Ragged Left

The newsletter for the Berkeley Chapter of the Society for Technical Communication

In this issue

Volume 19, Number 3
October 2006

Meeting Notes

Documenting APIs: Your First Week on the Job

Presented by Jim Bisso, Bitzone LLC at the September 2006 meeting

Notes on the presentation to the Berkeley STC by Kathryn Munn

This presentation to the Berkeley STC chapter on September 13, 2006 evolved in part from frequent questions to presenter Jim Bisso and Viki Maki, principals at Bitzone LLC, from technical writers assigned the job of documenting an Application Programming Interface (API) for the first time. Jim and Viki, co-writers of the book *Documenting APIs: Writing Developer Documentation for Java APIs and SDKs* and co-leaders of the Silicon Valley STC chapter Technical/API Docs SIG are providing innovative professional resources and information in this specialized area of technical communication. Visit Bitzone's web site (www.bitzone.com) for additional information and training opportunities. In his presentation Jim reviewed and contrasted the processes and skills used in creating task based user documentation and developer reference documentation, also called APIs. The familiar processes of learning to use the software UI and defining user tasks are not used in defining the reference information needed by developers. Similarly the cycle of defining deliverables, gathering source documents, planning, preparing alpha drafts, revising, reviewing, releasing, and maintaining documentation differs with the creation of API documents. In the case of an API, the audience is most often a third-party developer who will be accessing the functionality of the API through documentation, typically including code samples.

Knowledge of the programming language of the API and object oriented concepts are necessary skills of the API technical writer. Writers should be able to recognize class declarations or method signatures, format and document code samples, and write tutorials or sample applications. Jim also emphasized that the API writer should have good problem solving skills, heuristics, as described in the 1945 book by Polya, *How to Solve It*. The API writer should ideally bring domain knowledge to the job such as knowledge of technology standards and protocols relevant to the API, industry knowledge such as accounting or business processes, and framework or software architecture design.

Documentation deliverables for an API will typically include a reference guide, structured along the near standard of the Javadoc tool, and may include a programmer's guide with a description of how and why to use the API using more fully developed demo or sample code. Documentation plans related to these documents will be concerned with planning complete coverage of the packages (or namespaces), existing classes and their constituent members, milestones coordinated with the product, and defining the print or web based deliverables.

To begin gathering resources to document an API, the writer will get to know the product by reviewing earlier versions if available, documentation such as functional specifications, and competitor products. If specifications are not available, the writer should create a high level overview by inter-

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.

THE SOCIETY FOR TECHNICAL COMMUNICATION (STC) has members worldwide. Its members include writers and editors, artists and illustrators, photographers and audiovisual specialists, managers and supervisors, educators and 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. Classic membership is $145/year with an additional $15 enrollment fee. STC also offers Limited, E-Membership, and Student Membership options. To receive additional information and an application form, via mail or email.

- Send email to membership@stc-berkeley.org
- Send mail to Berkeley STC, PO Box 1007, Berkeley CA 94701-1007

INSURANCE Members of STC can apply for health, disability, and other insurance at STC group rates. For more information, contact STC office at stc@stc.org or (703) 522-4114.

WORLDWIDE ACTIVITIES STC's annual conference brings together more than 2,000 technical communicators from around the world for educational programs, seminars, and workshops conducted by experts in the field. Upcoming annual conference: Minneapolis, May 13-16, 2007. In addition the STC sponsors many regional conferences, which feature the same sorts of programs, seminars, and workshops on a more intimate scale. STC sponsors international and regional competitions in all aspects of technical communication. STC Special Interest Groups (SIGs) bring together members with common experiences and interests to share their skills and knowledge. STC SIGs include:

- Academic
- AccessAbility
- Canadian Issues
- Consulting and Independent Contracting
- Emerging Technologies
- Environmental, Safety, and Health Communication
- Illustrators and Visual Designers
- Information Design and Architecture
- Instructional Design & Learning
- International Technical Communication

- Lone Writer
- Management
- Marketing Communication
- Online
- Policies and Procedures
- Quality and Process Improvement
- Scientific Communication
- Single Sourcing
- Technical Editing
- Usability & User Experience

STC sponsors research grants and scholarships in technical communication.

STC publishes the quarterly journal *Technical Communication*, the newsletter *Intercom*, and other periodicals, reference materials, manuals, anthologies, standards, and booklets.

Formed in 1953, STC has today become the largest professional society in the world dedicated to advancing the theory and practice of technical communication.

LOCAL ACTIVITIES The six northern California chapters of STC conduct a variety of individual and joint activities. See page 4 for contacts for these chapters. See page 6 for a list of other local organizations in which STC members may be interested.

SUBSCRIPTIONS This newsletter is free to members of the Berkeley chapter.

ADVERTISING RATES The *Ragged Left* is not accepting advertising at this time.

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 talk with the editor for details of how to submit articles and illustrations.

The deadline for unsolicited submissions is the fifteenth of the preceding month.

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viewing the architect, product manager, or senior level programmer. As with all documentation the subject matter experts are identified and may include the software architect, product managers, programmers, and support and quality assurance engineers. Finally the technical writer will bring their own domain knowledge to the project.

Jim's well received presentation was closed with audience questions.

President's Letter

How You Can Get Involved

by Richard Mateosian

Last year our chapter went through a rechartering exercise. A small subset of the leadership council, led by our membership VP, Jim Dexter, filled out and submitted the required STC form, and we are now officially rechartered. You can find the rechartering document on www.stc-berkeley.org.

I don't think we did a bad job, but it's only a start. It won't really be a charter for the Berkeley Chapter until Berkeley STC members make it their own. That means that every word of the document we sent to STC headquarters is on the table. Let's start from scratch and ask ourselves what problems we have banded together to solve, what principles we'd like to maintain while solving them, and how we'd like to organize to accomplish the job. Let's use our Yahoo discussion group (see below) to talk about these matters. Since its inception, the Berkeley Chapter has not had bylaws. We have evolved our own version of the model STC chapter organization advocated by Headquarters. This year we hope to formalize our rules. We will have a full discussion, then vote on bylaws in conjunction with our annual chapter election. Our former president, Joe Devney is leading this effort. This is another good subject for the Yahoo group.

We try to provide interesting and informa-

tive programs at our monthly chapter meetings. We have taken surveys of the membership, and we are using that information to help us plan programs. Our programs VP, Mary Ann Campbell, is always on the lookout for new ideas or willing speakers. You can reach her at programs@stc-berkeley.org or talk with her at a meeting. If you haven't attended a meeting recently, you may have forgotten the great networking. We'd love to see you again.

Our webmaster, Jim Dexter, is continually improving and updating our chapter website, www.stc-berkeley.org. If you haven't visited it recently, take a look. It contains many useful resources. It also enables us to make meeting reservations online (at a discount). Give Jim new information for the site, or volunteer to help with putting it together. You can reach Jim at internet@stc-berkeley.org. Our jobs manager, Caroline Scharf, continues to manage our job leads list, STCJobsBA-L. Visit the Job Search Resources page of stc-berkeley.org to find information about how to receive and how to submit job leads.

Our newsletter, Ragged Left, is available in PDF format on www.stc-berkeley.org. It provides information about upcoming meetings and summaries of recent meetings. It also contains information about resources and about other organizations of interest to technical communicators. Ragged Left came out irregularly earlier this year, but we are now back on track with our new editor, Jennifer Abbott. I'm sure she would love to hear from you. Help Jennie with editing or production, write articles, or just point her in the direction of something newsworthy. Her email address is newsletter@stc-berkeley.org.

For chapter announcements we use a controlled list to which only the chapter president can post. For discussions, however, we have a Yahoo discussion list, Berkeley-STC@yahoo.com. Please join this list if you'd like to discuss rechartering, bylaws, program topics, or any other issue of interest to chapter members.

This year we are once again applying for a chapter achievement award. Jessica Living-

ston is leading that effort. She is using the STC checklist (a moving target) to help us understand what we are already doing well and what we could be doing better. With more volunteers, we can mount many more valuable initiatives. If there is something you'd like to see STC Berkeley do, or if you'd just like to be involved, get in touch with Jessica at publicrelations@stc-berkeley.org.

Our chapter has always been financially healthy. We have spent wisely under the watchful eyes of a long line of treasurers. At the moment, however, we do not have a treasurer. Some members of the leadership council have been handling those duties.

If you have experience managing money and keeping books, the chapter can use your help.

Our chapter leadership council meets every month on the Monday evening before the chapter meeting. We encourage all interested Berkeley STC members to attend. If you wish to attend, please send me email at xrm@pacbell.net, so I know how many chairs we need.

However you decide to get involved, your fellow STC Berkeley members will appreciate your efforts.

Other STC chapters in Northern California

East Bay: http://www.ebstc.org/

North Bay: www.stc-northbay.org/

Sacramento: www.stcsacramento.org/

San Francisco: www.stc-sf.org/

Silicon Valley: www.stc-siliconvalley.org/

Meetings

Our chapter holds a dinner meeting the second Wednesday of each month at the Shattuck Plaza Hotel, 2086 Allston Way, just west of Shattuck Avenue in Berkeley. The Hotel is across the street from the BART station at Allston and Shattuck.

The advance-order price for dinner and meeting is $18 for members, $15 for student

members and $21 for non-members. For those attending the meeting only, the cost is $12 for members and non-members, $10 for students. If you do not reserve in advance, dinner may or may not be available, as we order dinner based on the number of reservations.

Meeting Agenda

6:00	Check-in, networking, and conversation.
6:30	Dinner.
7:15	Chapter business and announcements. Anyone can announce jobs that they know about.*
7:30	Formal program. Usually we have a speaker or panel of speakers on a topic related to the business or technology of technical communication.
8:30	Conversation, offline questions for the speaker, follow-up on job announcements
9:00	Clear the room. Move conversations to the sidewalk.

* Attendees, please announce open positions, and bring job listings for distribution.

Recruiters are welcome to attend meetings, place literature on a designated table, and talk with attendees one-on-one during the informal parts of the meeting. We ask them not to announce specific jobs during the formal announcement period, but they are free to stand up and identify themselves.

Similarly, we ask anyone else with commercial announcements to confine themselves to calling attention to the availability of literature on the designated table.

October Meeting

Wednesday, October 11, 2006

Location

Hotel Shattuck Plaza - Towne Room
2086 Allston Way
Berkeley, CA 94704

Finding Work Outside the Technical Documentation Box

Technical communicators sometimes wonder how their skills, talents, and expertise apply to other careers or jobs. Judy will help us identify the qualities we bring to the table as technical communicators. She will help us understand the value that these qualities bring to other career opportunities.

Judy will lead a highly interactive discussion, starting from an inventory of our skills

and experience. You can download the inventory survey form from stc-berkeley.org before the meeting, or just show up ready to interact. Judy has listed many skills on the form. See how many you can add.

Based on the results of the inventory, Judy will show us how we can use our skills in other positions. For example, she will show how our skills enable us to coordinate proposals and grants or provide consultative support to small businesses and non-profit organizations.

Finally, Judy will lead a discussion of opportunities, successful transitions, and lessons learned.

Speaker
Judith Herr, Well Chosen Words

Judy Herr has worked as a technical communicator for 25 years - as a writer/editor, public health worker, trainer, and documentation department manager. She is the principal of Well Chosen Words, a consulting company that provides consultative support and services in technical communication

and knowledge management, occupational health, environmental science, and business acquisition. Her projects include preparing proposals to win government and commercial contracts; documenting computer system design; conducting design reviews; documenting scientific, environmental, emergency preparedness, and occupational safety programs; teaching adults, facilitating events and training; and conducting public relations and marketing.

Judy is an STC Fellow and the advocate for SIGs at the Society level. Her many former STC positions include president of the East Bay chapter, director of the Touchstone technical communication competition, and, most recently, leader of the Management SIG.

Berkeley STC Meeting Location and Directions

Give the following address to your favorite mapping program:
2086 Allston Way, Berkeley, CA 94704

By BART
Get off at the downtown Berkeley station (Richmond line) . Emerge from the west side of the Downtown Berkeley BART station. Walk south on Shattuck one block to Allston Way and turn right.

By Car
From north of Berkeley on I-80, take the University Avenue exit (east). Turn right on Shattuck Avenue. Allston Way is three blocks south.

From south of Berkeley, take 880 north from San Jose. Continue through Oakland on 880. Follow the highway as it curves sharply to the right (where traffic merges in) and becomes 980. Continue on 980 to Highway 24 (toward Berkeley and Walnut Creek). Take the first exit from 24 (Martin Luther King Jr./51st). Turn right on 51st and make an immediate left onto Shattuck. Proceed north on Shattuck 2.3 miles to downtown Berkeley. Allston Way is immediately before the BART station.

Parking
The nearest lot is on Oxford, between Kitteredge and Allston. Flat rate of $4.00 for the evening (subject to change -- not under our control).

Street parking is scarce, but free after 6:00 p.m.

Walking to your car or BART?
We can't guarantee you an escort, but we'll try.

STC News

Partnership with the Localization Industry Standards Association (LISA)

Mary Kabza
STC Director of Marketing and Membership

This partnership will allow LISA and STC members to benefit equally from each organization's services. LISA is "the leading international forum for organizations doing business globally." LISA offers valuable guidance in conducting business internationally, including consulting services for globalization, research and publications, standards development, networking, and educational opportunities. To learn more, visit www.lisa.org.

STC members pay the same rates that LISA members pay to attend LISA events such as LISA Forum Europe: Doing Business in an Expanding Europe, in Warsaw, Poland November 13-17, 2006. For more about LISA Forum Europe, visit www.lisa.org/events/2006warsaw. Information about upcoming LISA events will be featured on the STC Web site and included in the RSS feed highlighting STC news and related events.

We are continuing to develop our relationship with LISA, and finding new ways for STC members to benefit from LISA events and services. For example, plans are being developed for a separate STC forum on the LISA Web site. Soon, STC members will be able to enter their STC membership ID numbers when they register on LISA's site. There will be similar LISA links on the STC Web site.

As our careers continue to become increasingly global, we hope that you take advantage of the complementary benefits provided by our partnership with LISA to enhance your professional skills and your international business acumen.

For any questions, please contact me at mary@stc.org or (703) 522-4114, ext. 206.

Announcements

New Editor For Ragged Left

Jennifer Abbott is serving as the new editor for the *Ragged Left*, the STC Berkeley Chapter's newsletter. Jennifer has been working as a technical writer in Alameda since 1997, and her hobbies include newsletters, travel, websites, singing, and online zines. She welcomes contributions to *Ragged Left* at any time.

Ragged Left editor Jennifer Abbott can be reached at: newsletter@stc-berkeley.org.

STC Annual Summit

The new, revamped Call for Proposals is out for the **Technical Communication Summit: STC's 54th Annual Conference on May 13-16, 2007**, in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Take a look at the new conference tracks at www.stc.org/cfp/ and come share your wisdom, knowledge and experience.

Other Organizations

American Medical Writers Association (AMWA) of Northern California. Meets periodically at various Bay Area locations. http://www.amwancal.org

American Society for Training and Development, **Mount Diablo Chapter.** Meets monthly in Danville. http://mtdiabloastd.org/.

American Society of Indexers, Golden Gate Chapter. http://www.asindexing.org/site/chapters.shtml#golden

Association for Women in Computing, San Francisco Bay Area chapter http://www.awc-sf.org/

International Association of Business Communicators, San Francisco chapter. A network of professionals committed to improving the effectiveness of organizations through strategic interactive and integrated business communication management http://sf.iabc.com/

National Writers Union (UAW). A labor union for freelance writers of all genres. http://www.nwu.org

Northern California Science Writers' Association. Quarterly meetings and other events. http://www.ncswa.org