

Tech comments

The newsletter of the Southeastern Michigan chapter of the Society for Technical Communication

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Ginny Collins-Llope
President STC/SM

A LITTLE RAH RAH

It seems in recent years that STC/SM has enjoyed an increase in the number of members who are either new to technical writing or studying to become technical writers. I always get a kick from the enthusiasm they have for this field. It's infectious! It's one of the reasons I love being involved with STC.

Almost to a person, however, each of these new members, at some point in the conversation, mentions some level of trepidation about an upcoming project or the prospect of looking for work, in each case wondering how should they approach it, expressing doubt in their ability to get the job done.

When you are new to something, it is full of the unknown. For that matter, every new technical communication project is full of the unknown. Naturally, you have questions and perhaps fears. So, for those of you who are new to our field, I'd like to offer some words of encouragement.

Prepare yourself

Prepare yourself to handle any technical communications project by learning the basics (or brushing up on them). Trust your gut on what the basics are for you. The basics might consist of learning the software you think you'll use, learning how to interview subject-matter experts, and learning how to edit your own work (in case you won't have an editor).

Know that you can do it

Once you have prepared yourself, have confidence in your abilities. You'll do what you need to do to

complete the project in a bang-up fashion. If you are in the position of looking for work, let your confidence show in your interviews.

One more time

The important idea is, when you have a new project, whether it is your first or your hundred and first, you just do it. You assess the needs of the project. Then, you have faith in yourself and pull off the most amazing feats of research, regurgitation, and revision. Grrrrrr. Go get 'em!

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Pay Backs Can Create Winners

By Michael Dailey, Vice President STC/SM

I have heard it said that what goes around comes around. My experience suggests this to be true both personally and professionally.

For example, I was the most recent of my family to have children. As a result, I found myself in the unenviable position of receiving retribution for all of the "wonderful" gifts I bestowed upon my nieces and nephews when they were young. This point was most recently driven home when my brother convinced my sons that their newly-acquired Tinkertoys "go in Daddy's shoes."

As another example, I sat for my nieces and nephews before having children of my own. I was often called on for help at odd hours of the night and day as my brother is a volunteer fireman. This came back to me when my wife and I were hospitalized shortly after our boys were born. My siblings dropped everything late that evening and watched our boys for two days while we recovered.

We receive pay-backs in our professional lives just as we do in our personal lives. Most often, this is a positive experience. We begin our careers under the tutelage of others with more experience. We are able to grow into learned professionals because others take time to help us along the way.

Most of us owe our current successes to others who shared their knowledge. We are indebted to them and their generosity. The question that begs answering is how to repay these people who have given us so much. Should we hunt up our old mentors and tutors, repaying them in monies derived from the use of their gifts? Should we buy them dinner or take them to a show?

Perhaps the best way to repay our mentors and tutors is to teach others what we know, to pass our knowledge on. How? Several possibilities come to mind.

First, we can look into developing internships for undergraduate and graduate students of technical communication. Giving these students real-life experience is important to their future and to the future of our profession. Who better to show these students what our profession is all about than those of us who practice it every day for a working wage. Ann Blakeslee, a member of the Eastern Michigan University faculty and of the STC, is always looking for internships for her students. We can pay back on our debt by helping her find places for these students.

We can also pass on our experience through competitions. By serving as judges and on competition committees, we can ensure that entries receive a critical evaluation, an evaluation from which each member can learn and grow. Everyone is welcome to participate in our next competition or to work the committee that will run it. Contact Karen Gilbert or me, Michael Dailey, (*see page 2 for addresses and telephone numbers*) to say that you are interested in helping with a competition.

(Continued on page 3)

Translation Technology Subject of November Meeting

The speaker at the November program meeting was Dr. Winfield Scott Bennett, marketing director of Logos Corporation, a provider of translation services and technology. Dr. Bennett presented interesting insights into the process of translation and the technologies available to assist translators. He told us that the demand for all forms of translation is growing at the rate of thirty percent per year.

Good translation starts with a well-written document, as judged by the language in which it is written. It is then translated by a native speaker of the target language, not the source language, and is edited by another native speaker of the target language. The editor's job is to see that the translated information says the same thing as the original. . Choosing the appropriate foreign words is often difficult because some languages (e.g. Italian) do not have good dictionaries of technological terms. The editor must also assure that the translation is suitable for the target locale. Our common expression, "hit a home run" would be understood throughout North and Central America, but not in Europe or Africa.

The appearance of a translated document must be reviewed to see that the translated information is appropriately sized and appropriately placed in the item. Materials written in Spanish or French take up fifteen to twenty percent more room on the page than in English, and in German require thirty percent more. Ten point type may work well in an English language document, but Japanese characters must be at least twelve points, and Thai characters at least fourteen points in size. At a smaller size, the distinguishing marks of those characters will not be legible, and the text will become meaningless.

A business's choice of terminology is part of its corporate image, so it is important that that

terminology always be translated into the same words. Terminology management software can assure this consistency. Other software can store translated phrases. These programs can save time and money for a company which frequently produces documents in which much of the information is repeated or is very similar. At least sixty percent of the content of each such document needs to consist of re-used segments to make the use of this technology cost effective.

Digital translation, also called computer or mechanical translation, can be useful for translating large volumes of material.. An important question to ask before using such a program is whether or not its dictionary contains the terms your business uses. An obvious caveat is that mechanical translation should not be used to produce marketing materials. Remember the Chevrolet Nova, which in Spanish means "it does not go"?

Welcome, New Members!

*Cecilia S. Donabue
John W. Henderson
Karen A. Meech
Jennifer C. Regal
Deborah M. Scholten
Amy L. Schwalm*

We look forward to seeing you at future STC/SM functions!

(Continued from page 2)

Paying back in our professional lives is a good thing. Not only do we have a chance to help others and learn in the process, but we have fun doing so. I believe that the values of pay-backs are greater than those of the original deeds, that time intensifies the reaction. When we pay back to our profession, we all win in the end.

New Service for STC/SM Members: Web Directory of Technical Communication Expertise

Early in 1999 we will be replacing the present directory on our web site of STC/SM members with a directory of expertise available from members of our chapter. The intent is to provide a searchable database for people looking for technical communication services. To be included, please copy the form below and fax or email it to:

Renka Gesing

Email: renka@windsor.igs.net

Tel: 519 254-5015; Fax: 519 254-5949

Registration Form for Directory of Technical Communication Expertise

Name: _____

Tel: _____ Fax: _____

Email: _____ Web site: _____

Short description of business or services offered:

Please check categories appropriate to your area of expertise:

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Desktop Publishing | <input type="checkbox"/> Direct Mail |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Editing | <input type="checkbox"/> Graphic Design |
| <input type="checkbox"/> HTML Documentation | <input type="checkbox"/> Illustration |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Multimedia | <input type="checkbox"/> Online Help |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Online User Documentation | <input type="checkbox"/> Photography |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Printing | <input type="checkbox"/> Proofreading |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Project Management | <input type="checkbox"/> Publication Critiquing |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Slide Production | <input type="checkbox"/> Training, Computer Based |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Training, General | <input type="checkbox"/> Translation |
| <input type="checkbox"/> User Interface Design | <input type="checkbox"/> Video Tape Production |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Web Page Design and Maintenance | <input type="checkbox"/> Writing, Automotive |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Writing, General | <input type="checkbox"/> Writing, ISO |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Writing, Marketing/Public Relations | <input type="checkbox"/> Writing, Medical |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Writing, Science | <input type="checkbox"/> Writing, Technical Documentation |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Writing, Software Documentation | <input type="checkbox"/> Writing, Speech |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____ | |

STC Scholarship Applications Available

Application Deadline is February 15, 1999

Since 1971, STC has fostered the growth of our profession by awarding scholarships to graduate and undergraduate students enrolled in technical communication programs at universities, colleges, junior colleges, and technical schools.

Fourteen scholarships of \$2,500 each will be awarded this year for school tuition and expenses. Seven awards are granted to graduate students, and seven to undergraduates.

To be eligible, applicants must be full-time students who have completed at least one year of post-secondary education, and should be studying communication of information about technical subjects.

Applications must be postmarked no later than February 12, 1999, and arrive no later than February 20, 1999. To obtain application forms and additional information, contact either:

Society for Technical Communication
901 N. Stuart St., Suite 904
Arlington, VA 22203-1853
(703) 522-4114; or

Lenore S. Ridgeway
19 Johnston Avenue
Kingston, NY 12401
(914)339-4927

Exhibitors Wanted for Annual Conference

The STC office is developing a list of possible exhibitors for the 1999 annual conference to be held in Cincinnati in May. Exhibitors can expect to have contact with close to 3000 technical communica-

tions people within the space of only a few days.

Companies in our area should be particularly interested in being represented in Cincinnati because it will provide exposure in the region in which they are established, and the costs involved will be less than in other, major convention cities.

If there are businesses which you think should be on the list, please let our chapter president know. You do not need to contact the company, STC will do that. Send company names, contact people, addresses and phone numbers to Ginny Collins-Llope at ginny_collins@compuserve.com, or call her at (248) 546-0754.



Networking and Food—What More Could You Want?

By Kathy E. Carter, STC/SM Member

Have a pressing question about your help software? Wondering what the job market is like these days? Have an urge to return to class but not sure where to start? And you missed that really informative program meeting on the topic?

Never fear--your answers are as near as the next Ann Arbor Networking Lunch. These informal gatherings of 2-8 technical communicators in the Ann Arbor area are always informative. We discuss whatever the current buzz around town may be, answer questions for each other, and eat. And the food is great!

Any STC/SM member can attend and other interested people are welcome. Just give Kathy Carter a buzz at 734-475-5865 or e-mail her at bluehoo@provide.net to save your spot at the table. The calendar and web site provide meeting dates and locations.

Calendar Of Events

January 4 (Monday)

Board of Directors Meeting
Home of Ginny Collins-Llope
6:30 p.m.

January 20 (Wednesday)

Dinner Meeting
Susan Musico
Year 2000 Documentation
Holiday Inn North Campus
Ann Arbor

January 28 (Thursday)

Ann Arbor Networking Luncheon
Gratzi, 326 S. Main Street
Begins between 11:30 and noon

Quote of the Month

The most valuable of talents is that of never using two words when one will do.

Thomas Jefferson

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Publication And Reprint Policies

TECH comments is published monthly September through June for members and friends of the Southeast Michigan chapter of the Society for Technical Communication. We welcome feature articles; letters to the editor; and information about meetings, courses, and workshops. We accept manuscripts in both hardcopy and electronic format with MS Word or ASCII text. Submissions will be edited.

Reprints from *TECH Comments* are permitted if credit is given and a copy is sent to the managing editor.

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