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president@stc-berkeley.org

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Ragged Left

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

Spring 2011
Volume 24, Number 1

In this issue

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Editor's Notes

by Jennie Abbingsole

I am pleased to introduce co-editor Gwendolynne Barr! Thanks to Gwen, these articles are seeing the light of day, because I have been busy mothering a new baby these past months and missed producing recent issues of the *Ragged Left*. Gwen edited and prepared the content, learning RoboHelp along the way.

RoboHelp is my current method for providing both PDF and HTML format of the same newsletter (single source). If you have other ideas for single-sourcing PDF and HTML (other than FrameMaker), please let us know! We're particularly interested in free or affordable software so Adobe Technical Communication Suite is not a requirement for helping with the *Ragged Left.*

Submission Deadlines

The regular schedule is to post the PDF and the HTML the first week of every quarter:
- Winter = January
- Spring = April
- Summer = July
- Fall = October

Please submit your content two weeks before publication: mid-December, mid-March, mid-June, mid-September.

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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.

President's Notes

by Richard Mateosian

Because of an interruption in our production schedule, I'm writing this in late April, which is a good excuse to remind you that this organization depends on the efforts of volunteers. If nobody volunteers to do the jobs that need to be done, they don't get done. The newsletter staff just got a new volunteer, and we're moving forward again.

Volunteer jobs come in all sizes. You can volunteer at a meeting to write up the talk you're about to hear, or you can volunteer to plan all of our programs for a year. You can volunteer to greet attendees as they arrive, or become treasurer and track all of our finances. You can volunteer to cut up loaves of bread before a meeting, or take charge of providing meals at all of our meetings. There are plenty of other tasks like the foregoing. If you'd like to put a toe into the water with a short, focused task, send me email at xrmxrm@gmail.com, and I'll hook you up with one.

Some of the volunteer jobs in our chapter require training. It's hard to handle one of the major positions without first learning what's involved. All of the elective jobs (president, VP for programs, VP for membership, treasurer, secretary) turn over each January, although some office holders have been re-elected more than once. Every office holder will be happy to show you what's involved if you show any sign of interest. Our elections are almost always uncontested, but even when we have more than one candidate, we find suitable jobs for the ones who don't win. If you volunteer, we will find something interesting and rewarding for you to do.

Two of our office holders have announced that they really, really, really want somebody else to step up and take over. The jobs in question are treasurer and president.

A number of years ago, our treasurer tasks and procedures were too confusing for ordinary volunteers. Our former president Joe Devney took over temporarily and established a system. Then I, as president, became acting treasurer for a while. Our current treasurer, Nicki Davis, worked with me for about six months, then took over the job. She simplified and streamlined the system, so that it now hums along. She has been at it for three years, and she'd like to train someone else to take over. If you have a systematic mind and a facility with arithmetic, you can learn to become our next treasurer.

I have been president since July 2006. I will not be on the ballot this time, so we will have a new president -- or no president -- as of January 2012. President is a back-up job. The president has few specific duties but needs to understand what everyone else is supposed to do. If you have a flair for that kind of management and a clear understanding that volunteers are not employees, you can do this job. Let me know if you'd like me to show you how.

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, email membership@stc-berkeley.org

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.

Surviving the Baby Boomer Exodus: Capturing Knowledge for the Gen X and Gen Y Generations

Presentation by Gina Gotsill and Ken Ball

Article by Hilary Yothers

We live in a time of great flux. Due to an aging population companies are losing experienced and knowledgeable employees to retirement. An estimated 76 million people will retire in the coming years say Gina Gotsill and Ken Ball in their book, Surviving the Baby Boomer Exodus: Capturing Knowledge for the Gen X and Gen Y Generations (aka Millenials), and we have got to find a way of keeping their knowledge to avoid an "information vacuum" in the wake of their leaving. What role can Technical Communicators play in helping companies retain this valuable knowledge? According to Gotsill and Ball they can contribute significantly by using their traditional interviewing skills and becoming "information capturers."

The types of knowledge that need to be retained by a company can be categorized as follows:

- explicit knowledge,

- implicit knowledge,

- and tacit knowledge.

Explicit knowledge is defined as on the shelf and already articulated. Implicit and tacit knowledge is still in the heads of the knowledge holder. Other forms of knowledge that may need to be considered include social and cultural knowledge regarding the company itself. Implicit knowledge comes from action and experience and can be articulated, while tacit knowledge is somewhat more intangible. It is the kind of information that you need to recognizes a person's face says Gotsill. The savvy Tech Writer will know how to discern between these and cull the salient information for the new Gen Xer or Millenial to do his or her job more effectively.

They define these different types of knowledge, and pose the question: How do you know what types of information to document? If a procedure has been created to solve a problem or if a workflow has been interrupted in some way then it should be documented. What solutions were successful and what did not work? Asking these questions helps us determine what information assets need to be preserved.

Because of the differences in how these generations learn it is important to package the information accordingly. Boomers learn from a variety of sources such as academic accomplishment, experience and trial and error, while Gen Xers and Yers tend to want to learn by example and by doing. Gotsill and Ball also suggest establishing mentor and mentee relationships within a company in order to create a smooth transition of information from Boomer to Millenial.

In conclusion, it is important for companies to document and capture knowledge that valuable employees lend to their companies. With Boomers

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. **Annual conference: Sacramento, California, May 15-18, 2011.** 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

retiring and Gen X and Gen Y maintaining a shorter per job life-span, it is important to capture that knowledge now more than ever. The skills of interviewing and writing can be "re-purposed" into helping companies retain information assets. The Technical Writer's role in stemming the watershed of knowledge for companies is an important one during these times of great change.

February 2011 Meeting Notes

SharePoint

Presentation by Dan Beall

Article by Sherry Ashley

Dan believes that SharePoint is a realistic way to get started with content management without a lot of expense. It's a "poor man's CMS." Many companies already have it without most employees knowing about it. You might want to inquire with the network administrator or other IT personnel and push for an implementation.

Why use SharePoint? As you can see in Dan's slides, it's perfect for teamwork, access of documents, workflow automation, documentation history, and source control. If you would like to install it on your home computer to "play" with it, download it free from SharePoint Foundation at http://msdn.microsoft.com/en-us/library/dd776256(v=office.12).aspx

It will run on XP, and just about any browser. It prefers to run on Windows server 2008 although it will run in Windows 2003 with limitations. SharePoint is easy to install using wizards. There are also many companies hosting SharePoint, and for a small fee, your group can use a SharePoint site. (Search for "SharePoint hosted solutions.") SharePoint is designed for the average computer user and is user friendly. It's similar to Word, Excel and Outlook. SharePoint is menu driven and as intuitive as any other MicroSoft program.

If you are trying to convince management to adopt SharePoint you might use these selling points:
1. Everyone can access and search if they are given permissions. There are levels of accessibility and customizable rules about who can see what.
2. Regulatory compliance for record keeping is built into SharePoint.
3. Web Content Management is easy. You can work on content without it being live, and there are draft and published versions of web copy.
4. It's a Document Management System.

Everything is considered to be a "document" to SharePoint; the term "file" and "document" are interchangeable. HTML, XML, and PDFs are all documents to SharePoint.

The heart of SharePoint is the document library. Dan calls it "Windows Explorer on Steroids." Each document library has "meta" data which is similar to Explorer. You can input as much meta data as you like. You can also apply a template to each document you create so they all look the same. You can require documents to be "checked out," and set up an approval process. There were some questions about Visio. He was not sure about version control on Visio but thinks version comparison probably works. He did say that you can import a Visio document and SharePoint will

- Information Design and Architecture
- Single Sourcing
- Instructional Design & Learning
- Technical Editing
- International Technical Communication
- Usability & User Experience
- Europe
- Single Sourcing

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. These and a list of other local organizations in which STC members may be interested are included in the *Ragged Left*.

Subscriptions

This newsletter is free to members of the Berkeley chapter.

convert it into a workbook.

Translation management is another widely used feature. No, it doesn't actually translate the material, but it sets up a work flow and process for the translators.

One problem was pointed out. Although you can use either major (1, 2, 3…etc.) or minor (1.1, 1.2, 1.3…etc.) versioning, if you already have an existing system of document versions, it's hard to make SharePoint pick up where your version numbers left off. It wants to start at 1.

All in all it sounds like a great tool. Also, Dan did mention that SharePoint consulting is a fast growing field for those of us with an entrepreneurial character.

Sherry Ashley has over 10 years of experience in technical writing and web design. She currently works for ISM1. For more information about Sherry see www.linkedin.com/in/sherryashley.

March 2011 Meeting Notes

Creating Custom Search for Your Content

Presentation by Kevin G. Lim

Article by Gwendolynne Barr

The Basics

Google Custom Search allows you to create a Custom Search Engine (CSE) for your website or blog. With CSE, you can modify Google's generic search engine (which scours the entire Internet) and choose which websites to search. For example, if you have a cooking blog, your readers might want to search for blueberry recipes on your blog only and not on the entire Internet. Google CSE provides that ability.

To use Google CSE, you need internet access, a browser, and a Google account (e.g., a Gmail account). The search engine you create can limit searches to one site (e.g., your blog) or multiple sites. Kevin referred to these two types as site search and vertical search, respectively.

Don't confuse the terms "site" and "vertical" with those at the CSE website: Google calls its free edition, "Standard," and its enterprise edition, "Site." Both the Standard and Site editions allow you to create a site or vertical search engine; in other words, both allow you to search one or more URLs or domains.

Once you have determined which websites you would like your engine to search, Google generates code for you to insert into the body of your .html page. For example, if you paste the code into index.html, a small search field appears on your home page.

By default, the search field is placed across the entire webpage (and if you paste the code at the top of the body, it will appear across the top of your page); but you can configure it. Another default is that the search field displays the watermark, "Google Custom Search."

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.

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

Questions

One question asked by STC members was whether or not CSE can search internal sites – i.e., those that are password protected or behind a firewall. The answer is no. CSE can only support public sites. If the ordinary user cannot access the site, neither can CSE. Google's CSE is basically a filter applied to its generic search engine. If Google search cannot find it, neither can CSE. For searching private sites, Google has a product called [Google Search Appliance](#) (GSA).

Another question raised was if Google redraws your page with each search. The answer is no because it uses AJAX. AJAX allows web applications to reload only those parts of the page that change. For example, if you put your search box in a column to the side of the page, only that section will redraw with each search, while static content will remain as is.

One person asked about wildcards. CSE allows wildcards and other URL patterns so you can match on domains, sub-domains, directories, or single pages. Another asked if Google's CSE crawls your selected sites more often. No. To affect crawling, you need to submit a sitemap using [Google Webmaster Tools](#) (which you can access via the Indexing link of the CSE control panel). Finally, someone asked about Google's [Blogger](#). Blogger users can simply add a CSE as a gadget.

Creating a Google Custom Search Engine

1. Go to Google CSE: http://www.google.com/cse/.
2. Click the big blue button, "Create Custom Search Engine."
   You are taken to step 1, Set up your search engine.
3. Enter a name and description for your site.
4. Enter the site or sites you would like your engine to search.
5. Select the edition (Standard or Site).
6. Agree to the terms of service and click Next
   You are taken to step 2, Try it out.
7. Test your new search engine and click Next.
   You are taken to step 3, Get the code.
8. Click the link, Get code.
   You can now copy the code and implement into a website or blog.

Implementing a Google Custom Search Engine on your Website

To execute this procedure, you must have created a Google CSE and you must have a website on the Intranet.

1. Copy the code for the CSE you want to implement.
   See step #8 above in Creating a Google Custom Search Engine.
2. Open your .html page (e.g., index.html) as text.
3. Paste the CSE code into the body of your file.
4. Save the .html file and upload it to the root directory of your website (at your webhost).
5. Open your webpage in a browser.
   Your new CSE appears on your webpage.

Gwendolynne Barr is a technical writer at Thomson Reuters in San Francisco.

Meetings

Our chapter holds a dinner meeting the second Wednesday of each month. In addition to listing upcoming meetings, this section includes:

- [Meeting/Dinner prices](#)

- [Meeting Agenda](#)

- [Location and Directions](#)

Upcoming Meetings

Turning Content Into Gold: A Presentation and Work Session

Presentation by Paula Toth

Wednesday, May 11, 2011, 6-9:30pm

Highlands Country Club
110 Hiller Drive, Oakland, California

Program

In today's competitive marketplace, the extent to which an organization can leverage its assets determines how well it can sustain a thriving business. As technical communicators, our skill in developing content directly contributes to an organization's assets if we wisely manage how we apply our knowledge and talents.
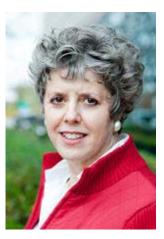
In this presentation Paula Toth, Best Practices Leader and "Single Sorceress" at TechProse, will show attendees how to use five key strategies to reduce content development costs, while simultaneously enhancing content quality. She will discuss the five strategies in detail, the strategy implementation phases, what can be done with or without changing tools, what tools to consider, and how to collect metrics to make the business case to apply the strategies. The five strategies are:

- Optimize content

- Separate authoring & publishing

- Streamline processes

- Manage team resources

- Socialize content

The work session following the presentation guides attendees to explore how they are using the five strategies in their work today, and how they would like to deepen their use of these strategies in their future work.

Speakers

Paula Toth is the TechProse team's in-house subject matter expert on DITA and single-source solutions. With nearly 20 years of experience in technical communications, she is passionate about helping organizations streamline and reuse their content. She has worked with TechProse since 1990 and has managed single sourcing projects for small firms and large corporations. For the last nine years, her focus has been single-source analysis, development, and information architecture.

Meeting/Dinner Prices

From the President: To generate more revenue, we've had to raise prices a bit -- still not to pre-recession levels -- but we don't want to shut anyone out. So we are instituting three-tier pricing:

- **Lowest prices**: Anyone for whom the higher prices are a hardship -- students, unemployed, underemployed. This will appear on our website as "student/low income." Anyone can choose to pay this price. We trust that nobody will abuse the privilege.

- **Discounted prices**: STC members.

- **Regular prices**: Non-members (except those who choose the student/low income price).

Former STC members who intend to renew when their finances improve can choose whichever of the three rates they feel most comfortable paying. We don't want anyone to feel shut out of the STC Berkeley community.

Advance Reservations

Reserved on the Chapter's website by the day prior to meeting.

Meeting and dinner
- Members: $12
- Non-members: $20
- Students/Low Income: $6

Program only
- Members: $6
- Non-STC-Members: $10
- Students/Low Income: $3

At the door (no reservation)

Meeting and dinner
- Members: $16
- Non-members: $24
- Students/Low Income: $9

Note: If you do not reserve dinner in advance, dinner may or may not be available on a walk-in basis. We order dinner for the number of reservations plus a few walk-ins.

Program only
- Members: $10
- Non-STC-Members: $14
- Students/Low Income: $6

Special cost notes
- Non-members 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 by midnight on the day before the meeting.

Meeting Agenda

6:00-7:00pm	Check-in, networking, conversation, and dinner.
7:00 -7:15pm	Chapter business, announcements, and introductions. Anyone can announce jobs that they know about.*
7:15 - 8:30pm	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 - 9pm	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

Note: If you need a ride from BART, contact Richard Mateosian (President@stc-berkeley.org) at least one day prior to the meeting.

View from the Highlands Country Club
Photo courtesy of Rhonda Bracey

Driving directions

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 is 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 over-crossing 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

Increase your network and net worth—join STC today!

The Society for Technical Communication (STC) advances the theory and practice of technical communication across all user abilities and all media. For more information about STC, send an e-mail to stc@stc.org or visit www.stc.org.

Chapter News

Leadership Positions Available

We are looking to fill several leadership positions! Contact Richard Mateosian if you are interested. See http://www.stc-berkeley.org/VolunteerOpportunities/volunteer.shtml for a list of open positions.

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

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

The Ragged Left is published four times a year (quarterly).