Ragged Left

In this issue

Lessons Learned from Web Applications and User Centered Design

October Meeting Notes by Caitlin Gannon

On October 10, 2007, Sarah Nelson and David Verba from Adaptive Path visited the Berkeley STC chapter to speak about what Ajax and Web 2.0 mean for user centered design and technical communication. In their highly interactive presentation they provided a number of websites as examples, and then focused on how current Web 2.0/Ajax design approaches can improve the user experience.

Sarah and David began the presentation with some definitions. "Ajax" and "Web 2.0" have become well-known buzzwords, but are often used loosely (for example, clients requesting a web design "that has Ajax and Web 2.0"). So what do these terms really mean?

Web 2.0, as a term, was coined by Tim O'Reilly. In his influential article "What Is Web 2.0", written in September 2005, he delineated the differences between the Web 1.0 model of web content (examples: Ofoto, Britannica, content management systems) and the emerging technologies that were enabling user-created content (Flickr, wikis, blogs, RSS). Web 2.0 refers to this participatory model of web application design.

Ajax, coined by Jesse James Garrett of Adaptive Path, is a shorthand way of referring to "Asynchronous Java script and XML". Today, however, Ajax refers less to the acronym and more to the set of technologies (XMLHttpRequest, Java script, XML, DOM, CSS/XHTML) that in combination create a powerful new way of experiencing the web. Put simply, Ajax allows the contents of a page to change locally, without requiring a trip to the server and a refresh of the page. Sarah and David used two travel websites as an example, Travelocity.com and Kayak.com. On Travelocity, if you want to change the search criteria for a flight, after you click Search, you are taken to a page titled "We are searching for your flight". A few minutes later you are returned to the original page with the search results, a time-consuming and tedious process. Kayak, on the other hand, presents search criteria and available flights all on one page. An adjustment to one of the search elements on the left panel changes the list of flights on the right. No trip to the server, no intermediary page, no hassle. Adjusting the search criteria is easy and fast, and allows the user to focus on finding the best flight rather than on struggling with the interface.

Sarah and David pointed out that these new developments in web applications are part of the evolution of the web from the domain of a select technical few to a canvas upon which many more people can express themselves. For example, ten years ago, setting up a personal website was a complicated process that involved a lot of technical knowledge. Today, it takes less than 5 minutes to set up a blog on Blogger.com. A new web publisher can spend her time developing content rather than learning web development. In a sense, the convergence of Web 2.0 and Ajax, and the increased bandwidth available to support them, has enabled the web to more fully embody its

THE RAGGED LEFT IS PUBLISHED SIX TIMES A YEAR (EVERY OTHER MONTH).

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	• Lone Writer
• AccessAbility	• Management
• Canadian Issues	• Marketing Communication
• Consulting and Independent Contracting	• Online
• Emerging Technologies	• Policies and Procedures
• Environmental, Safety, and Health Communication	• Quality and Process Improvement
• Illustrators and Visual Designers	• Scientific Communication
• Information Design and Architecture	• Single Sourcing
• Instructional Design & Learning	• Technical Editing
• International Technical Communication	• 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 8 for contacts for these chapters. See page 4 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 last Friday of odd-numbered months.

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initial promise of being a democratic platform for expressing ideas.

To bring this all together, Sarah and David then summarized that web applications based on Web 2.0 and/or Ajax allow people to:

Collaborate. With Google Docs, for example, more than one person can view or edit the same document. Applications like Basecamp keep a project team on track and sharing project details with one another. Google Calendar can be shared with friends, so everyone knows everyone else's schedule.

Remix. Many web applications provide an API (application programming interface), which makes it possible for developers (even those with moderate knowledge) to mix and modify the application, often combining it with other applications. The community creates new applications that the developers may have never foreseen. For example, Chicagocrime.org plots the Chicago Police Department's database of crime data on Google Maps, transforming previously inaccessible statistics into a highly visual and interactive experience. The whole is truly greater than the sum of its parts.

Co-create. Site visitors use the structure of social networking applications to create their own content. For example, Twitter.com allows users to write short messages that can be shared with either their network or with the public. Through the API, developers can create new versions of the application that the product's creators may never have predicted, such as Twittervision (a mashup of Twitter messages and Google Maps).

Organize. A number of creative new web applications allow users to organize their content in their own way. Tripit.com, for example, extracts data from your airline and rental car confirmation emails and creates a master list of all your trips and itineraries. Plaxo.com creates a meta-address book by extracting data from your MySpace, email contacts, etc. As the amount of information we have to manage grows, new applications spring up to help us manage it.

The final piece of Sarah and David's presen-

tation focused on how this combination of technologies enables a renewed focus on the user experience:

Discoverability – make finding things easy. With Ajax built into the design, users can see the results of their choices immediately. Searching through lengthy data sets is much faster and less painful, and creating content is more fun when the changes are immediately obvious (for example, Yahoo! Page Builder's instant preview).

Recoverability – prevent the user from making errors. Common Ajax interactions on forms include suggesting commonly chosen values (thereby preventing typing errors), suggesting other search terms rather than just stating "you have no results", and immediate feedback such as "password strength" indicators. Usability suffers when a person completes a long form only to receive a cryptic error message and blank view of the form.

Context – show where the user is in the process. During the checkout process, the user needs to know where she is, how much longer it's going to take, and how to go back in the process to make changes. The shopping experience is much smoother when the page doesn't have to reload every time the user wants to view an item's details or add something to her shopping cart.

Feedback – with Ajax interactions, when a user updates an item, the old methods of providing confirmation (alert boxes or page refreshes) need to be replaced. Users may not understand that if the page doesn't refresh, their changes have still been saved. For example, when an item has been saved, the system can provide a subtle indication ("I got your message") with a fading highlight on that item. You can also use progress bars to indicate that something is happening even though the page doesn't change.

The audience had a number of questions for Sarah and David, and discussion was lively. They presented a complex topic very comprehensively, and the attendees left with plenty of concrete design ideas as well as a list of sites to investigate.

Websites referenced in this article:

http://www.adaptivepath.com

http://www.oreillynet.com/pub/a/
oreilly/tim/news/2005/09/30/what-is-web-20.html

http://www.adaptivepath.com/ideas/
essays/archives/000385.php

Caitlin Gannon is a user experience designer with 10 years of experience in website development, information architecture, usability testing, and technical writing.
Website: www.caitlingannon.com.

Sarah B. Nelson is a design strategist for Adaptive Path. She has ten years of experience in interactive media and designing kiosks, mobile, and online experiences for clients in a variety of industries. Sarah has a particular passion for practice development, conducting research into methods for improving collaboration, supporting creativity, and encouraging innovation.

David Verba is Director of Technology for Adaptive Path. His many years of technical leadership and architecture experience cover a broad range of projects and strategies. David brings 15 years of development experience with both open source and more traditional technologies to Adaptive Path.

Other Organizations

American Medical Writers Association (AMWA) of Northern California. Meets periodically at various Bay Area locations. 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. www.asindexing.org/site/chapters.shtml#golden

Association for Women in Computing, San Francisco Bay Area chapter — 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. — www.nwu.org

Northern California Science Writers' Association. Quarterly meetings & other events. www.ncswa.org

President's Notes
by Richard Mateosian

I hope you enjoy whatever holidays you celebrate this season. An Indian technical writer IM-ed me to ask if Thanksgiving is a big festival here. I explained the to-grandmother's-house-we-go aspect of it. I'm not sure he understood. I'm glad he didn't ask me to explain what kind of festival Christmas is here.

The weekend before Thanksgiving marked the end of the initial phase of this year's local technical communication competition, which we co-sponsored along with the other Bay Area chapters. We will announce and display the winning entries at the Berkeley Chapter's holiday party in January. Finishing the competition requires additional work -- mostly tracking down missing pieces and making everything shipshape. If you're interested in participating in that effort, please talk with Patrick Lufkin or me.

The Berkeley Chapter's holiday party will be on Wednesday, January 9, 2008, at the Highlands Country Club. In addition to exhibiting competition winners, we will recognize Berkeley Chapter volunteers. This will be our third holiday party at the country club. The two previous were great successes. As usual, you can network with your fellow communicators, eat good food, and even win a raffle prize. Not all of the details are set, so watch our website for more information. The country club has ample but finite capacity. Sign up early to ensure your place.

STC renewal time is upon us. Go to the STC website to renew your membership. $25.00 of your renewal fee comes directly to our chapter, soon after you pay it. This money supports the programs and resources our chapter provides. If you appreciate what STC and our chapter do for you, you can show your approval by renewing early. If you renew before the end of the year, it can reduce your 2007 income taxes (check with your tax preparer to be sure). If you wait until January, you won't get a tax benefit until you file your 2008 returns.

Report

How Suite It Is: Adobe showcases its new Technical Communication Suite

by Patrick Lufkin

For years Adobe Systems has been fending off persistent rumors that FrameMaker and/or RoboHelp were going to be killed off or abandoned. With its newly released Technical Communication Suite, Adobe will surely put those rumors to rest.

On November 6th, Adobe showed off the new suite to a group of San Francisco Bay Area technical communicators. In a seminar given at Adobe's San Francisco offices, R J Jacquez, the suite's product evangelist, demonstrated that the suite can do just about anything that technical communicators—be they authors of print documents, producers of web based help, or designers of online training—might ask of it.

The suite consists of FrameMaker 8, RoboHelp 7, Captivate 3, and Acrobat 3D Version 8.

The suite also includes some handy ancillary tools such as RoboScreen Capture, and RoboSource Control, each features of RoboHelp. All of the programs feature major improvements and have been tightly integrated to work together.

Adobe characterizes the suite as a "complete solution for authoring, managing, and publishing technical information and instructional content in multiple languages and formats," and says the suite will allow users to "create and maintain technical documentation, user assistance systems, knowledge bases, simulations, software demonstrations, and other support and training information."

FrameMaker

While Adobe has long worked to position FrameMaker as a single sourcing tool, getting to the desired results has not always been easy, even with the help of third-party tools such as WebWorks Publisher. With FrameMaker 8, Adobe appears to have moved the program much closer to being a true single-sourcing tool.

While FrameMaker continues its unrivaled support for long print documents, it also includes enhanced functionality for versioning and single-sourcing. Support for different output formats has been improved to lessen or eliminate the need for third-party add-ons. (WebWorks Publisher no longer ships with the program.) The production of channel-specific versions of documents through the use of output filters using Boolean expressions and the use of attributes to control conditional output has been enhanced.

As with earlier versions, authors can choose to work in either a style-tagging mode or in a fully structured environment. FrameMaker 8 has been optimized for better support of XML and now supports DITA's topic-based authoring as well. Adobe says the new version has moved away from reliance on proprietary formats, and now conforms to industry standards such as DITA and DocBook.

FrameMaker 8 can also serve as the primary authoring tool for other parts of the suite, especially RoboHelp, and can, in turn, use files produced in Captivate and Acrobat 3D.

RoboHelp

RoboHelp, long the tool of choice for creating online help, has also received a number of enhancements, including Unicode support which allows authoring in multiple languages. One can import content from many formats, including Adobe PDF, FrameMaker, HTML, XML, or Word, as well as from such multimedia formats as SWF, AVI and MP3. It can generate output to almost any online format one might care to use.

If one chooses to author in FrameMaker, Robohelp can link to the FrameMaker files

and easily update its RoboHelp topics when the source files are updated.

Captivate

The other primary authoring tool in the suite is Captivate, a tool for creating software demonstrations, simulations, and scenario-based training. During a screen-recording session, the program can capture mouse movements and other activity to quickly create interactive simulations. One can add text descriptions, multimedia, various forms of interactivity, and even assessments with scored user interaction.

Acrobat 3D

While all of the suite members look strong, the wow factor award probably goes to Acrobat 3D, which has the ability to work with 3D objects such as those produced by Solid Modeler and other 3D CAD software. As Jacquez pointed out during the demonstration, engineers are often loath to hand their 3D model files to technical communicators, for fear they will get messed up. Acrobat 3D obviates the problem by allowing communicators to import 2D and 3D designs in PDF and then manipulate the PDFs without danger to the original files. One can add materials (skins), create exploded views, edit lighting, and even add embedded audio and video. One can save the results as 3D objects—which can be rotated and manipulated by the viewer—or as 2D images. While creating 3D PDFs requires Acrobat 3D, the resulting PDFs can be used inside of FrameMaker and Robo-Help and can be read by anyone using a regular PDF reader.

Pricing

For those interested, trial versions of the suite are available at https://www.adobe.com/go/tcs

Adobe has priced the suite at $1500 for those who do not own earlier versions of any of the constituent products. However, current owners of any version of FrameMaker or RoboHelp can upgrade for $999. The educa-

tional price for students is $599.

Patrick Lufkin is a longtime member of STC. He is currently Membership Manager of the Management SIG and Chair of the Kenneth M. Gordon Memorial Scholarship.

November 14, 2007 Meeting Notes

Asset-based Learning Content at Autodesk
by Paul Sinasohn

Ray Eisenberg and David Sanchez, both Senior Managers at Autodesk (www.autodesk.com), talked about how they manage the content development process. Their group is currently part of the Customer Support organization.

Autodesk localizes their products in 19 languages, and their self-paced learning is localized in 10 languages. They create technical training materials for most of their products, with product stakeholders providing priority content. Much of the subsequent content processing is handled by outside vendors of all sizes—from single practitioners to large companies.

Autodesk provides specifications to their vendors, adjusting the information depending on the vendor. They have found that some offshore development companies need very detailed spreadsheets of content items, while others can work with less specific information.

Autodesk manages their content internally, using a content management system (CMS), OutStart Evolution. See later in this article for more information about their tools.

Ray's group uses Project Managers, Technical Editors, and Localization experts. They set the framework for the content and manage the vendors. A separate group in-house does the production, final processing, and release management.

When they are developing materials for a completely new product, they rely on SMEs, including software developers, who create video files using the software.

In order to accomplish their wide-ranging

mission, Ray's group uses a Learning Object structure: they classify information into 5 categories for training purposes inside a training object:

- Concepts
- Facts
- Principles
- Procedures and Processes
- Projects (Exercises)

These items are book-ended by a subject overview at the start and a summary at the end. The student performs a pre-assessment and a post-assessment on each learning object.

Ray and his group have found, over the years, that the Objectives and the Assessments are absolutely critical to the learning process. Their system is loosely based on Information Mapping (IM), and Ray encourages everyone to learn something about it. Other favorite references include Robert Mager's *Preparing Instructional Objectives* and Ruth Clark's *Developing Technical Training*. Clark's book, in particular, marries the concepts of IM to those of Instructional Design.

They have not found a panacea for creating assessment questions; it is something of an art, and few have mastered it. They must be especially careful when creating certification questions, as there are many pitfalls. In response to a question, Ray mentioned that certification localization has not been a focus for Autodesk to date.

The bottom line is that assessment questions **must** relate to the Learning Object objectives!

While their design specification is rigorous, it is flexible—not every learning object requires every type of item; the contents will change. However, in their system (as in all IM-based content development), titles are critical: Gerunds are required except where they make no sense (mostly for the Objective and Summary items).

They enforce a writing structure that allows content to be re-used while still making sense. For example, connecting statements ("As you previously learned…") are often left out, as they would not necessarily apply to e-learning projects. They do **not** single-source; their online content has between 120% and 140% of the topics included in their printed manuals. But everything does come out of one database. Building content in a database allows them to customize content delivery based on a user's profile—even on the fly.

They have had to address the problems related to changes in functionality—at what point does a new content object get created, rather than an existing one being edited? This is a classic Content Management System issue.

Dave Sanchez took over the presentation to discuss the actual system used.

Their Content Development system is thin-client/web-based, run using OutStart Evolution, with a prescribed data model. The base task is to chunk and tag the content. This, of course, is made more complex by their decentralized development model. Evolution allows them to test and edit content as well as develop it.

Database elements are complied into assemblies. An Assembly at Autodesk is just a collection of learning objects. The elements in them can be text, graphics, or just about anything else that can be stored electronically. Evolution does not, however, track slide presentations at this time. New assemblies are linked to existing ones (new versions, for example). An assembly can use elements created or managed by different content managers, even in non-learning systems. Other Autodesk data repositories are tagged and indexed as their items appear in Knowledge Management system searches.

Autodesk deliberately delivers content customized to the individual learner. The business unit responsible for the software product creates profiles that can include subscription or payment requirements, topics needed for the learner, and products available to the learner.

Autodesk does massive amounts of content mapping, as you might guess—new vendors and writers must be edited very carefully. Fortunately, tagging has been automated to a great extent.

Determining the effectiveness of a particular assembly is done through the standard assessments, such as the Kirkpatrick levels (look them up!). To date, the assessment data has not been formally circled back to the Content Development group, but it will be in the future. Right now, there is some ad hoc and voluntary usability testing being done by volunteers in a lab environment.

In their current system, content cannot be tagged with instructor notes, but this is mostly a bandwidth issue. When dynamic user profiles are in widespread use, this will definitely be required.

Dave demonstrated their LCMS portal—it is a standard, permissions-based system using tabs—the tabs you see depend on what rights you have been given regarding elements in the database. Tracking content states—submission, review, edit, release—are all done in the LCMS tool. All review comments are collated at the element level.

Ray and Dave have put years of work into this system and the procedures and processes affiliated with it—each has been with Autodesk between 8 and 10 years. But their work has paid off, and will continue to do so, making it easy for learners to understand the very complex and powerful software they must use.

Paul Sinasohn an Instructional Designer and Technical Trainer with ten years training experience and 15 years business background in multiple industries and different disciplines. He is currently looking for a new full-time position. Paul is also a professional singer specializing in Vaudeville and comic songs. http://www.geocities.com/sinasohn

Other STC chapters in Northern California

East Bay: 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

Web Usability column

Readability and visibility

by Eric Hughes, Managing Director, Simplexity, LLC

In our previous columns, we discussed the process for ensuring quality navigation, and how to keep a web presence appropriately simple and consistent for your audiences. In this column, we'll discuss readability and visibility on the web—is what is supposed to be clickable really clickable? Is content easily scanned? Are headers used well? Is content written and presented appropriately?

Because publishing on the web is so incredibly easy to do, we have lost track of what it takes to do quality content creation and editing. Many have rationalized that by preaching timeliness over quality. Clearly, there are circumstances where that stance is appropriate, but in most cases, those who publish to the web need to have a tighter reign on what gets read and experienced.

As is true with everything on the web, if you know your audience, you can create content that is relevant and easy to digest, and still meet timeliness goals. Ask yourself these questions:

Is your content written at the right level for your audience?

Here is a trick you can try (this is called the Gunning Fog index, but there are others):
1. Select a sample of at least 100 words. Count the number of sentences and divide the total number of words in the sample by the number of sentences to get the average sentence length (ASL).
2. Count the number of words with three or more syllables in the sample, but don't include proper nouns, hyphenated words, two-syllable verbs made into three with -es and -ed.

3. Divide this number by the number of words in the sample. For example, 10 long words divided by 100 words gives you 10 percent difficult words (PDW).

4. To get the fog index, add the average sentence length and the percent difficult words and multiply this by 0.4. The formula looks like this: (ASL + PDW)x0.4 = Grade Level.

This is the number of years of schooling an English-as-a-first-language reader would need to easily understand the selected sample.

Are your URLs and headers short, consistent and frequent?

People scan information on the web. They expect to be able to find what they are looking for quickly and accurately. Put time into what your headers say. Make them complete and clear—and don't just use the first thing that comes into your head. Be careful about the hierarchy of headers that you use—make sure it is obvious what a sub header is. Viewers often see headings out of context, such as in the results of a search engine. For example, if you're selling used guitars, don't use *Fender* at the top of one page and *Looking for a Gibson?* at the top of another. Instead, put *Used Fender Electric Guitars* on the first page and *Used Gibson Acoustic Guitars* on the next. These headings are simple, complete, and consistent.

URLs should be as simple as possible. This is getting difficult with some technologies, but don't lose track of how hard it is to copy an URL that runs off the side of the location bar, or that splits into two lines in an email message.

We recently reviewed a site that mixed breadcrumbs and headings. A typical heading looked something like this:

> Courses/Upcoming Classes/Online.

It was clear that the text represented a header, but there should have been a clear hierarchy with the headers, and they should have been presented in different sizes or styles of text, not just run together. The page title should be Courses, then there should be sections for Upcoming Classes and Online Classes. The site also used these headers as breadcrumbs, but it wasn't clear that the text was clickable unless the text was moused over. Breadcrumbs, if used, should distinctly separate from headers and be formatted like this:

Courses > Upcoming Classes > Online.

Is it clear what text (or other content) is clickable?

Underlined text should be clickable. Don't use it unless you are indicating that clicking it will take you someplace else. Except in places where it is obvious that text is navigational, don't make people mouse over the text or object to figure out that it is clickable (logos in headers are exempt from this rule, as it is standard that clicking on a header logo will take you back to a home page). Know what your visitors want and put it where they can find it.

Make sure that buttons look like buttons. Don't get carried away with how creative you can make a button look. If it says: "Submit", sure, people will always know what to do no matter what it looks like. But if it says: "Search" or "Filter" or "Clear", it is usually not so obvious.

Are your paragraphs short and to the point?

Scanning content is the norm on the web. People generally don't read in detail until they find something of interest. Make it easy for them to find that content they need, then give them detail.

It used to be that multiple vertical columns were the norm, and you can still find that used throughout the web. Unfortunately, multiple columns has given way to tremendous clutter on home pages. Too much choice invariably leads to no choice at all. Many "web 2.0" sites have begun to use horizontal columns, and that seems to work even

better than vertical columns, since it leads to a more organized look.

NOTE: Please don't ever use all upper case letters (except occasionally in headers). It is hard to read and sometimes people will think YOU ARE YELLING AT THEM.

Is your home page focused and uncluttered?

Help your visitors find what they need by understanding why they came to your site. Tell them right away who you are, what you do, and why they should do business with or contact you. Try to keep your home page focused enough so that people don't have to scroll down to see anything. If you have that as a goal, you will avoid the tendency to clutter.

Don't use busy backgrounds, they just distract from your message. For those of you struggling with how to present information on mobile devices, this is also very important. As of this writing (November 2007), about 15% of web users still use 800 x 600 screens. Don't make your site impossible for them to read.

Is your navigation persistent?

We have noticed a tendency recently to only put secondary navigation into mouse-over menus. This makes it very difficult for viewers to scan what they want to do next. It is best to keep your navigational options readily available.

Readability and visibility are incredibly important to a successful web experience, and incredibly hard to do well. It takes planning, audience analysis and quality information architecture work to be successful in this arena.

Meetings

Our chapter holds a dinner meeting the second Wednesday of each month. See *Berkeley STC Meeting Location and Directions* on page 12.

Upcoming Meetings

Single-sourcing through a CMS for a Small Writing Team, using AuthorIT
by Chris Muntzer

Wednesday, December 12, 2007, 6-9:30pm
Highlands Country Club
110 Hiller Drive, Oakland, California

Chris Muntzer leads a small team of writers who produce both hardcopy and Help from a single source CMS (content management system) using AuthorIT. Chris will share his expertise and discuss how to:

- Set up and maintain consistency with multiple writers when single sourcing through a CMS
- Analyze a project to break it down into reusable chunks of information
- Develop a localization strategy that synchronizes changes in the source and translated projects

Speaker

Chris Muntzer was born in and raised in the UK where he trained as an electrical engineer. In 1978, he moved to the USA and has since become a US citizen. As an engineer, he became increasingly interested in technical documentation and, seven years ago made a career change to become a full-time technical writer.

As a technical writer, he has explored the practical implementation of single-sourcing and content management systems (CMS). For several years he has led a small team of writers, creating documentation for several products out of an AuthorIT single-source CMS.

Berkeley Chapter Holiday Party

Wednesday, January 9, 2008, 6-9:30pm
  Highlands Country Club
  110 Hiller Drive, Oakland, California

Program

Join us for good company, good food, and to hear (and see) the results of the 2007-2008 Northern California Technical Communication Competition. The entries will be on hand for viewing.

Creating Online Help for Eclipse: A Case Study

by Kim Rathbun

Wednesday, February 13, 2007, 6-9:30pm
  Highlands Country Club
  110 Hiller Drive, Oakland, California

Program

Eclipse, as a platform, is widely adopted for building development environments because it offers a universal platform for tools integration. LeapFrog has adopted Eclipse to develop its software development kits and internal applications. Because the Eclipse platform is a plug-in environment, it presents some addition challenges when developing online help.

This presentation focuses on how LeapFrog has adapted its single sourcing environment using FrameMaker and WebWorks ePublisher to produce online help for Eclipse applications. Kim will explain the process involved in taking HTML topics generated from ePublisher—or any other source—and making them work within an Eclipse online help plug-in. This involves creating a table of contents file, a context sensitive help file, and then testing them within the Eclipse environment.

Speaker

Kim Rathbun is currently a senior technical writer at LeapFrog Inc. She has over 25 years experience working in the computer industry as an engineer, trainer, and technical writer. As a writer, she has designed and written user manuals, online help, training materials, and e-learning modules for a variety of industries. At LeapFrog Inc., her current focus is developing user manuals and online help for their Eclipse-based applications.

Meeting/Dinner Prices

STC Members Meeting and Dinner
  $21.00 per person at door
  $18.00 if reserved on our Chapter's Website by the day before the meeting

Students Meeting and Dinner
  $18.00 per person at door
  $15.00 if reserved on our Chapter's Website by the day before the meeting

Non-STC Member Meeting and Dinner
  $24.00 per person at door
  $21.00 if reserved on our Chapter's Website by the day before the meeting

Meeting-only prices (reserved and at door are the same):
  STC Member $12.00
  Student $10.00
  Non-STC Member $15.00

Special cost notes:
- All members of the San Francisco Chapter of the IABC are welcome to register for Berkeley STC General Meetings at the member price ($18 dinner/$12 without dinner) by midnight on the day before the meeting.
- Nonmembers are always welcome to STC meetings at the non-member rates.

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.

Berkeley STC Meeting Location and Directions

Highlands Country Club
110 Hiller Drive
Oakland, California

Information at http://www.stc-berkeley.org/MonthlyMeeting/june2007_meeting/calendar.shtml#loc

By Car

From San Francisco

Cross the Bay Bridge to I-580 Eastbound. Remain in the right lane, until Highway 24 Eastbound (toward Berkeley and Walnut Creek). Continue eastbound until the Tunnel Road off-ramp. Exit will loop around to the west, crossing back over Highway 24. Turn left at the stop sign. Follow Tunnel Road/Caldecott Lane to traffic signal. Veer to the right, and follow Hiller Drive halfway up the hill. Highlands Country Club will be on the right-hand side of the street.

From Walnut Creek

Take Highway 24 Westbound through the Caldecott Tunnel. Stay in the right-hand lane, taking the first exit after the tunnel ends, the Tunnel Road exit, going towards Berkeley. Follow Tunnel Road to the complex intersection and stop light, at Tunnel Drive, Hiller Drive, and Highway 13. Veer to the right, and continue halfway up the hill on Hiller Drive. Highlands Country Club will be on the right-hand side of the street.

From I-80 and Berkeley

Take Ashby Avenue to the Highway 13 exit. Ashby becomes Tunnel Road at the Claremont Hotel. Continue on Tunnel Road (through the split-level section) to the stoplight just before the Highway 24 overcrossing. Remain in the left lane and make a sharp left U-turn around the Firestorm Memorial Garden, on to Hiller Drive. Continue halfway up the hill. Highlands Country Club will be on the right-hand side of the street.

From Hayward

Take I-580 Westbound to Highway 13 north. Continue on Highway 13 past the overcrossing of Highway 24. At the stoplight, turn right, then left, onto Hiller Drive. Continue halfway up the hill. Highlands Country Club will be on the right-hand side of the street.

Parking

Please park on the street. The club's parking lot is for members only.

Public Transit

Prefer to take BART? The Rockridge station is closest. Send email to president@stc-berkeley.orgto ask about transportation from BART to the meeting.

AC Transit bus E from SF via MacArthur then Rockridge takes you as far as Tunnel Road & Roble Road, with a half mile walk uphill on Hiller Drive to the Hillside Country Club.

STC News

Chapter News

Leadership Positions Available

We are looking to fill several leadership positions! Contact Richard Mateosian if you are interested.

Membership Update

by Jim Dexter:

Total STC Membership as of September 30, 2007	14,831 (up 125 since August, 2007)
Total Chapter Membership	149

Welcome Frank D. Ripp, Maureen T. Jerrett, and Amy Rasmussen to our chapter!

Tips & Tidbits

Easy Ways to Make Your Web Site a Search Engine Attention-Grabber

You probably have plenty of search engine optimization (SEO) key phrases on your Web site's product and service pages. But there are simple ways to give your site even more SEO power. Write brief articles about trends in your industry or other topics of interest to your customer, and include hyperlinks (using SEO key phrases) to examples within your Web site. Also, review your frequently asked questions page and add SEO key phrases where they fit.

Source: Heather Lloyd-Martin, chair, Direct Marketing Association's Search Engine Marketing Council; http://www.search-enginewriting.com.

Where is Credit Due?

Plagiarism and the Web

Are you confused or concerned about how copyright applies to what you put on the Internet or intranet? See the Nolo site and its 10 tips (http://www.nolo.com/article.cfm/objectID/8CD796F2-9770-4ECA-B8F2B4F66DB170F1/310/266/ART/).

The first tip is to assume anything you want to copy is copyrighted and you can't post it without the owner's authorization.

The site gives some links to collectives and clearinghouses that organize and license works for their members. For example, if you want to reprint a cartoon, go to http://www.cartoonbank.com.

A Time for Giving

You can help others with the click of a mouse at several sites this year, including a portal site, http://www.networkforgood.org, that includes AOL and Yahoo as its founders and sponsors.

The site allows you to search by keyword, area of interest and location or by organization. It offers direct links to a number of charitable sites, to specific causes, crisis relief, and to sites where you can donate non-cash items.

Network for Good offers some unusual options. You can choose from 10 gift baskets grouped by themes and causes, create or find a favorite charities list and keep track of your donations.

Worried about giving online? Read the 10 tips for giving safely online.

Wondering if your donations are deductible? Read the tax tips.

APEX 2008 Competition

The 20th Annual APEX AWARDS FOR PUBLICATION EXCELLENCE is now accepting entries for APEX 2008 (Entry deadline: MARCH 17, 2008).

Call for entries information, brochure and entry form are posted at http://www.Apex-Awards.com/apexawards.htm.

To download the APEX Call for Entries brochure, go to: http://www.Apex-Awards.com/apex_broch.pdf.

Just need the APEX Entry Form? Go to: http://www.ApexAwards.com/ apex_entry_form.pdf.

You can fill out the PDF Easy Entry Form right on your computer screen. (No need to find a typewriter or fill out the form by hand.) Then just print it and mail it with your entries and payment.

New and revised categories for 2008 include
- Health & Medical Campaigns
- Member & Customer Communications Campaigns
- Science & Technology Writing
- News Series Writing
- How-to Series Writing
- Employee & Benefit Materials
- Member & Customer Materials
- One-of-a-Kind Science & Environment
- and One-of-a-Kind Public Service.

For the complete list of all 110 categories, see http://www.ApexAwards.com/ apex2008awardscategories.htm.

The competition's entry deadline (postmark) is MARCH 17, 2008.

APEX is sponsored by the editors of WRITING THAT WORKS, a newsletter for writing, editing and communications professionals. The contest is open to corporate, nonprofit, freelance and agency communicators. Entrants do not have to be WRITING THAT WORKS subscribers.