, or reference type

Language and Content

Content requirements are critical to the organization of information and clarity of documents. These considerations will vary, but should include the following items:

♦ Verify uniqueness of content (repetitions often require updating in multiple locations)

♦ Focus topics around user benefits, not product features

♦ Always consider the user environment and work tasks first, then explain product features last

♦ Procedural tasks:

♦ Include just enough contextual information in the first paragraph to describe the purpose and mentally prepare the reader

♦ Exclude reference and concept information that needs to be included elsewhere

♦ Use active tense and second person

♦ Constrain each step to a single activity

♦ Separate topics into task content or conceptual content (or break down topics that try to do both)

♦ Keep maximum number of words per sentence to less than 25

♦ Paragraphs should contain no more than than five sentences

♦ Headings should use imperative verbs to describe task/procedural topics or noun phrases to describe conceptual information

♦ Complex or specialized language should only be used for keywords and SEO (and should be defined for less complex audiences in a document glossary). Otherwise, use plain language, following the typical guidelines for technical communication

♦ Consider adopting a controlled natural language (CNL) or other system to reduce the vocabulary available to writers.

Part 2 of this article (including Processes) will be published in the November newsletter. Stay tuned!

Editor's Newsletter Notes: Smooth Sailing Ahead

By Jeanette Evans (Lines & Letters Co-Editor)

As we go through our 2013-1024 year, it looks like we are off to a great start, especially with Paul Holland steering our NEO STC ship.

Steering our ship is, of course, a nautical metaphor, especially appropriate as Paul said about his first President's Column – "I don't want to use a headshot. I am a maritime historian and will change out the maritime image each month." About the image he used in that column, he said, "Be nice. The lady in that image is a grand old dame of the sea. She has protected us for many years, and we owe her." He may have outdone himself with the great images and bits of history in this issue.

In looking some more at Paul's background, we see it includes being Marketing Communications Manager for Federal Equipment Company in Cleveland (http://www.fedequip.com/default.aspx). Having served as NEO STC Website chairperson and on the team for the Region Five Conference in the past, Paul also served as co-manager of the STC Marketing Communications SIG.

In addition, he served as Chapter Secretary for the Lone Star Chapter (http://www.stc-dfw.org/cms/), is active in the Cleveland Chapter of the National Marine Corps Business Network (http://www.nmcbn.com/), and is Marketing Communications Writer and Graphics/Web Designer for BlueGray Communications (http://www.bluegraycomm.com/).

A Hiram College graduate, Paul has served as webmaster for NEO STC and ably answers our Joomla questions, as many of you know. His volunteer activities include work with EyeCare International – an Ohio-based initiative that provides eye care service to Central and South America, most notably El Salvador, where Paul does field work. He also volunteers as a docent/graphic designer for the Steamship William G. Mather Museum.

We look forward to him being captain of the NEO STC ship for this term, and I personally look forward to more of the nautical images. I also look forward to more great articles like the ones in this issue. It goes without saying that these kinds of great articles should help us "chart our course" for the future.

Let's also not forget that we are always looking for photos from our various events. Thank you to Joann Rasmussen for providing this photo of our September speaker, Jennifer Loudiana.
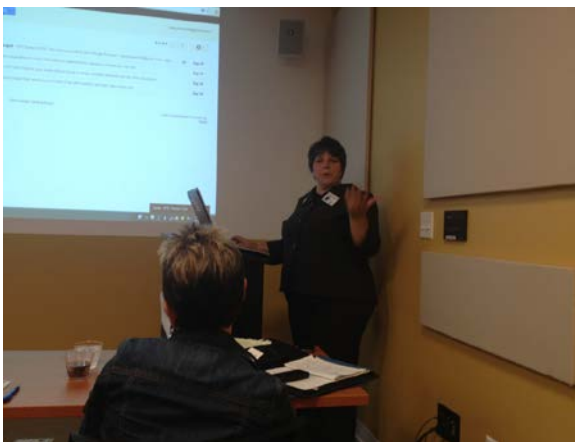
Thanks also go to Jennifer for her very well-received presentation. She spoke on the topic of Google Apps. In

her current position, she works as an Education and Training Specialist in the Information Technology Services (ITS) Division at Case Western Reserve University. She is a Senior Member of STC.