

Ragged Left

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The Monthly Newsletter for the Berkeley Chapter of the Society for Technical Communication

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October 2002 Volume 16 No. 9

In this issue

Next Meeting

Debating whether to upgrade your Framemaker? [Join us](#) on October 9, when Ted Windsor presents *FrameMaker 7 and XML: What's the lowdown?* Ted will be bringing FrameMaker 7 demo CDs for everyone!

Usability Wrap

"Usability affects everybody everywhere," Elaine Randolph told Berkeley STC chapter last month. Check out Robert Wazeka's in-depth recap of September meeting with Elaine Randolph in the [Monthly Wrap](#).

News & Reviews

Ever feel like the Silicon Valley is the land of Oz? Get grounded by reading Richard Mateosian's [review](#) of Geoffrey A. Moore's *Inside the Tornado: Marketing Strategies from Silicon Valley's Cutting Edge*. Looking to keep your feet on the ground? Follow [A Technical Writer's Odyssey](#), by John Peel. Keep up with the latest information and trends in the Chapter, Society and Industry with our [News](#) section.

Resources

A great way to get noticed in this tepid job market is to get out and about to other meetings. Visit our [networking links](#) to locate other opportunities. Educational and employment opportunities can be found in our [Resources](#) section.

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Next Meeting: Wednesday, October 9, 2002

FrameMaker 7 and XML: What's the Lowdown? Ted Windsor

The newest version of FrameMaker incorporates the structured content development capabilities of Frame+SGML, but enhances them to use XML DTDs. Our speaker this month is Ted Windsor, Principal of FrameHelp (and formerly a Senior Trainer with Caxton), and experienced FrameMaker expert. Ted has been using FrameMaker for over seven years and is an Adobe Certified Expert in FrameMaker+SGML, GoLive, and Acrobat. He has recently been representing FrameMaker 7 at conferences and consulting engagements around the country on Adobe's behalf, including notable tradeshows such as Seybold, FOSE, and MacWorld.

Ted will discuss the new features of FrameMaker 7, focusing on how to use the XML features and work structured content development into your current processes. Bring your questions and your thinking caps, so you can tap his wisdom—and an extra pocket, as Ted is also bringing FrameMaker 7 demo CDs for everyone!

STC-Berkeley Chapter Meeting Details

Vo's Restaurant in downtown Oakland, is within easy walking distance to BART, is wheelchair accessible, and has both street and nearby garage parking.

Networking and conversation start at 6:00 p.m., and dinner at 6:30 p.m. If you want to eat dinner, reservations are required and must be received no later than 12:00 noon the Monday before the meeting. Reservations are necessary so that we can order the right amount of food. Do not contact the restaurant.

RSVP Online

Use your credit card to order meeting reservations via the chapter [Website](#). The meeting fee with dinner is \$18 for members, \$15 for student members, and \$21 for nonmembers. If you come for the program only, starting at 7:30 p.m., the fee is \$12 for members and nonmembers, and \$10 for students. If you are not eating, payments may be made at the door.

RSVP by Mail

Send checks to Berkeley STC, P.O. Box 1007, Berkeley, 94701.

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October 2002 Monthly Columns

Notes from the Editor

Learn the Latest News about the Ragged Left, STC-Berkeley's Monthly Newsletter, from Editor Jessica Livingston.

President's Message

A Few words on the state of the Chapter from President Kathryn Munn.

Director Sponsor Message

Catch the latest scoop from Region 8's Director-Sponsor Bonni Graham.

Monthly Recap

Each month a guest writer writes a recap of the previous meeting. Great way to refresh, or find out what you missed.

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Editor's Column October 2002

Welcome to the new online *Ragged Left*. We've recieved a lot of positive feedback on our new electronic design. As always, I'm in search of articles for our monthly columns, so peruse the list below to see if any of our needs match your skills. This fall I'm working on issues to submit for the National STC competition, so your work might be read by a wider audience. In the coming months we'd also like to expand the *Ragged Left* staff with more volunteers. If you're interested in contributing to our industry, while expanding your portfolio, contact [me](#).

See you at Vo's,

Jessica Livingston
Ragged Left Editor

Ragged Left Topic Needs

Below is a list of the articles we are most often searching for.

Monthly Recap

Each month we look for a volunteer to write a recap of the speaker's presentation at our monthly meeting. The length of that article should be around 350 words, although if it was a particularly engaging topic we can run a longer article. Attendance at the meeting would be necessary.

Resource Column

Every month we run a monthly resource column. Suggested topics include a review of software; new, new version, or related: a Website or other online resource related to our industry: books or other tools you found useful: a process, language, or class that was beneficial. To insure that your topic has not been recently covered, please clear the topic in advance with the [editor](#). Suggested length: 375-750 words

Introduce New Members

Periodically we write a paragraph or two about new members in our chapter. This involves contacting the names we provide, interviewing them about their interests and involvement in the industry, and meshing it all into a cohesive article. It will take a bit longer to get the responses back, so this feature takes more lead-time than most.

Feature Articles

We're open to articles on unsolicited topics.

Please send articles as an attached document, preferably in MS Word, with no formatting.

Submission Guidelines

Thank you for considering writing for the *Ragged Left*, the Berkeley STC chapter's award-winning monthly newsletter. Each

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President's Message

Greetings STC-Berkeley chapter members and friends! We hope you are enjoying the electronic Ragged Left. Take a few minutes to drop a note to Editor [Jessica Livingston](#) with your feedback, positive or otherwise. The newsletter is a work in progress and we value your input as our primary customer. In October and November we will be sending a postcard to remind you to go to the Web site for the latest edition. Want to see your name in electronic print? Jessica is always looking for additional content for the newsletter. She will even give you a directed writing assignment if you like.

At our September meeting we reluctantly accepted the resignation of our VP of Membership, Ruth Wright. New personal life ventures are demanding more of her attention and she did not feel she could give the job the attention it needed. We thank Ruth for her faithful service. Richard Mateosian, last year's Distinguished Chapter Service Award recipient, has once again stepped up to help the chapter. He has agreed to serve as VP-Membership in a temporary capacity and mentor a replacement. This is a great opportunity for anyone interested in a leadership position in the chapter to work with a seasoned and talented mentor. Anyone interested in this opportunity should [contact](#) Richard.

On October 9, 2002 join us to hear all about the latest release of the authoring tool used by many technical communicators, FrameMaker 7.0. Ted Windsor from FrameHelp, Inc. will be presenting. We are still developing the program for November. In December we will be taking a meeting break for the holidays with plans to return to a great new year of programs in January 2003.

As always we want to hear about what the Chapter can do to support you in your professional goals as a technical communicator. email me with your ideas, suggestions, and especially any ways you might be willing to contribute your own talent and time. See you at the October 9, meeting!

Kathryn Munn

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Director-Sponsor Column October 2002

This Year's Region 8 Conference Bonni Graham, Region 8 Director-Sponsor

Yes, folks, we will be having a Region 8 Conference this year. Well, not quite this year, but more this year than not. Here's the latest from our new Conference Manager, Patrick Morrissey:

We're planning to hold the 2002-2003 Region 8 Conference in mid-January in Las Vegas, Nevada, USA. The tentative theme, if we get the accommodations we seek, is January in Paris. (A hint as to where I'd like to have the conference.) Conference tracks subject to approval include: Passport and Maps (Content and Knowledge Management); Exploring The Countryside (Writing and Editing); Exploring the Infrastructure (Technology and Applications); Understanding the EURO (Localization and Usability); From Writing at Your Favorite Bistro to Teaching at The Sorbonne' (Your Career).

With a great deal of assistance from Bonnie and Kathryn, our next conference has been jump-started and we'll be putting the committee together in short order. Those initially involved with the conference planning will be contacted right away to see if they can still provide their expertise. Of course, there's always room for more victims, er, volunteers. I fully intend to utilize the Southern Nevada Chapter's resources to assure this will be a stellar conference keeping in the tradition of Region 8.

If you have any questions or comments, please feel free to direct them to Bonnie at...just kidding! You can contact me via [email](#). I'll be presenting at Region 5 and Region 7 (Oklahoma City, Oklahoma and Vancouver, BC, respectively) so if you're attending either or both, please say "hello" in the appropriate regional accent. Cheers!"

Patrick, thanks so much for taking this on! Cheers to the Southern Nevada Chapter and the conference committee.

I hope to see all of you there in January.

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Monthly Wrap

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 the editor.

Usability 101

Elaine Randolph at the June Berkeley chapter meeting

by Robert Wazeka

"Usability affects everybody everywhere," Elaine Randolph told Berkeley STC members to lead off the program segment of the Chapter's September monthly meeting. To illustrate her point, Randolph cited the difficulties she had in figuring out something as simple as how to operate her husband's car radio because of its badly designed interface.

As the immediate past president of the Orange County STC and currently a JET Manager at Unisys, Randolph has been a technical communicator for twenty years, during which time she has educated herself on usability issues and has done extensive work in implementing good usability principles in computer hardware and software. She has given her presentation, entitled *Usability 101: The Basics of User-Centered Design (UCD)* to numerous audiences around the country.

Companies undervalue usability, Randolph said, because they want to do everything "quick, dirty, and cheap." What producers ignore is that poor usability can result in higher support costs and decreased sales; and what purchasers ignore is that products they buy with poorly designed interfaces can cause difficulty and lost time for their employees. Users, she said, want products that are effective, efficient, engaging, error tolerant, and easy to learn—the "five E's".

What we as technical communicators must do is to become "usability champions" where we work. Randolph says that we have six effective tools at our disposal—site visits, surveys, focus groups, prototyping, heuristic evaluation, and usability tests. These six tools together comprise what she calls "the UCD Toolkit." By starting small and by selecting the tool or tools appropriate to the task, we can begin achieving success one step at a time.

Randolph went on to describe effective ways of using each tool, citing research studies and illustrating her points with a wealth of examples drawn from her own experience.

- Site Visits depend upon structured interviews and observation. It's important to tell the difference between what users actually do and what they say they do. Videotaping and visits to the home or office where a product is being used can improve the accuracy of the information.
- Surveys are effective only if the questions are carefully and unambiguously designed, if they are tested beforehand, and if the survey sample is large enough.
- Focus Groups of 8-12 people aren't good for generating quantifiable data, but they are appropriate for identifying attitudes and feelings. It's important to record these sessions either on audio or video.
- Prototyping, typically done in Visual Basic or a similar tool, is an excellent way of testing user reactions to a variety of designs. Design teams can make changes dynamically and test several iterations of a product.
- Heuristic Evaluation is a way of evaluating an interface by using a set of design principles or guidelines. Such evaluations are best done by usability experts.
- Usability Tests are given to a group of users in a controlled environment. The users are asked to perform specific tasks and to "think aloud" as they work. Observers collect data and make recommendations for change.

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Resources

An assortment of resources to find people, jobs, brush up your skills or expand your knowledge.

Networking

Visiting other STC chapters and other writers' groups is a great way to expand your knowledge and networking circle.

Employment

It's a tight job market out there, so make sure that your resume gives you the competitive edge. Each month we offer free resume reviews before the monthly meeting. Book your appointment with our [Employment Manager](#). STC Berkeley also operates a free job list, which you can [sign up](#) for.

Trends In Technical Writing

Feeling like you're at the crossroads in your career? Follow one writer's odyssey in this month's [feature](#) article, *A Technical Writer's Odyssey*, by John Peel.

Education

The Golden Gate Chapter of the American Society of Indexers offers its fall workshop *Money, Money, Money: Making It and Collecting It* with Nancy Mulvany, on Saturday, October 12, 10:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m., at the Orinda Library Gallery Room. Registration is \$40 for ASI members/\$55 for non-members. Students enrolled during the year 2002 in the USDA or UC Berkeley Extension courses qualify for the student discount of 50%, making their fee \$25.00 for the workshop.

Book Review

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News

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Catch up on the latest news from the Chapter, Society, and Industry

Chapter News

Professional Web Sites Welcome

Want to be more visible to potential employers? Consider linking your professional Web site from the STC-Berkeley Web site. Check out the Member Home Pages link at www.stc-berkeley.org. If you are a member of the Berkeley chapter of STC and would like to add your home page to this list, please email your name and URL specifying Member Home Page in the subject line. Send to [David Alt](#).

Don't have a professional Web site? Consider publishing an electronic resume and portfolio online to showcase your skills as a technical communicator. Visit some of the member home pages on the STC-Berkeley Web site to get an idea about how resume and portfolio information can be presented. Plan your professional Web site just like you would any technical writing project. It can be easy, fun, and inexpensive. A great resource for beginners to Web development is found at www.webmonkey.com. Click on Beginners for simple instructions and money-saving resources. Want some feedback on your professional Web site? Remember that the Berkeley Chapter sponsors resume and portfolio reviews from 6:00-6:30 PM on the 2nd Wednesdays of the month, just before the chapter meeting. Contact [Madeleine Adkins](#) to schedule a review and feedback of your professional Web site.

Welcome New Member

A big welcome to one of our chapter's newest members, Jennie Brandon. Jennie spent eight years as a recruiter with a staffing agency, specializing in the graphics and technical niches. Currently she's not working on the recruiting side and juggles a new position in an East Bay technology firm, a preschooler, and recently completed her first course in the UCB Extension certificate program.

Society News

Region 8 Conference

Great news! The planning effort for the STC Region 8 Conference has been infused with new energy and vision with the appointment of Patrick Morrissey from San Diego as Conference Manager. With sights set on a Las Vegas venue for January or February of 2003, Patrick is recruiting a team and looking for volunteers to create a great program in a fun setting. Sound interesting? This is a great opportunity to get involved with STC members throughout Region 8 and make a contribution to your profession. Volunteers are needed for big and little jobs including:

- Publications and Publicity Committee Managers
- Conference Stem Managers
- Newsletter and Advertising Coordinators
- Webmaster and Web Committee members
- Conference Shopper

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October

[Monthly Meeting](#), Wednesday, October 9

November

Monthly Meeting, Wednesday, November 13

December

Leadership Symposium

Mills College, Oakland, Saturday, December 7

A day for local STC Members to meet and discuss, chapter-to-chapter networking, ideas, resource sharing and team building. This will be the first in a series of three related sessions. Anyone thinking of running for an office in the future or just interested in helping out would greatly benefit from this session.

No meeting Monthly Meeting in December -- Happy Holiday Seasons

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