Ragged Left

September 2001

Vol. 15, No. 9

THE SOCIETY FOR TECHNICAL COMMUNICATION   BERKELEY CHAPTER

Translate from FrameMaker to Acrobat—and Back!

Join us at our September meeting to acquire some top level FrameMaker–to–Acrobat skills as we welcome internationally known expert Shlomo Perets of MicroType. Mr. Perets will demonstrate PDF problems, pitfalls and deficiencies and their remedies. He will be discussing issues like display and print quality, find and search functionality, bookmarks and links, testing principles and checklists.

Mr. Perets has focused primarily on developing FrameMaker and online documentation applications since 1993. He trains technical communicators to get the most out of FrameMaker and Acrobat, separately and together. He is the developer of the SP TimeSavers and SP Bookmark Controller. Shlomo is a regular speaker at PDF and FrameMaker conferences and is a PlanetPDF columnist, where his series "PDF Best Practices" is also being published. Mr. Perets is giving his seminar on Advanced FrameMaker–to–Acrobat Techniques in San Francisco at Caxton on September 13-14.

In October, Eric De Mund will be getting us up to speed on "Linux for Technical Writers". This is the last call for questions! For those of you who have sent yours along, many thanks. They've been forwarded on to Eric. If there is something specific that you would like Mr. De Mund to discuss, send your questions to *programs@stc-berkeley.org* and his talk will be tailored with your concerns in mind.

Annual Touchstone Competition Nears

Touchstone 2001 Technical Communication Competition Seeks Entries and Volunteers

BY PATRICK LUFKIN

Touchstone 2001, the California technical communication competition, is seeking both entries and volunteers. Sponsored by the Northern California STC chapters, the competition is expected to draw several hundred entries. Over the coming months, dozens of volunteers will be needed to process and judge entries, and to perform the many other tasks needed to make the competition a success.

Touchstone takes its name from a technique used in mineral assaying. Ores are scratched against a fine-grained stone, and judged by the color of the streak they left. "Touchstone" has come to mean a criterion used to assess value.

Each year Touchstone works to promote the profession, foster excellence in technical communication, and ensure that outstanding work gets the recognition it deserves.

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About the STC

TECHNICAL COMMUNICATION is the bridge between those who create ideas and those who use them. Conveying scientific and technical information clearly, precisely, and accurately is an essential occupation in all sectors of business and government.

STC has more than 20,000 members and 155 chapters world-wide. Its members include writers, editors, artists, illustrators, photographers, audiovisual specialists, managers, supervisors, educators, students, employees, and consultants.

STC strives to:

- Advance the theory and practice of technical communication.
- Promote awareness of trends and technology in technical communication.
- Aid the educational and professional development of its members.

Membership

Membership is open to everyone. Regular membership is $110/year, with an additional $15 enrollment fee the first year. Student membership is $45/year.

To receive additional information and an application form, via mail or email:

- Call our chapter voicemail number 510-466-5464 and leave a message.
- Send email to *bkymbrs@stc.org*.
- Send mail to STC-Berkeley, PO Box 1007, Berkeley CA 94701-1007.

Advertising Rates

Page $70, 2/3 page $50, 1/2 page $40, 1/3 page $30, 1/6 page $20, business card $10. STC members receive 20% off. Ad deadline is the fifteenth of the month prior to publication.

Submissions

Ragged Left publishes original articles and illustrations. We edit them to meet our needs. You retain copyright but grant every STC publication royalty-free permission to reproduce the article or illustration in print or any other medium. Please contact the editor for details of how to submit articles and illustrations.

Deadline for unsolicited submissions is the 21st of the month preceding publication.

Other STC publications are hereby granted permission to reprint articles from *Ragged Left*, provided such reprints credit the author and the specific *Ragged Left* issue, and a copy of any publication containing such a reprint is sent to the *Ragged Left* editor.

STC-Berkeley Chapter Meeting Details

Next meeting: Wednesday, September 12. The Silver Dragon Restaurant serves STC-Berkeley members delicious Chinese food. The meeting begins at 6 P.M. with networking and conversation, and dinner at 6:30 P.M. Chapter business and announcements are made around 7:15 P.M., followed by the speaker.

If you want to eat dinner, reservations are required and *must* be received (by Ruth) no later than 12:00 NOON the Monday before the meeting (September 10). Reservations are necessary so that we can order the right amount of food. Do *not* contact the restaurant.

Send checks to Ruth Wright, 586 Vernon Street, Oakland, CA 94610.

Checkout

RSVP online: Use your credit card to order meeting reservations via the chapter Web site, *www.stc-berkeley.org*.

With a reservation, the meeting fee with food for members is $20, for student members is $17, and for nonmembers is $23; if you come for the program only, starting at 7:30 P.M., the fee is $12 for members and non-members ($10 for students). If you are not eating, payments may be made at the door.

Résumé or Portfolio Review

Does your résumé or portfolio present your qualifications in the best light? If you're new to the field, or just concerned that your résumé or portfolio may not be up to snuff, sign up for a free 30-minute review. We have a cadre of seasoned tech writers with hiring experience who can review your material and give you expert feedback.

To sign up for a review, email *employment@stc-berkeley.org* by the Thursday before the monthly meeting.

State your name and the meeting at which you're hoping to have the review.

Be sure to write *resume review* or *portfolio review* in the subject heading of the email message. If it's for a résumé, paste your résumé into the body of the message. If it's a portfolio review, bring your portfolio to the appointment.

After you've sent the email, look for a reply from the Employment Manager, confirming that you are booked for a review. The message will also specify your review time (6 or 6:30) and who your reviewer will be.

Reviews are booked on a first-come, first-served basis. Since our reviewers are volunteers, the number of slots available

Recap of Making Feedback Meaningful

BY KELLY PARKINSON

Feedback—like multi-tasking—is a word everyone uses but no one seems to do well. (In the last month, this writer received 30 feedback-related e-mails. "Highlight the topic in the information," one person suggested, cryptically.)

Maybe people don't have enough time. Maybe they're used to providing "yes" or "no" answers on comment cards. Or, maybe they just don't know any better. At the August STC meeting, VP of Membership Paul Sinasohn gave a talk on giving good feedback. An audience of about 30 was on hand to feel twinges of guilt and to promise themselves never to rush through a feedback exercise again.

Drawing from a deep well of personal experience, Paul provided several colorful examples of bad feedback. Such comments as "What the F*** is this?" "Why don't you bother to USE the product," and "This graph is really cool; I liked the colors," were deconstructed and reworked into shining examples of helpful feedback.

Paul listed a few "musts" for providing good feedback to anyone. They include:

1. Know the intended audience and purpose of the document. Develop your feedback with these factors—not your own preferences—in mind.

2. Whether you're praising or criticizing, give specific examples.

3. If you're criticizing, follow these steps:

- Find a lot of problems? Emphasize the positive before launching into the negative.

- Be a problem-solver. Offer thoughtful solutions to any problems you find.

- Use imperatives in the present tense. Don't beat around the bush with "nights and" shields. And if you like something, don't say you "liked" it.

- Be professional. The best tone is firm but gentle.

- Resist the urge to nitpick. Unless grammatical and spelling errors are endemic, focus on big-picture issues.

4. Think you don't have time to make thoughtful suggestions? Remember, what goes around, comes around. When you give good feedback, you can expect good feedback in return.

If you missed the meeting, you can view Paul's before-and-after feedback examples on the Berkeley-STC Web site at *http://www.stc-berkeley.org.*

Touchstone Volunteers

In past years, Touchstone has been primarily a Northern California competition, but this year covers the entire state.

Entries will be judged in the fall, and awards will be announced in a celebration to be held in March 2002. Distinguished winners from Touchstone are automatically entered in the international competition, which presents its awards at the international STC conference in May.

Entries Sought

The competition is open to all those who strive to make technical information understandable regardless of how the communication is delivered. The competition seeks entries in 24 print and online categories—computer manuals, training materials, magazines and newsletters, technical and annual reports, online help systems and more.

Experienced technical communication professionals evaluate and provide written feedback for every entry. Winning entries earn awards and professional recognition.

Entrants need not be STC members. The deadline for entries is September 21, 2001.

Volunteers Needed

Touchstone also needs experienced professionals to help judge entries.

Judges receive training and work in teams under a lead judge to evaluate entries, make awards, and provide feedback to entrants.

Judges see some of the best work being produced, hone their skills, add to their résumés, and meet and work with many of the leaders in the profession.

Proceeds from Touchstone support the Ken Gordon technical communication scholarships.

To Volunteer

To volunteer call Richard Mateosian at 510-540-7745 or send email to *xrm@pacbell.net.*

Additional information about how to enter or volunteer is available on the Touchstone Website at *http://www.stc-touchstone.org.*

Patrick Lufkin is a senior judge for the competition, and a past president of the San Francisco chapter of STC.

New and Returning Members

BY JOE DEVNEY

Here is a bit of information about the newest faces you might see at our chapter meetings.

Gail Shea has been a freelance technical writer for fifteen years. She started out, she says, in a "hippie publishing company" after college, and later spent an intense two years at Bechtel, where she learned "attention to detail; fast, accurate work under constant deadline pressure; and, how to deal with clients." She now specializes in structural and earthquake engineering reports, manuals, and procedures. She has spent the last year writing a corporate history for a large engineering firm, and takes on other engineering, geosciences, and architecture writing when the opportunity arises.

Spencer Read is a returning member: he served on the board of the Berkeley chapter for two years. He is a Senior Web Coordinator at Kaiser Permanente, a job he moved into after a couple of years as a senior technical writer for Kaiser's IT division. He develops medical/clinical projects for the organization's Web Development Services department. Part of his duties in this position are familiar to many tech writers: technical specifications and other documents pertinent to application development.

New member **Brian Halton** is originally from Ireland. He has degrees in both English and Education, and has taught English as a Second Language to corporate staffs in Europe. For the past twenty years he has worked as a technical writer and editor in the engineering and construction industry, producing brochures, corporate magazine articles, training manuals, procedures manuals, and press releases. He's also done stints as a news editor in community radio and as a legislation analyst in government service.

STC Berkeley *Ragged Left* Resource Corner

Each month rotating guest writers offer resources that benefit the technical writing industry. If there is a topic you would like to cover for a future edition, email newsletter@stc-berkeley.org.

Finding a Needle in a Haystack: Making Efficient Use of the World Wide Web

BY SUSAN MARCHIONNA

The World Wide Web is nothing less than an information revolution. Making sense of this vast and ever-changing chaos is an enormous task. Fortunately, there are many services devoted to making the web's information more easily accessible to its users.

Technical communicators frequently search the web for information, often relying on a single search service, when there are hundreds available, and they are *not* all alike. Having a more informed set of tactics can help us use a wider variety of services, reduce our level of frustration, and increase our rate of success.

The major types of web search services are search engines, directories, libraries, and metasearch tools. There are also email discussion groups, and Usenet newsgroups (not discussed here). Which is best for your search?

Search services

Search engines automatically scan or "crawl" the web for new public sites and compile them into databases. All search engines function similarly, but they differ from one another in the number of websites they access, the relevance of their results, the frequency of their updates, the syntax they use in advanced searches, and the speed of their result returns. Some of the major search engines are Google, Lycos, Excite, Direct Hit, and Northern Light.

Directories are databases maintained by human editors who review, evaluate, annotate, and compile websites into huge, interconnecting lists. Websites are categorized and fit into a hierarchy organized from the general to the specific. Directories vary mostly in size and level of quality control. Some of the major directories are Yahoo, Galaxy, Open Directory, About, Lycos, and GO Network.

Virtual libraries resemble their brick-and-mortar counterparts. The information sources in a virtual library are organized in much the same way as books are in an actual library, using the solid and familiar principles of library science. Some of the resources available through virtual libraries are subject guides, which link to sites in a particular field, reference works, which are resources you would find at the reference desk of the library, and specialized databases, which link to indexes of a particular kind, such as court decisions or medical documents. Some of the major virtual libraries are Argus Clearinghouse, Internet Public Library, WWW Virtual Library, Britannica, and Infomine.

Metasearch tools allow you to use multiple search engines simultaneously, collecting results from each one. They offer a simple way to cover as much of the web as possible, however, the search formula is automatically simplified in a way that may not yield the most relevant results. Some of the major metasearch

The Berkeley Biotech SIG is taking a hiatus. In lieu of meetings, STC Berkeley offers this monthly column. If you would like to write a column of your own to run in this space, or you'd like to ask a question or make a comment, please contact Ruth Wright at programs@stc-berkeley.org.

The Self-Governing Manufacturing Process: What it Means to be ISO Certified

BY RUTH A. WRIGHT

This month's biotech column has a somewhat broader topic–thank you for your indulgence.

The developers of the ISO certification process took on an ambitious goal. Their definition of a quality system is that it should do away with the need for inspectors.

If you're an engineer, you likely have a long acquaintance with ISO. For many of the rest of us, our knowledge of ISO is just as likely to be limited to noticing the cryptic banners hanging from buildings announcing various ISO certifications.

A company that meets ISO certification standards essentially has process systems in place that are designed to improve and correct quality automatically as issues come up if those processes are followed. A large part of the ISO auditing process involves a focus not on finding errors, but on how an existing quality system functions to correct errors.

The purpose of a quality system of any kind is to ensure consistency of a product or a process because variation drives up costs.

Before looking at how this is possible, a short overview of ISO is in order.

The abbreviation ISO stands for International Organization for Standardization. ISO is an organization that provides guidance to the outside world on how to judge the "quality" of your quality systems, and presumably by extension, your products. ISO has been developing voluntary technical standards over most sectors of business since 1947. The organization has member bodies in over 100 countries. In the U.S., ISO is located at the American National Standards Institute in Washington, DC. Member countries pay dues, and there is a category for developing nations that don't have a quality measurement system of any kind in place. They aren't participating members, but they're provided with information necessary to develop such systems.

> *A company that meets ISO certification standards essentially has their process systems in place*

The standards are developed by ISO Technical Committees that develop and maintain the standards for their area of expertise. Accreditation bodies exist in a number of countries to provide some measure of control over the activities of certification agencies. An accreditation body will accredit a certification agency as competent to carry out ISO 9000 or ISO 14000 certification of management systems in specified business sectors. ISO does not itself carry out assessments or provide accreditation. Conformity assessments are carried out by providers in the private sector or by regulatory bodies when ISO standards are incorporated into public legislation.

ISO 9000, introduced in 1987, is an international quality standard for management and for business-to-business dealings. ISO 14000, which followed in 1997, deals with environmental responsibilities, attempting to minimize the environmental impact of a business. They are both generic management system standards, meaning that they can be applied to an organization of any size that produces a product of any type, even if the product is a service.

A cornerstone of ISO is that continuous performance improvement is built into an organization's quality systems. It also aims toward international recognition and acceptance of systems that measure and assess conformity to quality standards, an issue considered to be an important correlate to the further development of international trade.

What happens to an organization that decides to work toward ISO 9001:2000 certification? The company first looks over their current management systems, comparing them to the ISO standard. They decide where the gaps are, and work to close them. Or they work to develop a system that actually traces the effectiveness of their processes. Or maybe they develop some in the first place, with an eye toward developing a "company way" of doing things that is distinct from the way that the individuals that perform the task do it.

There are many other ISO Certifications, all designated by numbers, that are specific to a certain industry or to a process. They contain technical specifications and criteria to be used as guidelines to ensure consistency of materials, products, processes and services.

There are standards providing guidance in developing quality programs and in verifying your quality system's ability to achieve your defined objectives that can be used for internal audits or to audit suppliers as well as guidelines for obtaining continuous performance improvements.

tools are Dogpile, MetaCrawler, All-in-One Search Page, and Fossick.

Develop meaningful search strategies

Analyze your search topic by considering the focus, complexity, purpose, and need for precision of your search. Searching with a strategy begins by understanding the nature of the information you seek.

A directory is a good choice for broad searches or overviews. Keep in mind that a directory looks only in URLs and annotations for your keywords, and a search engine looks through the entire text of its websites. A search engine might be better if your topic is very specific, multi-faceted, or detailed, or you are sure of your keywords. Search engines scan the entire text of their websites for your keywords. A single word can link you to sites that have real relevance to your topic. A library is a good choice if you are looking for information of a special nature, or if you are looking for something that would be found in a standard reference.

Browsing by category is a good way to begin when you are looking for general information. Use a directory or virtual library and follow the category links to the material that best suits your needs. Navigating within directories and search engines is fairly uniform. From the directory home page, choose a top level category and drill down to more focused information; the directory notes your path at the top of the window.

Searching by keyword or phrase is a very useful approach, especially if your subject is specific or detailed.

Consider what word or words are most essential to your topic.

Advanced searching is an option in every search engine or directory. You can limit and direct the search using a variety of methods. The exact rules governing a service's advanced searching are found in its help pages; these can save you time in the long run.

Boolean operators are English conjunctions (AND, OR, and NOT) representing a mathematical combination logic that help you focus your search for more efficiency. (There are variations in acceptable syntax--the precise word order needed—between different search services.)

Boolean logic also applies to groups of words larger than two, and you can create subgroups of words by using parentheses. This is called "nesting." For example: **Endangered AND (Birds OR Monkeys)** would yield different results.

Other advanced search features include:

- **Proximity searches** use the word NEAR to indicate a relationship between words and concepts. For example, **ozone depletion NEAR cancer rates**.
- **Truncating** or **stemming** a word allows you to search for many forms of a word simultaneously. Use an asterisk in place of the missing letters. For example, **postmodern*** would return postmodern, postmodernism, and postmodernists.
- **Field searching** limits the search to one or more of the website fields, such as URL, heading, annotation, or hyperlinks.
- **Case sensitivity** is important if you are looking for proper names, but not all services recognize capital letters.
- **Limiting by date** instructs the search engine to look for websites added to the databases within a date range that you define.
- **Analyze your results** once you have your "hitlist" and broaden or narrow your search as needed. Use NOT to eliminate a repeated irrelevancy.

A subtle change in your keyword, such as making a noun plural or singular, can yield a more successful result. Look for clues, try a different keyword, try another search engine. The more you use the web to look for information, the more you realize that creativity and skill come into play. Organize your bookmarks, use a wide range of services, learn about advanced search features, be fearless, and have fun.

What it Means to be ISO Certified

There are 3 iterations of the umbrella ISO 9000 management improvement standards, each an effort to improve on the previous version. Thus a 1984 version was replaced by ISO 9001:1994, which put more emphasis on the actions of management. Specifically, it dealt with the problems that arise when management's words and actions don't match. As an example, you can't tell your employees and shareholders that you value something and intend to pursue it as a goal and then provide no funding or manpower to achieve that goal. That sort of cognitive dissonance is a problem that newer quality system implementations supported by ISO will point out.

The various ISO system subcategories are designed to work together in an integrated way that allows for their use by widely disparate industries. Technical Committees work continuously at making improved iterations of the system, based on their observed performance in the field.

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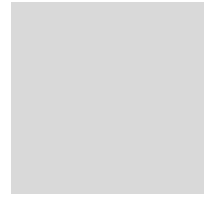
Next Meeting:

Wednesday

September 12:
Translate from FrameMaker to Acrobat—and Back!

with Shlomo Perets

Meal reservations required by Monday, September 10.

See page 2 for costs and meeting details.

RSVP online: Credit cards accepted at
.stc- e d .o g.
Silver Dragon Chinese Restaurant:
835 Webster Street (at 8th) in Oakland
Dinner   6:30 - 7:30
Announcements and Program   7:30 - 9:00
Please do   ot call the restaurant!

STC-BERKELEY MEETING DIRECTIONS

From north of Oakland: Take the I-880 North. Merge onto the I-580 East ramp towards downtown Oakland. Merge onto I-980 W. Take the 18th street exit towards 14th street. Merge onto Brush St. Turn left onto 17th St. Turn right onto San Pablo Ave. Turn slight right onto City Hall Plaza. Turn left onto 14th St/International Dr. Turn right onto Webster St. and proceed to 8th & Webster.

From south of Oakland: Take I-880 north from San Jose through Oakland. Take the Oak Street exit towards Lakeside Dr. Turn right onto Oak St. Turn left onto 8th St. Turn right onto Harrison St. Turn left onto 10th St. Turn left onto Webster St.

From San Francisco: Take the Bay Bridge towards Oakland (I-80 East). At the end of the bridge, take the I-580 East ramp towards downtown Oakland (CA-24)/Hayward-Stockton. Merge onto I-580 E. Take I-980 West ramp towards downtown Oakland. Merge onto I-980 W. Take the 18th street exit towards 14th street. Merge onto Brush St. Turn left onto 17th St. Turn right onto San Pablo Ave. Turn slight right onto City Hall Plaza. Turn left onto 14th St/International Dr. Turn right onto Webster St.

From far East Bay: Take Highway 24 west through Caldecott Tunnel. Highway 24 west becomes I-980 west. Take the 18th street exit towards 14th street. Merge onto Brush St. Turn left onto 17th St. Turn right onto San Pablo Ave. Turn slight right onto City Hall Plaza. Turn left onto 14th St/International Dr. Turn right onto Webster St. and proceed to 8th & Webster.
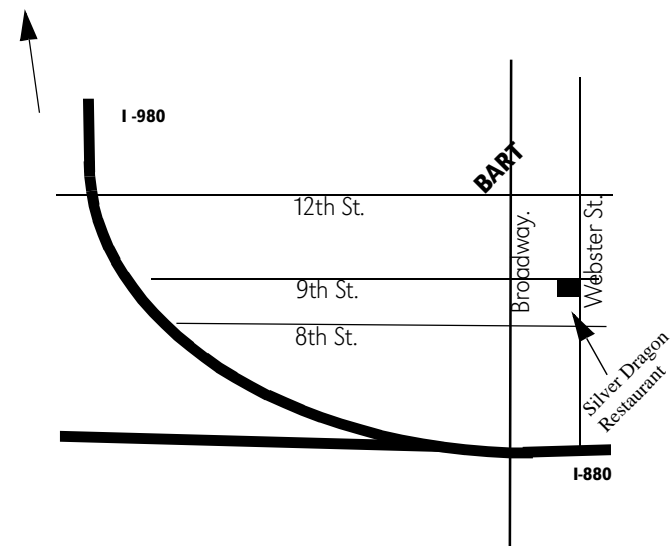
Join us in our New Meeting Location in Oakland

By BART: Exit the 12th Street Oakland station. Walk south for two blocks, to Webster St. Turn right and walk west to 835 Webster St.