Ragged Left

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

In this issue

STC
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Wiki Workshop a Great Success
by Patrick Lufkin

With all the buzz about new web technologies—collectively termed Web 2.0—most of us have heard the term "wiki," and may have even used Wikipedia, the technology's most well known success story. But just what is a wiki, what can it do for you or your company, and how does one set one up? These and other questions were recently addressed in a day-long workshop sponsored by the Berkeley chapter of STC.

Organized by Linda Urban and Mary Ann Campbell, the chapter's Co-VPs for programs, the workshop was held on March 1 in a classroom at the UC Berkeley Extension in downtown Berkeley, where Linda also teaches classes in the Extension's technical communication certificate program. The chapter wishes to thank the Extension for the use of the classroom and the wireless connectivity that made the workshop possible.

Instructor

Led by Stuart Culshaw, a web communications manager at ILOG, a Paris-based business management software company, the workshop covered concepts, history, and uses of wikis, but its main focus was on giving attendees actual hands-on experience in setting up and using a wiki.

An Englishman working in France, Culshaw has over 15 years experience as a technical writer and web developer. At ILOG, Culshaw is helping redesign the company's wiki-based corporate intranet, and is charged with evangelizing Web 2.0 technologies. He is also the Past President and current Vice President and Webmaster of the STC France Chapter.

Culshaw, who has worked with many different web content management systems over the years, says that since discovering wiki, he has never looked back. What makes wiki unique on the technology frontier is that it is more of a concept or philosophy than a tool or technology.

The Wiki Way

The first wiki was developed in 1994 by Ward Cunningham, who was already well-known in programming circles for his work on programming design patterns. Cunningham needed a quick way for programmers to exchange ideas. The challenge, as he saw it, was to develop "the simplest possible online database that could work." The result, which is comparable to a set of online index cards, he named Wiki, after the Hawaiian word for "quick." Cunningham expanded on the concept in The Wiki Way, published in 2001.

At its simplest, a wiki is a collection of web pages that anyone can edit. Pages are stored in a central location. Editing is easy and does not require special tools. Formatting is far simpler than HTML. While wiki implementations vary, any wiki should support the basic formatting and features found on web pages: heading levels, numbered and bulleted lists, simple tables, hyperlinking, embedded graphics, and so on.

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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 14 for contacts for these chapters. See page 16 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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Culshaw said that the essence of wiki is collaboration. Wikis are bottom up, not top down. "When content is in a shared space and is easy to create and connect, it can be collectively owned."

Exploring

The best way to become familiar with wikis is to visit a few. Perhaps the most famous wiki is Wikipedia, the collaborative online encyclopedia, with its truly awesome collection of articles on everything from the most arcane science to the latest pop craze. In addition to Wikipedia, (http://www.wikipedia.org/), Culshaw had the class visit Wiktionary (www.wiktionary.org/), an online multilingual dictionary, Wikiversity (www.wikiversity.org/), a source for publishing and taking courses, and Wikinews (http://www.wikinews.org/), an online news source, which features citizen reporting.

Wiki Tools

A large part of the workshop was devoted to letting attendees get some hands-on experience setting up a wiki and creating and editing a few pages.

While wiki is not a tool, you do need wiki software or a wiki service of some sort to make a wiki work. Wiki software and services come in many flavors. As this is written, WikiMatrix (http://www.wikimatrix.org/index.php), a website that allows you to cross-compare various wiki tools and services, lists close of 100 offerings.

TiddlyWiki

At the simple end is TiddlyWiki, which its creators call a reusable non-linear personal web notebook. An open source program written in HTML, CSS, and JavaScript, TiddlyWiki will run on any modern browser without the need for any server-side logic, and will allow anyone "to create personal self-contained hypertext documents that can be posted to a WebServer, sent by email, or kept on a USB thumb drive to make a Wiki-OnAStick."

Culshaw had attendees work with Tiddly-Wiki for a while, and it is indeed simple and fun. One can easily imagine it being used to store and organize personal notes, or for a simple collaborative project.

Those who would like to try it can download a free copy from www.tiddlywiki.com/.

PBWiki

However, to really harness the power of wiki, you will probably want access to a server-based wiki, either through your company, or through a hosting service. Here, Culshaw demonstrated PBWiki, a free offering from a hosting service. (PBWiki hopes that if you like the free version, you will upgrade to the paid service with its added bells and whistles.) The "PB" is for Peanut Butter, to imply that creating a wiki is as easy as making a peanut butter sandwich.

Culshaw says that the free version of PB Wiki, which he uses for the STC France Chapter, will meet the needs of most people and of small organizations. PBWiki is at www.pbwiki.com.

Success and Failure

While wikis are collaborative, a successful wiki project takes planning, Culshaw said. It also needs people: engineers to handle the technology, knowledge nerds to provide content, and passionate people who want the knowledge to get out. Expressed in terms of roles, it needs readers, editors, contributors, managers, and Wiki champions, people who are passionate about the wiki and who drum up the support it will need to succeed.

While planning is needed, Culshaw said it is also important to not overdo it. You should keep it simple and not "over think it," he advised. "Throw it up there," and let it grow, and remember that "unfinished is okay."

While wikis can be wildly successful, they can also fail. Culshaw discussed a number of failure factors, many of them tied more to human foibles than to technology. To begin, he stressed, your user community must be ready. A wiki won't succeed in a culture of knowledge hoarding, or where egos easily

bruise when ideas or prose gets edited or amended.

Berkeley STC Leadership Wiki

One of the immediate outcomes of the workshop is that the Berkeley STC has established a wiki for its leadership to help it gather and organize ideas for better managing the chapter and serving the membership. At the time of writing, the Wiki is just getting started, but you will probably hear more about it in the months to come.

Patrick Lufkin is a long-time STC member, serves as Member-at-Large on the Berkeley Chapter Board, and is chair of the Kenneth M. Gordon Scholarship for technical communication.

President's Notes
by Richard Mateosian

The first four months of the year are always hectic. A number of STC-related events and issues demand our attention in that timeframe.

In January we had our wonderfully successful post-holiday party, at which we hosted the awards ceremony for the Northern California Technical Communication Competition. Check out the January/February *Ragged Left* for details and pictures. Planning for the 2008-09 competition will begin soon. Let me know if you'd like to participate, or just be on the mailing list.

On March 1, Stuart Culshaw presented a workshop on wikis. Many members of the chapter leadership attended (at their own expense), and we have subsequently experimented with ways to use wikis to facilitate our discussions.

Later in March we had a strategic planning meeting. I invited all chapter members to participate, but beyond the leadership, only one other member attended. However, this process is still in its early stages, so it's not too late to get involved. Let me know if you are interested, and I'll show you how to view and participate in our work in progress.

The bulk of membership renewals are in, and I hope that those of you who haven't

renewed yet will do so soon. Our chapter is financially sound, and we'd like to keep it that way! Under the new funding model, we receive $25 for each standard renewal (less for students, retired members, and a few other cases). STC accumulates this money and sends us a payment every month or so. The sooner you renew, the sooner we get the money.

If you don't plan to renew, I'd appreciate your sending me a note telling me why. If it's because of something we're not doing the way you'd prefer, the chapter leadership would like to know that.

The STC election closed on April 14th, and STC will announce the results the first week of June at its annual meeting, which will be in Philadelphia this year. I will be there, as will some other chapter members. If you're planning to attend, let me know, so we can touch base while we're there.

STC is changing its fiscal year to coincide with the calendar year. That means that STC will have a short fiscal 2008 (July 1 through December 31, 2008). Fiscal 2009 will begin on January 1, 2009. The Berkeley Chapter leadership has decided to change the chapter's year to match the STC year. That means that officer terms will now run for a calendar year, rather than July 1 through June 30. To make the transition as smooth as possible, the current chapter officers have agreed to stay in their jobs for an additional six months. We will hold chapter elections around the end of October for our 2009 officers.

There are many ways you can participate in our chapter, but the most important of all is to come to meetings! Our programs managers, Linda Urban and Mary Ann Campbell, have worked hard to bring us a series of programs on important topics. You can find out about our excellent upcoming programs by visiting our chapter website. Just for attending you might win a coveted Berkeley Chapter mug or any of a number of other great prizes in our raffle. We've also adopted some of the suggestions we've had about the food, and our meeting site in the hills overlooking the bay is especially beautiful this time of year. See you there!

February 13, 2008 Meeting Notes

Kim Rathbun Shows Eclipse Plug-in Help in Action

by Thomas Albert, Ph.D.

Software developers have long awaited the equivalent of executable building blocks with which they can add (or subtract) whatever functionality they want. The Eclipse software framework provides a flexible Integrated Development Environment (IDE) for Java developers. Eclipse originated at IBM and is growing in popularity, in part because it has a business-friendly version of open-source licensing. Developers (and software organizations) can extend the default rich-client platform (RCP) environment by contributing their own plug-in modules. (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eclipse.org)

Eclipse is particularly useful for allowing core developers to rapidly provide a customized environment for application developers. Adobe, IBM, Oracle, Sybase, and many other organizations have developers using Eclipse. At the February meeting, Kimberley Rathbun informed us that Leap-Frog Enterprises is using Eclipse to facilitate the development of internal tools used to produce educational products for children.

The Eclipse framework includes an XML-based plug-in for producing a kind of HTML Help called Eclipse Help that resembles Java Help. LeapFrog's implementation of Eclipse Help features the collapsible Contents tree and full-text Search, and context-sensitive help. While Quadralay Corporation has indicated that it is expanding its support of Eclipse Help so that technical writers can use FrameMaker (and perhaps Word) to author the content, WebWorks ePublisher doesn't currently offer a solution for generating Eclipse Help. If you download the free trial version from http://www.webworks.com/Downloads/Free_Trial/, Rathbun warns that you won't find Eclipse help in the output formats list. Their sales department says that the Eclipse help feature is due in the Q2 2008 release. So, for now, you can generate your HTML, but have to use some other method to create your toc.xml file.

Rathbun demonstrated the process of producing Eclipse Help. In this case, WebWorks is the starting point to generate the HTML files. She then generates a toc.html that lists HTML files to be included in the Help system. This HTML file must be converted to an XML file in the Eclipse format. Rathbun recommends using an XML Editor application, such as XML Lite 3.2 Exchanger, which is free at http://www.freexmleditor.com/.

The Eclipse framework supports context-sensitive help. LeapFrog implements this help on dialogs and panels in the form of little round buttons with question marks. The technical writer delivers a contexts.xml file that includes the context ID, label and, link to the HTML topic file. The software developer hooks the ID to each Help button so that the end-user's action of pressing the question mark button displays the help window with the link to the appropriate topic.

Rathbun also demonstrated how to test the finished Eclipse Help within the same customized Eclipse environment that her end-users use.

Resources

Eclipse Documentation ~ http://help.eclipse.org

Technical Writers using Eclipse ~ http://groups.yahoo.com/group/eclipse_tw/

IBM's introduction to Eclipse Help Plug-in ~http://www.ibm.com/developerworks/opensource/library/os-echelp/

Comparison of Java Help to Eclipse Help ~ http://www.keycontent.org/tiki-index.php?page=Eclipse+Help+System

Thomas Albert, Ph.D. writes developer documentation at Symyx and teaches First Course in Java for U.C. Berkeley Extension, which does not required any programming background. For details, see http://www.write-technical.com/

March 12, 2008 Meeting Notes

Management Panel: Putting Together the Right Team

Notes on the panelist round table
by Jesse Ducker

If you want to join a technical writing team with a company, know how to deal with adversity and always make sure to proof-read your resume. These are just a couple of tips that a panel of managers shared with the Berkeley chapter of the Society of Technical Writers at the March monthly meeting.

Four representatives from prominent corporations were guests at a panel discussion on March 12, sharing their knowledge and wisdom with the 27 audience members. The theme for the discussion was *Putting Together the Right Team*; panel-members included Judy Burkhart of IBM, Stewart Florsheim of Advent Software, David Jackson of Oracle, and Lis Fraser, who recently worked for Tesla Motors.

Linda Urban moderating the panel
Photo courtesy of Rhonda Bracey

When they are putting a together a team, the panelists said they value strong writing skills first, but they also agreed that candidates should be proactive, resourceful, and willing to take the initiative.

"I value people who can evaluate standards and processes, and people who show the initiative to help us modify the process if necessary," Jackson said.

Panelists said they value writers who are willing to really dig in and get to know all facets of the product they are writing about, from how it works technically to getting to know who the project will serve.

"They should be passionate about the customer requirements and always think about what's important to the audience member," Burkhart said.

David Jackson and Judy Burkhart
Photo courtesy of Rhonda Bracey

When putting together a team of technical writers, the panelists said there are no specific characteristics they look for in possible candidates. However, many said they take special interest in how candidates approach challenges that come with the job and how they handle themselves in the most difficult situations. Stewart said he looks for a demonstrated expertise and knowledge of the industry, while Fraser said she values how a candidates works to drive and document the project on their own.

Jackson said that often candidates underestimate the importance of the resume and the writing samples in applying for a position, emphasizing that they should always be carefully proofed. He stressed the importance of efficiently describing responsibilities at past positions. Burkhart said that references writers list on their resume are very important and should be up to date. Stewart added that with electronically transmitted resumes, it's helpful to include functioning links to online samples of your work.

Many of the panelists said that they didn't have the resources in their budgets to hire contractors. However, those that did still use contractors said they valued those who could get to get up to speed quickly, work independently, and work on site. Stewart looks to see if the contractors personality fits

in with the rest of the team, so there won't be any chemistry issues.

The panel agreed that outsourcing technical writing duties to other countries is not nearly as prominent now as it used to be. Jackson said that often executives with little or no experience try to save money by outsourcing technical writing, soon find that it isn't nearly as cost-effective as they originally thought, and end up scrapping the idea after a short period of time. Panelists believed that while some companies still outsource, most of the time it takes the form of hiring local contractors, rather than going international.
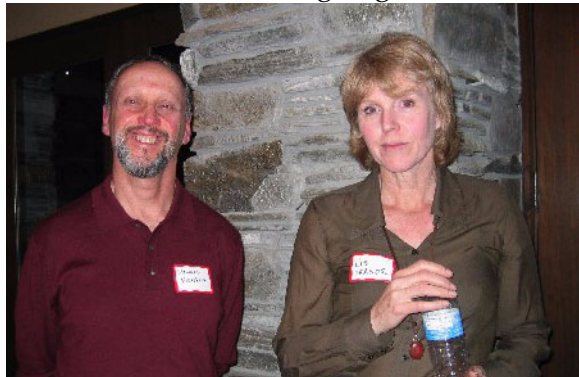
Stewart Florsheim and Liz Fraser
Photo courtesy of Rhonda Bracey

For the companies represented at the meeting, more experience makes you a stronger candidate for the team. Some of the representatives said they'd like to be able to hire people at the entry-level, but they don't have the resources to train them, so they opt for writers with expertise in the area. "I worked for a small organization, and we didn't have time to train someone," Fraser said.

Other words of wisdom from the panel included:

- If you are referred to a company through a recruiter or temp agency, bring your own copy of your resume to the job interview. Recruiters will often butcher your resume when they send it to a prospective employer.
- Include a cover letter when you send a resume to the company, especially if you address issues that have to do with the position you are applying for and explain how you are especially qualified.

- Writers should be comfortable communicating with the audience members and/or customers of the company. Burkhart says that at IBM, ideally every employee communicates with a customer in some fashion.
- All of the companies present said they make extensive use of wikis, so it is good for candidates to be familiar with how to use them. [See *Wiki Workshop a Great Success* on page 1, -Ed.]The panel was split half and half on whether their companies use metrics.

Panelists said there are many reasons for technical writers to be optimistic about their opportunities to be a part of a thriving team.

"It's a writer's market," Stewart said. "It's not that difficult for a technical writer to find a job. Writers can look for what they want."

Jesse Ducker is an aspiring technical writer from Oakland. He currently freelances for a number of publications throughout the Bay Area. He's looking for opportunities to write content for websites.

Web usability column

Availability and Performance
by Eric Hughes, Managing Director, Simplexity, LLC

In our previous columns, we discussed processes and guidelines for ensuring that web development efforts result in a successful project. In this column, we'll discuss a couple of criteria that are especially near and dear to those of us who grew up on systems developed before the advent of the browser: availability and performance.

There is a difference in the mission criticality of software applications. An online banking web site has a much higher level of mission criticality than a social networking site. Each is important to its customers, but one deals with money and private accounts and one deals with, well, information. So when planning a critical web application, somebody has to be thinking about how much time, effort, and expense will be allocated to

making certain the application and data is always there and always running smoothly. Do you need multiple servers? What about redundant databases in different locations? Are single servers in a single location OK? What about the networks? As we've preached again and again in previous columns: know your audience and what they need and will tolerate!

When we talk about usability of applications, we tend to focus on how easy they are to learn or use, not whether we can get to them at all. The Internet has done wonders for increasing the availability of network access to applications, and has allowed us to have availability characteristics from home similar to what we used to have only from our workplace. But there are still a bunch of things that can go wrong between someone's computer and your application or web site. We don't think about it often, but as soon as you click your mouse, data is packaged in an "envelope" that is addressed, sequenced, error-checked, converted, and sent through routers, hubs, digital or analog modems, old wires, new wires, optical fibers, satellite links....and on and on. Then, when it gets to its computing destination, it causes software to process, databases to crunch and useful information to be sent back to the originating computer in the same manner. Fortunately for us, we can spend a lot less time today than in the past designing and configuring wide area networks.

Recent problems you may have heard about:
- Headline: April 3, 2008 - US Census bureau counters will go back to pencil and paper in 2010 - hand held devices were too hard to use, and there were software problems affecting availability of the systems.
- Headline: March 25, 2008 - Netflix web site outage delays DVD deliveries.
- Headline: February 15, 2008 - Amazon Web Services goes down, takes many startup sites with it.
- Headline: July 31, 2007 - Facebook outage: wake up call for privacy advocates.
- Headline: July 24, 2006 - MySpace outage blamed on power loss. I play in a bluegrass band called Foggy Gulch. As with most bands, we have a page on

MySpace where we can publish our music and keep in touch with our fans. If there were any other place to do this, I'd move there in a second because MySpace availability and performance are so incredibly bad. hmmmm...perhaps they know that and figure that lousy availability is acceptable for those of us who aren't willing to pay anything for what they provide!

Service levels for performance and availability

Sometimes it isn't worth the effort to try and separate performance and availability. After all, what is the difference between a site that is so slow you can't use it and one that just isn't there? Many firms will try and explain outages from the perspective of service levels. A site that is available 99% of the time will be available in all but about 2 hours per week in that case. If they meet those goals, they consider that to be success. But in many cases, service levels don't include lousy performance. A poor performing site may be "available" in some definitions. In addition, for those of use using an application, we don't really care that a site is up 99% of the time, because to us, the service level is one of two measurements: zero or 100.

Some people may try to argue that response time (the time it takes for a page to fill your screen after you hit the enter key) isn't important anymore. What is important is what happens to your server when you have 2 or 3 times the number of concurrent users as is typical. OK, there are causes and effects—both are important.

Planning

We can separate what is necessary for highly available web sites into two general planning categories: development effort and systems architecture. Development effort is all about planning the infrastructure of your site in such a way that it can't be compromised, that it takes full advantage of the resources available to it, and that it doesn't use technologies

that are inappropriate for the message or interactions needed. Systems architecture is all about planning for the combinations of networks, servers, and management systems needed to provide access to (or restore) the application and its data under difficult circumstances.

If you are on a team planning a mission-critical web application, hire both developers and designers. Be wary of people who only consider themselves to be designers and try to convince you that developers are unnecessary (or vice versa!). By a developer, I mean someone who has a programming and systems architecture background. Designers tend to focus on interface and use tools to automate the back end, whereas developers approach things the other way around. That is not to say that you shouldn't use designers, it is just that, if optimal availability and performance in your development effort is important, you want someone who can deal with efficient back-end development and systems architecture in addition to design. Developers talk about expiring headers, compression, style sheet placement, JavaScript, content management, DNS lookups, and technologies. They are probably not your first choice for lunch dates. Designers talk about colors, logos, fonts, shapes, emotion. Much more fun.

That being said, you will get about 80% (generalizing with the ol' 80/20 rule) of predictable performance problems solved by optimizing your front end first. That is where designers excel. Make certain that what your customers see in the interface works well: images, scripts, Ajax, Flash or other presentation technologies. While you are doing that, your developers will be ensuring that everything behind the interface is working efficiently: programming, networks, servers, site architecture, security, disaster recovery.

You might want to consider looking into what are called "content delivery networks" for truly critical applications. They provide, in an outsourced manner, much of what you will need to deal with availability and performance of mission critical applications. A Google search on that phrase will show you some of the alternatives. There are also

many third party monitoring systems that you can consider for reporting both performance and availability. Google "web site monitoring." Also be careful of cheap hosting solutions. You will definitely get what you pay for in that arena.

And what about process?

Please don't forget about support processes when you consider performance and availability. It is another area sometimes neglected in the rush toward rapid development. Here is what happened to me in early April, 2008:

A friend of mine is getting married in mid-April, so a few friends went in together to buy some cookware for them. Here is how the process went:

- I navigated to the Williams Sonoma Wedding registry and added two items to my "shopping basket."
- I was nibbled for the additional $5 for gift wrapping, filled out a few forms, gave them my Visa card number, pressed "submit order" and got the following message:

    "OUR SITE IS TEMPORARILY UNAVAVAILABLE. PLEASE CALL 877-812-XXXX FOR IMMEDIATE ASSISTANCE"

- Annoyed, I called the number on the screen, and after holding for 12 minutes (immediate??), was told that none of the information I had entered into the site was available for processing, and that I needed to talk to a completely different group since it was a wedding gift. OK, then why not give me that number on the error page?
- I said: "No thanks, I'll just order from someone else." So I ordered something different from another company on the registry.

The next day I get an email from Williams Sonoma thanking me for the order and telling me it was ready to ship!!

Software as a Service

It used to be that there was a pretty distinct line between what we used as a 'desktop application' and a 'web based application.'

When I did my taxes, I used a desktop application and I didn't need to worry about availability across anything other than my home computer and a printer. Now, if you use any of the common tax programs, you can buy either. You will find that there are significant differences between the two version in both performance and function. For those of you interested in the differences, these programs are an interesting study. It makes a lot of sense to development organizations to move applications to the web, but it isn't always the best availability and performance move for our customers.

You can reach Eric at eric@simplexity.net

Why I Belong to STC

by Clyde Parson
President, Suncoast STC

As we enjoyed Panera Bread's outdoor seating during an Admin Council meeting a couple of months ago, I started thinking about why I belong to STC. My reasons, as would be expected, are unique to me. This means that the things which may be important to me may not be important to our overall membership.

During my recent employment search, those items that I view as important were brought into full view by way of a personality profile that I was asked to complete. It was a very interesting "test" that only required me to choose a series of single words from among twenty-four groups of words. The result was astoundingly accurate. During the interview process, the results were covered and a statement was made that I've continued to think about each time the Admin Council's discussion turns to the topic of membership value.

"We don't often come across technical writers who are as extroverted as you are."

Since I know that I'm recharged by my alone time, I understand that I'm actually an introvert but it is nice to receive the feedback that I do as good a job with my verbal communication as my written. I do genuinely enjoy people and I can see how this combination of factors would influence what I would want from an STC membership.

I also recall an interview with a different company during the same employment search where one former long-term technical communicator turned hiring manager shared with me his preferred work method.

"I would love it if they would slide my work under the door in the morning and I could slide out the completed tasks that afternoon."

Differences like those between myself and this hiring manager have given me reasons to seriously consider exactly why I'm a member of STC and what I hope to gain from my membership. With that in mind, here the top reasons why I belong to STC (in no particular order):

- **Social interaction** - I used to believe that I preferred the warm glow of a computer monitor but in recent years I've found that I would much rather talk to someone face-to-face (never mind the fact that LCD monitors just aren't as cozy to snuggle up with as CRT's once were!)
- **Status associated with membership** - Several employers during my employment search, including the one that I ultimately selected, seemed quite impressed with the fact that I was a member and the chapter president. I think this speaks to one's personal commitment to his or her chosen profession. It says that I view this as a career rather than just another job.
- **Sense of belonging** - As a "lone writer," it's nice to know that there are others who share the same concerns and issues even if they happen to work for a different employer.
- **Career related networking opportunities** - I've long held the belief that the sales function is significantly influenced by how good the salesperson is at building a relationship with a prospective client. In much the same manner, the hiring process can be significantly eased by the establishment of relationships outside the interview.
- **Working toward a common goal** - In my Suncoast leadership position, I've been able to experience the synergy that can take place when multiple people are all pulling in the same direction to accomplish the same goals.

- **Opportunities to express my creativity** - I tend to think in "big picture" terms but since I'm not running my own business I don't always have an outlet for my ideas. Serving in a leadership position with our chapter has provided numerous opportunities to let my creative juices flow.

As the time for membership renewal has once again arrived, I would encourage all STC members to take a moment and reflect on exactly why they joined STC in the first place. Perhaps your list may include some of the items I mentioned. Maybe you came from a completely different angle and your list would be very different. Either way, there's value in revisiting your original decision.

Further, I would encourage you to reaffirm that original decision by renewing your membership if you have not already done so. If you feel that you have not received all from your membership that you would have preferred, I would ask you to consider getting involved with your chapter (your community) at a deeper level. Remember, like many things in life, you can only get out as much as you put in.

Over the last few months as I've settled into my new employment arrangement and my STC administrative duties, I've occasionally reflected on my decision to join STC. I can easily see how much of an impact STC membership has had on my personal and professional life. Further, I can easily see how I will continue reaping the numerous rewards associated with membership in this organization. I enjoy the people I get to meet and the things I get to learn. And, frankly, I can't wait to see what happens next!

Meetings

Our chapter holds a dinner meeting the second Wednesday of each month. See *Berkeley STC Meeting Location and Directions* on page 13.

Upcoming Meetings

Avoiding Death by PowerPoint (Why are good presentations so hard to create?)
by Rick Altman

Wednesday, May 14, 2008, 6-9:30pm
Highlands Country Club
110 Hiller Drive, Oakland, California

Program

Do you quake when you hear the words "Create a PowerPoint for tomorrow's meeting"? Why? Is it because the software is so difficult? In fact, just the opposite is true. The basics are easy--so easy that most people never take the time to learn PowerPoint properly. Then there is our fear of public speaking. As Jerry Seinfeld put it, people would rather be in the coffin than deliver the eulogy.

This talk will look at the primary factors that make up presentations and offer ideas and practical wisdom on how to break out of the rut in which so many presentation content creators find themselves.

Speaker

Rick Altman is the creative director at betterppt.com, which provides consulting and coaching services to companies and individual professionals who seek better results with their presentation content and delivery. His expertise covers the full range of presentation needs, from message crafting through slide design and software technique. He is known for his common-sense approach and pragmatic advice.

Rick is the author of *Why Most PowerPoint Presentations Suck, and how you can make them better*, published in May 2007.

Rick came to presentations through graphic design, having worked with the Corel products throughout the 1980s and 1990s, and having hosted the CorelWorld User Conference across three decades.

Note: Rick is making a $35 discount available to Bay Area STC Members who register for one of his PowerPoint Live Seminars, available in April and May around the Bay Area. For details, see special pricing for STC members (http://www.betterppt.com/training/seminars/discount.php?STC).

Getting Published: How to Write a Successful Technical Book Proposal
by Tim Cox

Wednesday, June 11, 2008, 6-9:30pm
Highlands Country Club
110 Hiller Drive, Oakland, California

Program

Commercial publishing is under strain from corporate consolidation and the influence of the Web. What does this mean for aspiring authors and what opportunities does it present? What kind of proposals stand the best chance of acceptance in this climate? This entertaining and fast-moving talk will consider the situation of technical publishing today and the implications for authors. The keys to a successful book proposal will be discussed along with some of the most anxiety-producing parts of the book contract. Finally, some tips are presented for selecting a publisher, managing the production phase, and estimating financial return. The goal is to learn to think like an editor to achieve a satisfying publishing experience.

Speaker

Tim Cox is an award-winning editor with over 15 years experience in technical and professional publishing. He has established programs with companies such as Apple and Hewlett-Packard to publish documentation and has also published market-leading college textbooks. Most recently he was a senior acquisitions editor

at Morgan Kaufmann Publishers, working in the fields of software engineering, computer graphics, and game development.

Currently he is a freelance editor working in the North Bay. He holds a B.A. in literature from the University of Chicago.

Developing an Interactive Tutorial with Adobe Captivate and RoboHelp
by Laurie Edelman, Altera Corporation

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

Program

In recent years, many companies have recognized the positive and effective use of simulated and interactive learning tools to systematically teach complex concepts, policy, and tasks associated with proprietary material.

The software department at Altera Corporation just completed the fourth release of the Quartus II Interactive Tutorial using Adobe Captivate and RoboHelp development tools. The Quartus II software is an advanced engineering design tool provided to customers for the purpose of creating designs and programming Altera programmable logic devices.

Speaker

Laurie Edelman is a Senior Technical Writer with Altera Corporation, where she is responsible for creating web-based training targeting programmable logic devices. Laurie has experience creating user assistance documentation within a variety of industries including Education, Software Quality Assurance, and Software Engineering.

Meeting/Dinner Prices

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

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

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

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:
- Nonmembers are always welcome to STC meetings at the non-member rates.
- 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.

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/directions.shtml
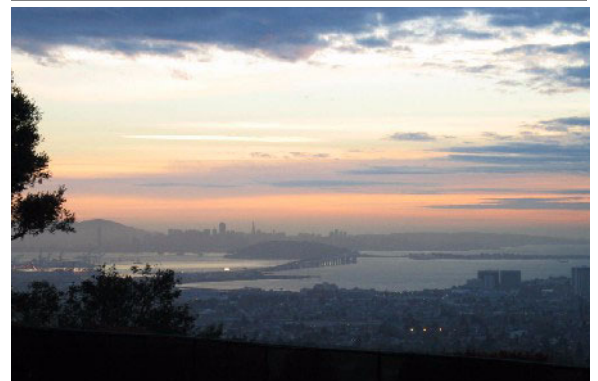
View from the Highlands Country Club

Photo courtesy of Rhonda Bracey

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.

> ### 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

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, Membership Manager:

Total STC Membership   14,831
as of September 30, 2007

Total Chapter Membership   143
as of March 31, 2008

Welcome Tina Skates and Karen L. Winters to our chapter!

National STC News

2008 STC Conference

The 55th Annual Technical Communication Summit will be held in Philadelphia June 1-4, 2008. The Philadelphia Metro chapter is eagerly looking forward to hosting this year's conference. From Philadelphia Metro chapter member Al Brown:

"On the whole, I'd rather be in Philadelphia."

We hope you take W.C. Fields' epitaph* to heart and join us here for the Technical Communication Summit June 1-4. You know what to expect at the Summit itself: news about the latest developments and techniques in our field and the chance to get

together with colleagues and friends, old and new. But there are plenty of surprises and unexpected pleasures waiting for you in the City of Brotherly Love.

Just a few examples: you can visit the Liberty Bell and Independence Hall, where it all began. Or Franklin's Court to see a working replica of Ben Franklin's printing press and find out how things were done before laser printers. Wander out Ben Franklin Parkway to see the Museum of Natural History, the original dinosaur museum; climb aboard a full-size Baldwin locomotive at the Franklin Institute (almost everything here was founded by or named after Old Ben); or check out the world's largest collection of work by Dadaist master Marcel Duchamp at the Art Museum.

Hop on the SEPTA subway to take in a Philadelphia Phillies (baseball) home game at Citizens Bank Park. (Yep, they are in town May 30th through June 5th.)

Head down the Avenue of the Arts for a musical, theatrical, or dance performance by one of our world-class companies.

Or if you really want to go hard-core Philly, try the Mummer's Museum (2nd Street at Washington Avenue).

In short, there are lots of things to see, do, and eat (not just pretzels and cheese steaks) in William Penn's "Greene Country Towne." Stop by the STC-Philly Metro Chapter's Hospitality Booth and say hello. We'll be glad to suggest something exciting that fits your particular interests.

See you there!

*Well, it isn't really, but why spoil a good intro?

Events

Bay Area PowerPoint Live Seminar Series

Renowned presentations coach Rick Altman (our May meeting presenter) will also be presenting "Do you need an antidote to

Death by PowerPoint?" for his Bay Area PowerPoint Live Seminar Series.

"Your livelihood is presentations. Like the one your boss assigned you that is due yesterday, or the 90-slide deck that looks like hell, or the one with more pies than a bakery. Or how about the one for which you need to be at your very best because the stakes have never been higher?

"Organizations are finally making the investment and raising the bar on presentation content. Now it's your turn—give us one day and we'll transform the way you think about your presentations and the way you work on them. Join us in one of five Bay Area cities this spring and turn a huge corner in your presentation design and delivery skills.

Walnut Creek • Milpitas • Burlingame • San Leandro • Palo Alto

All Bay Area STC members are eligible for a $35 discount!

Click here for details: www.betterppt.com/seminars or call 925.398.6210.

Thoughts on FAQs

You go the extra mile to make your frequently asked questions (FAQ) page a practical tool for customers. Now make sure they know about this great resource.

Make sure that customers can link to your FAQ page from other pages on your Web site. If you have a group of FAQs related to product return policies that restricts the returns on certain products, provide a link to those questions from the products that have a limited return policy.

Another tactic: Use a title other than FAQ. That may sound counter-intuitive, but it isn't if most of your questions relate to a specific goal. For example, a long list of questions about how to join an organization or open an account might be on a page entitled Getting Started.

Source: Rahel Anne Bailie, president, Intentional Design
http://www.intentionaldesign.ca

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