STC Southeastern Michigan Chapter

TECH*comments*

In This Issue

SOCIETY FOR TECHNICAL COMMUNICATION

Chapter President's Letter

Remind me again . . . Why *Did* I Volunteer?!

Mary Jo David
STC-SM Chapter President

Our chapter's STC year can seem so confusing. Our annual dues take us through the calendar year, but my term as president of the chapter officially began last July 1. There's plenty of time before my "reign" is over, yet I feel the time is going by quickly. This might be because, lately, so many of our Council discussions have centered around nominations for our upcoming elections. Our very efficient Nominations Team of Catherine Titta Buerkle, Sally Paul, and Jennifer Regal has been actively recruiting nominees so we'll have plenty of time to roll out this year's ballots, count the returns, and announce our new Council in time for our June program.

This year's Council has been a devoted crew, working to make our chapter one of the best in the Society! Our Council meeting attendance has been terrific this year. Council members are coming to the meetings prepared and they're following through on their commitments.

At our last face-to-face meeting, we were debating reasons why our chapter listserv had been so inactive lately (that was *before* our run on listserv messages in February!). Someone pointed out that I used to post a lot more questions to the listserv and asked me why I wasn't posting them anymore. The obvious answer is "Because when you get to be my age, you know everything!" But of course, that isn't true…I'm not *that* old! So, I thought about it and realized…the main reason I'm not posting to the listserv as often now is because I've developed so many personal relationships with fellow STC'ers. Now, I usually just send my questions directly to people I know.

Wow! That really prompted me to start thinking…not about all the *time* I spend volunteering for the chapter, but about all the *benefits*

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I've realized as a result of being a chapter volunteer. No, my name isn't *Suzy Sunshine*—and yes, volunteering does mean *more work*! But if you're serious about your career in technical communication, what better way to spread your professional wings than to get involved in STC at the chapter level!

The opportunities I've experienced by "growing my professional network" through STC involvement prompted me to start creating a matrix. On the X axis, I listed each of the Council and Committee positions in the chapter. On the Y axis, I listed a number of opportunities for personal and professional growth. Then I started to check off which positions afforded which opportunities for growth. Guess what? There really was no need to build a table, because pretty much any of the positions provided a chance to experience just about all of the opportunities on the list!

What are those opportunities? Well here's the list that I came up with, but I'm sure the other Council members could probably add to it:

- Running meetings
- Participating in meetings
- Developing project plans
- Managing projects
- Expanding business contacts
- Expanding professional contacts
- Initiating/Expanding press contacts
- Initiating/Expanding contacts in academia
- Using new technology
- Writing reports
- Budgeting
- Expanding portfolios
- Increasing professional stature
- Developing new writing styles
- Event planning

I may have only four more months left of my presidency, but my chapter involvement won't end on June 30. I'll continue to stay involved because, professionally, I can't afford not to!

BGSU Student Chapter (continued)

We are also looking forward to possible spring programs that include presentations by Southeastern Michigan chapter members about what they do in the workplace. We have been working with Lynnette Price and Lanette Cornwell to develop a mentoring program between the Southeastern Michigan and BGSU chapters, and we hope that some of you will come and share your own experiences as technical writers with us.

Visit us at our campus website! We're located at http://www.bgsu.edu/departments/stc/chapter/index.html

Introducing the BGSU STC Chapter

Tiffany A. Holmes
Lisa L. Walker
Jude Edminster, Faculty Advisor

The Bowling Green State University STC student chapter kicked off their year in September with a report on the 50th annual STC conference in Dallas by chapter Secretary Tim Brown. Tim was last year's recipient of our chapter's travel scholarship, which is awarded every year to one student member for the purpose of attending the national conference. At our program meeting, Tim presented information from the conference presentations he found most interesting. Later in September, two members, Tiffany Holmes and Liz Monske, traveled to Detroit with advisor Jude Edminster for the Southeastern Michigan chapter meeting to network and build a collaborative relationship with the chapter and its members.

This fall our chapter also set up a booth at BGSU's Technology Fair to promote STC, recruit new members, and join with the Scientific and Technical Communication Program (S&TC) here at BGSU to recruit new majors.

Angel Belford, BGSU chapter treasurer, led the discussion at the October meeting, with insights from her technical writing position at La-Z-Boy, Inc. Angel performs a variety of tasks in her position, including online documentation and manual writing. STC student members are always interested in seeing what other technical communicators do with their degrees, as it prepares us for types of responsibilities we must undertake in the future. Our members are also hoping to prepare themselves for the workplace by networking with Southeastern Michigan members.

In November the student chapter experimented with new technology in a virtual discussion with doctoral candidate in marketing, Rich Gonzalez, from the University of South Florida. Mr. Gonzalez discussed the role of technical communication in e-commerce and marketing. Although he was in Florida, students were able to ask questions and discuss points of the presentation in an online forum. Such tools are becoming increasingly important in many fields that deal with technology, and we eagerly explored the new medium while learning about yet another niche for technical writers.

January's meeting brought Kevin Shoop to campus, presenting "Knowledge Management and the Health Care Industry." Kevin is a graduate of the BGSU S&TC program who is currently working as a technical communicator in the Information Technology Department at HCR Manor Care, a provider of home health care.

In March, we are sending two students, Lisa Walker and Tim Brown, to the Single-Sourcing Workshop in Dayton sponsored by the Southwestern Ohio chapter.

STC Launches 51st Annual Conference Web Site

The Web site for STC's 51st Annual Conference is up and running. The site provides comprehensive, up-to-date information on educational and professional opportunities at the conference and includes a dynamic online registration form. When a member enters his or her five-digit member number, the name and address fields are automatically populated with information from the STC membership database. (Note: To register at the member rate, members *must* enter their membership number, which appears on the address labels of *Intercom*, *Technical Communication*, and all other correspondence from the Society office. Members who want to be reminded of their membership number should call the STC office at 703-522-4114.)

The conference Web site also includes a complete database of technical sessions that can be searched and sorted in many ways, including keyword, day/time, topic, and session stem. The session information includes brief descriptions of the sessions, locations and times, and the names of the moderators and speakers. As the conference draws near, this information will be updated frequently. Members are encouraged to visit the site often for the latest information.

As with STC's main Web site, all pages are printer-friendly for the convenience of attendees in planning their schedules. ◆

NAVIGATING
THE FUTURE
OF TECHNICAL COMMUNICATION

Baltimore, Maryland
May 9 – 12, 2004

STC's 51st Conference: "Navigating the Future of Technical Communication"

The Society's 51st Annual Conference, titled "Navigating the Future of Technical Communication," will be held in Baltimore, MD, this year. Each day is loaded with interesting and informative sessions. Not sure the conference has anything you're interested in? Have you taken a look? Just do a little searching at: http://www.stc.org/51stConf/sesSearch.asp to get a feel for the wide array of topics being presented. **The last day to register at the advance registration rates is 4/23/2004.** For more conference details check out http://www.stc.org/51stConf/

Passport Savings Plan

STC/SM has offered a special Passport Savings Plan for the 2003-2004 program year. When you attend four programs, your fifth program is on us! Congratulations to the following members who qualified for a free fifth meeting:

Dunrie Grieling
Sharon McDonnell
Sally Paul
Mary Jo David
Thomas MacLaney

New Senior Members

Here is the latest list of new Senior Members of our chapter (as of the end of December 2003). Congratulations to these persons on achieving this status!

Cecilia S. Donohue
Karen A. Meech
Jennifer C. Regal
Deborah M. Stacy

Attending an STC Conference on a Shoestring Budget

By Kathy Bine, Washington, D.C. Chapter

Let's face it—companies are reducing their training budgets. Technical writers must get more creative than ever to gain company support to participate in the annual conference. The most important tactic is to start early. Tell your boss about the conference as soon as possible, and explain how the knowledge you gain will change his or her life. Explain how you plan to shop early for tickets and hotels, and present your boss with a list of the expenses if you made no effort to cut costs, and the expense you anticipate after all your cost cutting. If your manager is still uncertain, consider offering to pay for the airplane ticket if the company pays for the hotel and registration.

Here are ideas for cost-effective transportation, lodging, registration, and meals, and desperate measures if you cannot attend at all.

Transportation

1. Shop for your plane ticket early. Start looking for bargains in November or December. Set up a Fare Watcher on the Travelocity web site. Be sure to compare the cost of arriving Saturday versus arriving Sunday—it's nearly always cheaper if you stay over a Saturday night, even when you consider the additional night in the hotel. Compare fares by checking Expedia, Orbitz, Travelocity, and CheapTickets, then go to the airline's Web site to actually purchase the tickets. You'll almost always save a few dollars this way.

2. Ask friends and family members to bring you to the airport and pick you up.

3. Travel between airport and hotel with members of your STC chapter so that you can split the cost of cab fare.

4. Use the Web to research public transportation from the airport to the hotel. Check days of the week and times of day to verify that public transportation is available.

5. Set aside some money in case your ride backs out!

6. Avoid renting a car. Rental fees, parking fees, gasoline, and parking tickets (!) add up very quickly. How badly did you want to get lost, anyway? Public transportation, cabs, and your feet can take you all over town, and you'll learn more about the place.

Lodging

7. Shop for a budget hotel. Staying at the conference hotel is wonderful but expensive. You may find a bed and breakfast near the conference for half that cost, and save on food costs! Ask your friends and colleagues, even the host chapter to recommend a less expensive hotel, or use the Internet sites mentioned above. Once you find that hotel, reserve a room immediately.

8. Share the cost of a hotel room with a friend from your chapter. Or meet a new friend by canvassing your SIG listserv for a roommate.

Registration

9. Propose a presentation to give at the conference. Besides the opportunity for you to share your knowledge and skills with your peers, speakers receive a discount on the registration fee. (August is the deadline for submitting presentation proposals, but it's a good idea for next year.)

10. Register a day or two before the early registration period ends. This gets you the best price, and you keep your cash in hand longer.

11. Attend for just one day. This is a tough solution, because presentation descriptions are often unavailable until a few weeks before the conference and you may find that Tuesday's sessions are just as compelling as Monday's. If you are looking to save substantially on the registration, though, this is an option.

Food

12. Attend all the free events. These include the regional receptions on Monday evening, and the general Welcome Reception, international members' reception, and vendor exhibition opening session on Sunday evening.

13. Bring breakfasts and snacks. A box of granola, energy bars, and bananas are nourishing and inexpensive. Peanut butter and apples are filling and travel well.

14. Pick conference lunches and dinners to attend. I enjoyed the SIG luncheon, the networking luncheon, and the Awards Banquet because of the opportunity to meet with renowned members of our profession.

If all else fails and you can't attend:

15. Arrange for an attendee to buy and ship to you the Proceedings on CD-ROM ($20 plus about $0.80 postage). Or order the CD from the International Office.

16. Write to the presenters whose sessions appear interesting and ask them for their materials (free!).

13. Check out the conference Web site and download information from the Uploaded Session Materials page. These often represent the handouts that speakers provided, and are not included in the Proceedings (free!).

Looking ahead

The 51st annual conference will be held May 9-15, 2004, in Baltimore, Maryland, near the Inner Harbor. There are a number of hotels and restaurants in the area. The closest airport is BWI, which is known locally as the best value of the three airports in the area (Dulles International and Reagan National being the others). For more information about the 51st conference, go to www.stc.org/51stConf/.

How to Convince Your Boss

(Conference on a Budget, continued)

Carissa Demetris recently asked the STC-SM listserv for some ideas on how to convince her company to underwrite her attendance at STC annual conference. STC-SM members had some great ideas to offer:

(Bill Peters, AAA Michigan) We convinced our company to send us every other year on the basis of keeping up our skills, learning new methods, experiencing new technology, and looking for better solutions. Let your company know you can find ways to save them money by (1) attending the sessions to learn techniques, (2) networking with other writers (especially if your company is looking to hire temporarily), (3) learning new software, and (4) improving upon your current processes based on things learned. For instance, we are in desperate need of a way to single source, but politics are preventing collaboration among departments. Several sessions at this year's conference offer methods to help overcome this obstacle.

We all know the bottom line is what drives companies' decisions. The best way is to take a look at the sessions being offered, then show your boss how something could apply to a project you're working on or how it could affect your department or the company as a whole. This is how we are able to negotiate with our bosses to send us every other year and keep our memberships.

(Mary Ann Bowen) Bill Peters listed some excellent methods you can use to persuade your employer to subsidize the cost. I would add these:

Point out the value-for-money aspect. Compared to the price of other 4-day conferences, STC is one-third to one-half less expensive, mostly because presenters are unpaid volunteers.

Offer to share what you've learned when you return. You could write a report or make a presentation to your team or department.

Networking Lunches

STC/SM members gather for lunch each month to meet other technical communicators for professional networking and job sharing information. All interested technical communicators are welcome to attend in addition to STC/SM members. RSVPs are appreciated in order to secure sufficient table space.

Ann Arbor/Washtenaw County

Gatherings start at 11:30 a.m., but arrivals are welcome at any time. Contact Kathy Carter at 734-475-5865 (bluehoo@comcast.net) for more information or to be added to the e-mail reminder list. Kathy Carter and Doug Howell will be hosting the following lunches over the course of the coming year.

Date	Host	Location
Wed. Apr. 14	Doug Howell	Café Marie
Tues. May 11	Kathy Carter	Paesano's
Wed. June 23	Doug Howell	Olive Garden
Tues. Aug. 10	Kathy Carter	Grizzly Peak Brewery

Note that dates and locations are subject to last-minute change.

Networking North

This year we plan to alternate the format of these meetings to draw in larger audiences and better meet the needs of our membership. We decided to host lunch and evening gatherings, and possibly host a book discussion. Providing a mixed format will allow us to bridge the gap between professionals and students, provide a better place for networking, and establish stronger relationships among our members.

If you are interested in hosting a networking meeting or have suggestions for meeting topics, please send an email to profliaison@stc-sm.org.

Lansing Area

We are considering having networking lunches for members, or potential members, who live or work in the Lansing area. If you are interested, please contact Shannon Everhart 800.248.0892 ext.242, or Susan O'Doherty 517.333.0322.

Mystery Photo Contest Continues

Mystery Photo #7

Well...you have to get up pretty early in the morning to beat Sally Lattuca to the punch! In less than ten minutes from the time we posted the announcement about the new edition of TECHcomments being available, Sally Lattuca e-mailed our president with her guess for one of the Mystery Photos. Sally is correct. Mystery Photo #5 is Stephanie Rosenbaum of Tec-Ed in Ann Arbor. Stephanie is a long-time STC/SM member; in fact, she holds the very prestigious rank of "STC Fellow."

Maryann Bowen correctly guessed the person in Mystery Photo #6 as Deb Stacy, our revered Council Secretary...and new Mom!

Congratulations Sally and Maryann! Both members received a "mystery prize" in the mail.

A special thank you, again, to Ernie Mazzatenta for supplying us with some of his photos from years gone by! We're having a lot of fun with these, so if any other readers have old STC photos to share, please let Mary Jo know.

To enter the contest, e-mail Mary Jo David with your answers (president@stc-sm.org), or phone and leave a voicemail (734-392-0019). Ties will be broken by the date stamp on the message.

Here are your next two Mystery Photos. Good Luck!

**Mystery Photo #5:
Stephanie
Rosenbaum**

Mystery Photo #8

**Mystery Photo #6:
Deb Stacy**

February Program Meeting

Grant and Proposal Writing

By Maureen E. C. Moyer
Member, STC-SM

"Grant and Proposal Writing," February's STC-SM program, was definitely an exercise in enlightenment. Four speakers, two each for grants and proposals, offered expertise, informative tools, helpful ideas, and useful sources to those who wish to pursue this avenue of endeavor, or may just be assigned to such matters.

The grant writing panel included Mark Clevey from the Small Business Association of Michigan, and Lisa Kurek from Biotechnology Business Consultants. Mary Chmielewicz and Harry de Meijer from the Proposal Management Professionals Association represented the area of proposal writing. All four were held to a 15-minute presentation to be followed by a Q&A segment. Each held to the time limit and filled their allotment with a brief bio and loads of material. Without a doubt, these four panelists were certainly well chosen for their expertise.

Lisa Kurek stressed the importance of strategy, as well as doing your homework and knowing the rules. She emphasized the writer's responsibility to keep in contact with those who are offering the grants, and to keep timelines so as not to flood the grant-givers with requests at the last minute…a sure train ride to failure, or back-burner status. Perhaps most important is accurately telling your story. Be honest in what you don't know and how you will find it out. Do not inflate what you are trying to do. Very sensible words to the wise seemingly fit for any endeavor.

Mark Clevey stressed that grants are a means to an end—to generate jobs. He stressed exercises to develop your preliminary grant request on the front end. Ask yourself *in what industry do I want my technology?* Is this industry of yours ripe for off-shore development? He also advised that matching funds show that others believe in your concept and are willing to support it, and having match money gives priority to your proposal. Another very useful tip from Mark was that universities are important places to receive R&D dollars, as they, too, must license their technologies. A new and fascinating commentary by Mark provided a hint of possible future technologies in utilizing agricultural resources for raw materials, especially in plastics and biotechnology.

As a proposal writer for SBC, Mary Chmielewicz stressed points in relationship to working for an actual client. Proposal development was the theme of her presentation. Mary focused on how the executive summary must be precise, accurate, and to the point. She also echoed the importance of the ideas presented by both Lisa and Mark, and incorporated them into how she provides this service for her employer, SBC.

Harry de Meijer echoed his predecessors by stressing that we writers need to know and follow the rules. We need to keep up with the customer and not only *their* rules, but any laws that may apply as well. Harry provided a wealth of resource materials, Web site links, organizational and training information, as well as his own Web site to use for further exploration of proposal writing.

An extensive Q&A for all the panelists followed the presentations. Lisa provided a list of skills necessary for a good grant writer and surprisingly, they are not any different from those already needed for *any* type of technical writer; good text editing skills, organization, discipline, ability to manage a project, and ability to listen.

Harry de Meijer posted his presentation on his Web site: http://www.adi.com/~demeijer/hadem_international/stc_feb04_files/frame.htm

Final Program Dates for 2003-2004

April

Watch the Web site, listserv, and your mail for details of date and location (at press time it looked like the meeting will be during the last week of April).

May

No program meeting in May due to the STC Conference in Baltimore.

June

Plan on showcasing your best work at our June Awards Dinner and Member Showcase event! You may showcase your work in any of the following categories:
- User Manuals
- Training Materials
- Instructional Design
- Marketing Writing
- Online Help
- Policies and Procedures
- Or any other professional OR PERSONAL product or service!

Or showcase your portfolio. There will be tables designated for general members and tables designated for student members.

In addition, we will have the traveling exhibit of winners in the International Technical Publications and International Online Communication competitions available for your review.

The June Awards Dinner and Showcase is scheduled for Thursday, June 10, in a facility along the I-275 corridor. Watch the Web site, listserv, and your mail for location details as well as more information about how you can submit an exhibit.

March Program Meeting

Networking from an Expert

Resplendent in an emerald green St. Patrick's Day blouse under her trim black suit, Sue Voyles of Logos Communications provided STC members and guests in attendance at Schoolcraft College with a complete and thought-provoking presentation on both networking and marketing yourself. For "thought starters" she recommended the four books listed in the sidebar.

Sue Voyles (left) chats with Vice President Natalie Roelant before the meeting.

Moving on to discuss some low-cost marketing ideas, she mentioned networking, referrals, having a tagline, thinking beyond today, and winning an award. For the rest of the evening, she expanded upon these five ideas to the benefit of all in attendance. In each section she posed a question and forced the ready-made small groups at each table to discuss them with each other (networking!) for a few minutes.

Thought Starters

Do What You Love, the Money Will Follow by Marsha Sinetar
When Money Isn't Enough: How Women Are Finding the Soul of Success by Connie Glaser
Guerilla Marketing Attack by Jay Conrad Levinson
The E-Myth Revisited by Michael E. Gerber

Networking

Never underestimate the power of . . . networking! Join organizations (such as STC) and get involved. Don't waste your membership dues! Build relationships with people and visibility by attending meetings and getting involved. If a regular small group meeting (networking lunches; serving on the board) is available for your organization, attend that. Small groups are better for building relationships. At large events, have someone you know introduce you to someone you don't know.

The business cards you can make yourself are fine, but get "real" ones. Nothing says professional (and successful) like a nice thick card with raised lettering—and they're not that expensive. As a final thought on networking, Sue pointed to a 30-year Carnegie-Mellon study that claims 85 percent of a person's success comes from communication skills, and only 15 percent from experience and education.

Question: What other organizations are out there that could help you?

Referrals

Tell everyone you know what you do and ask them to refer you. Forty-five percent of business services are chosen by customers based on the recommendations of others.

Question: Who could you ask for referrals?

Tagline

Have a tagline that clearly communicates what you do and put it everywhere—business cards, brochures, ads, Web sites, etc. Also, develop a 20 to 30 second intro of yourself that quickly communicates your services.

Question: What's your tagline and intro?

Think Beyond Today

Always be on the lookout for new opportunities, whether related business opportunities or something different from what you do now. Opportunities come in different forms: volunteer work, education/training, mentoring, working with nonprofits. All of these are chances to meet new people and show them what you can do.

Question: What other opportunities might be available to you?

Win An Award

Awards are great opportunities for publicity, and they build your credibility. Be sure to list them on your resume! Nominating your clients for awards improves customer relations as well as associating you with a winner. Research industry, community, and volunteer awards. Check Crain's and other business publications and Web sites for announcements of awards.

Question: Is there an award I can win or nominate a client for?

In closing, Sue concisely and patiently answered a multitude of questions from the audience. I hope everyone else came away with as many good ideas and action items as I did. In spite of a lack of green beer, it was a St. Patrick's Day evening well spent!

More Resources

www.sba.gov (U.S. Small Business Administration
www.mich.gov (click on Business Services)
How to Form Your Own Michigan LLC Before the Ink Dries, Phillip G. Williams
The 22 Immutable Laws of Marketing: Violate Them at Your Own Risk, Ries and Trout
Detroit Small Business Assistance Center provides free templates: www.detroitchamber.com/business_development

Recent Job Postings

Documentation Manager at Arbortext

Contact Name: Tess Molloy Thomas
Company Name: Arbortext, Inc.
Address: 1000 Victors Way, Ann Arbor, MI 48108
Phone/Fax: 734.997.0200 / 734.997.0201
E-mail/URL: people@arbortext.com / www.arbortext.com
Position Title: Documentation Manager
Type of Position: Permanent/Full-Time
Job Location: Ann Arbor, MI
Skills/Education Required:

Required qualifications include 10+ years of technical communication experience; a Bachelor's Degree in Software Engineering, Technical Communications, or an equivalent; 3+ years experience leading and managing a department, project or team; and knowledge of software development technologies such as web servers, programming languages, user interfaces, content management systems, and XML.

Job Description: We are looking for an experienced technical professional to lead the planning, development, and release of Arbortext product documentation.

Salary Range: Negotiable (but very competitive)

Arbortext is the leading global provider of enterprise publishing software that enables creating and automatic publishing of information to multiple types of media: Web, print, CD-ROM, wireless. Our software is installed at over 1,300 organizations worldwide.

We are a dynamic company experiencing strong growth in a rapidly emerging market. We are focused on attracting the best people to create, deliver and support exceptional products for our customers worldwide.

Come join us! Arbortext offers equal employment opportunity, excellent compensation, competitive benefits, and a dynamic culture with tremendous potential for professional development and career advancement.

Send your resume and cover letter to people@arbortext.com. And check out our Web site at www.arbortext.com to learn more about us!

"Writers Without Borders"

Region 4 Conference April 17, 2004

Our Region 4 Conference will be held in Pittsburgh, PA, this year. Topics include an Intro to Windows Longhorn, Content is King, Essential Consulting Skills for Success, Small Steps to Single Sourcing, Using FrameMaker for Single Sourcing and XML, Usability LIVE!, Diving into User-Centered Design, and Enhancing Your Creativity. Registration Deadline is April 5, 2004. Visit the following Web site for more details and a registration form: http://www.stcpgh.org

Technical Writer at The DAKO Group

Contact name: Tony Lioi
Company name: The DAKO Group
Address: 2966 Industrial Row, Troy, MI 48084
Phone number: 248 655-0100 ext 246
Fax number: 248 655-0101
E-mail address: tlioi@dakogroup.com
Company URL: www.dakogroup.com
Title of position: Technical Writer
Type of position: Contract
Length of position: 6 Months MINIMUM
Job location: Plymouth, MI
Skills required: MS WORD required, QuarkXPress and/or SGML preferred
Job description:

We are seeking a Technical Writer for a new project on a contractual basis for one of our clients located in the Plymouth area. The person's responsibilities will include writing operation and maintenance technical procedures for technical manuals and Electronic Technical Manuals. Research engineering drawings, specifications, and service data for vehicles to determine technical content and proper format of procedures. Review procedures to verify they are technically accurate and that format is correct.

Experience/Skills Required: Minimum Associates Degree or equivalent experience in written communications. Mechanical aptitude for application to vehicle and equipment is essential. Knowledge of Microsoft Word is essential. Knowledge of personal computer systems, QuarkXPress desktop publishing software, and SGML software is highly preferred.

Salary or hourly rate range: $18.50 to $21.00/hr

Free On-line Seminars

Presented by expert Ann Rockley, and sponsored by Arbortext and Documentum, this series is designed to teach you what you need to know to turn content management into a competitive advantage for you and your organization. Writers, editors, documentation department managers, information architects, usability specialists, IT professionals, web and print content creators can benefit from attending these free on-line events.

Although the first segment in the series has already taken place, future "webinars" are scheduled monthly. All on-line seminars start at 11:00 am Eastern time, and last for one hour. Register today: http://www.rockley.com/upcoming.htm#Webinar%20One

PART TWO - April 8, 2004 - Performing a Substantive Audit & Determining Business Requirements

PART THREE - May 13, 2004 - Content Management Design & Implementation

(see Web site for Parts Four and Five)

New Technologies:

Introducing Veredus™
A Single-Sourcing XML Solution

*by Natalie Roelant*
Vice President and Program Chair

On November 13, 2003. I ventured west to the Western Michigan Shores STC chapter to attend a program on a new XML product developed by Rascal Software. The PowerPoint™ presentation given by Rascal Software President and CEO, Rob Frankland, is available at the Rascal Software website: www.rascalsoftware.com.

Rob started the presentation with an objective look at XML. He educated the 30 or so attendees on the history of XML and some of the typical pitfalls XML users have been faced with. For those of you not familiar with XML, XML was originally created to deal with data, mostly from an academia stand-point. It also required very simple structures. Some of the original XML products released include DocBook, DITA, RelaxNG, and LMNL. Rob then transitioned into why most people use XML—to create Help files. We reviewed the typical elements of a Help page, such as a single screen of informa-tion for a topic and the consistency in how the data is displayed.
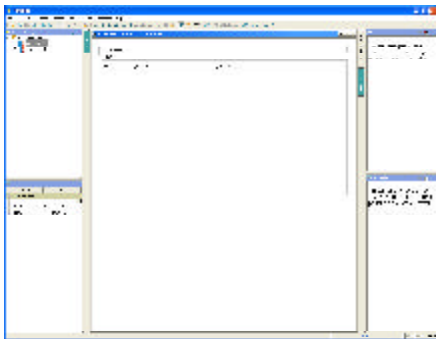
Rob then introduced his product, Veredus™, to us. Veredus is an XML-based authoring tool for creating single-source documentation projects such as Help and PDF files. It is a self-contained Java-based program. Unlike other products on the market today, you do not need to know how to create and manage XML metadata tags when you use Veredus. Additionally, the user interface is very easy to use and simulates current Microsoft Office® programs with both icons and standard menu titles.

> **Rascal offers a free 30-day trial version of Veredus™ at their Web site.**
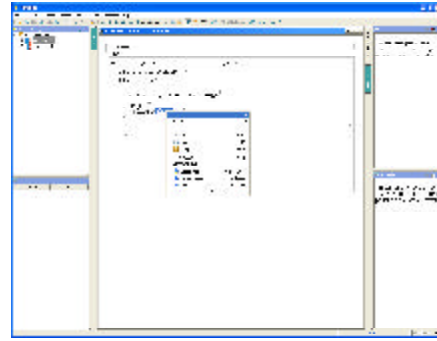
Unlike typical help programs such as Microsoft HTML Help Workshop, users do not even need to know HTML and JavaScript to incorporate many standard help functions such as links and popups. Veredus uses icons and menus to easily help you incorporate this functionality into your project painlessly.

Another reason Veredus stands out are the many programmatic features built in to the program such as easy creation of indexes, glossaries, and tables of content.

Veredus is compatible with Windows 2000 and XP operating systems. Users of Windows 98 may find reduced functionality. Rascal is currently reviewing options to have Veredus compatible with Linux and OX operating systems. You can import RTF and MIF files into Veredus. TXT files can be dragged and dropped. Typical outputs are CHM or PDF. A single Veredus project can be exported into HTML Help 1, Java Help, PDF, PostScript, HTML, or WebHelp formats.

The price is also very reasonable. A single license retails for $899.00. Users of a "competitor" program can purchase an upgrade license at $699.00. Rascal also offers an annual maintenance plan at an additional charge, which includes technical support and limited upgrades.

Veredus does have a few downsides. You cannot manipulate the XML metadata tags, although Rob did mention that future versions of Veredus may include the ability to modify and change the XML code. Veredus does not support importing of DOC files or integration with CMS. And currently, the ability to print the output file is not very comprehen-sive. However, a major upgrade solving this problem is planned for release in six months.

Rascal Software, located in Seattle, Washington, was founded in 2002 with the primary objective of providing an Extensible Markup Language (XML)-based product for content creation, editing, and multi-channel publishing. Currently, Rascal has thirteen employees.

The following article by our president was published in Tieline*, the STC newsletter for chapter leadership. It discusses the many ways in which an effective Publicity Manager can benefit an STC chapter. Unfortunately, at the same time that this article was released, our chapter's Publicity Manager, Kelly Self, had to resign from the position due to unforeseen family responsibilities. If you're interested in filling this open Council position, contact Mary Jo at president@stc-sm.org.*

Making Publicity a Priority

By Mary Jo David, President and Senior Member, Southeastern Michigan Chapter

The power of the media is an amazing thing. Many believe the media influences public opinion to the point that it controls the way we think about *everything.* Whether or not you subscribe to that belief, you might agree that, if something is *never* in the news, chances are people *never* know it exists.

It stands to reason, then, that an STC chapter that doesn't have a publicity manager is missing a huge opportunity to get our organization's name, and specifically the chapter's name, in front of people in its local area. Since you can fill only so many positions with a limited number of volunteers, it's easy to understand why some chapter council positions have to remain empty. However, when you look at the positive effects a good publicity manager can have on all other council positions, it's definitely worth putting a focused effort into filling the position of publicity manager. This article explains the effect a good publicity manager can have on your chapter, discusses ideas for filling the position, and demonstrates how the Southeastern Michigan chapter has benefited from its publicity manager.

The Publicity Manager and the Ripple Effect

Many Council positions stand to benefit when an effective publicity manager is in place:

Membership. The membership manager should be allowed to focus on aspects of membership that might attract new chapter members. The publicity manager can support the membership manager by including these benefits in press releases or stories distributed to local media.

Programs. The programs manager oversees the program schedule, speakers, venues, and member mailings. Yet how often have program teams worked hard to put on top-notch programs and seminars only to be disappointed in the turnout? A publicity manager is perfectly positioned to get the word out about these special events, to audiences beyond the chapter mailing list.

Competitions. So much work goes into organizing chapter competitions, and the results are a perfect opportunity for positive press. An experienced publicity manager can ensure that awards announcements and recognition extend beyond the chapter membership to include both community-based press and local business press. Members benefit by getting their names in front of potential employers—and by adding clippings to their professional portfolios!

Professional Liaison. The duties of a chapter's professional liaison probably offer the greatest opportunity for working closely with a publicity manager. The role of professional liaison can take many shapes, but it often involves facilitating mentoring opportunities and increasing the local exposure of the chapter and its members. Obviously, the more a professional liaison can rely on local media exposure, the easier it is to find business sponsors, and impress upon them the chapter's ability to help fill open positions. In addition, the publicity manager can help the professional liaison promote the profession to the local press.

Finding a Volunteer

The first trick for locating an effective publicity manager is convincing yourself that the right person exists somewhere in your chapter. (Hint: Begging seldom results in the right fit for *any* council position.) Another trick is to use your chapter newsletter or Web site to list the benefits and challenges of the position so your members can determine for themselves whether there is a good fit—before volunteering. Such a list could take the form outlined in Table 1.

In the Southeastern Michigan (SM) Chapter STC, the publicity manager position was held recently by a mechanical engineer-turned-technical writer with an outgoing personality who isn't afraid to initiate contact with people she doesn't know. Her career path didn't match that of the typical publicity manager, but luckily, she didn't let that stop her!

Publicity is not simply sending out one e-mail or making one phone call. It requires a focused effort over a period of time. Publicity also lends itself nicely to committee work, because it includes distinct responsibilities that can easily be assigned to different people:

- Developing and maintaining a media list
- Writing the press releases
- Overseeing the copying, mailing, and e-mailing of the releases
- Following up with media contacts
- Maintaining a "clippings" binder or log

Developing a Publicity Plan

Until last year, the SM chapter publicity manager position had remained unfilled for almost four years. During that time, the chapter managed to expand its programs team substantially; it also hosted a Region 4 conference. The managers in charge of these events had

more than enough to do communicating events to STC members. Without a publicity manager in place, the SM chapter wasn't able to leverage chapter events among prospective chapter members or area businesses through the press. Could it be a coincidence that, for the first time in years, the chapter's membership count has fallen below 300?

About a year ago, the SM chapter filled the publicity manager position. In addition, it worked out a trade with Business Wire to distribute our press releases in exchange for an ad in our newsletter. Working with Business Wire has simplified press release distribution immensely, and Business Wire's staff has been very helpful every step of the way. In addition, the organization has been conscientious about following through with notifications when press releases hit the wire—and, yes, someone from Business Wire even phoned the SM chapter once to correct a typo *before* the release hit the wire!

The SM chapter is still developing a complete publicity plan. Now that the press release distribution is under control, the chapter plans to develop more media contacts, following through to make sure the releases result in actual press coverage. Who knows—you may even see the SM chapter in a future STC public relations competition!

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detroit_group@bizwire.com (www.BusinessWire.com

Table 1.
Publicity Manager Position: Benefits and Challenges

Benefits	Challenges
Most publicity tasks can be done from home or office, during the day or at night.	Writing for the press requires a different style of writing than writing for a technical audience.
Most publicity tasks can be accomplished by e-mail, mail, phone, or fax and seldom require face-to-face meetings.	The role requires a person who is proactive and comfortable initiating contacts.
The role provides opportunity for making valuable contacts in the press and with local businesses.	The role usually requires strict adherence to deadlines.

Call for Committee Managers

Catherine Titta Buerkle
Chair, STC/SM Nominations Committee

In addition to the Executive Administrative Council, our chapter also has an Extended Administrative Council, made up of the managers of the various chapter committees. Many of these committees are already in place and their managers have, fortunately, agreed to continue into our next chapter year, or another member has agreed to step up to the manager role. There are just a couple of committee manager positions open for next year. Although these are not elected positions, we are very interested in hearing from you if you are interested in volunteering your time as a committee manager for any of the following:

Professional Liaison: Facilitate communication between our chapter and other local professional associations and businesses. (Note: A lot of ambitious groundwork has been done this year, related to helping members in the current economic climate.) Many ideas and initiatives were undertaken this year that either need followthrough or need to be repeated if successful. (ASIDE: This is a great spot to be in if you want to network and be visible to potential employers, folks!)

Publicity: Write press releases to promote our monthly chapter program meetings (based on template). Distribute releases electronically to area press contacts. Follow up with media contacts as needed, and gather clippings, etc. This has typically been a one-person committee, but the work effort could be divvied up.

If you are interested in serving as a manager for one of the open committee manager positions, please contact Catherine Titta Buerkle (nominations@stc-sm.org) as soon as possible.

I look forward to hearing from you!

STC's Transformation Initiative

The following two articles are part of a series being written to update members on the work of the STC Transformation Team. Please visit the STC Transformation Team's Web site at www.stc.org/transformation.asp. We feel strongly that STC members must be aware of the transformation effort and encouraged to give us their feedback on the Blog at www.trans4mation.typepad.com so STC can become the organization that will best meet their needs.

Thea Teich, President
Andrea Ames, First Vice President
Suzanna Laurent, Second Vice President

Transformation: Whys and Wherefores

Technical communication is often defined as any effort that makes it possible for people to get the most from the technology in their lives. Under that broad umbrella come all the activities technical communicators find themselves involved in: instructional design, information architecture, marketing communications, documentation development, usability, management, training, writing and editing—whatever is necessary to make our companies' and clients' products and services acceptable, understandable, and accessible to customers and users.

As technical communicators, we are all aware that change is a basic parameter of our profession. By definition, we try to make technical information understandable and accessible to audiences who are not knowledgeable about the related field. Therefore, because technical information is ever-changing, we accept the fact that our work will be continually various, constantly in flux. So it really should come as no surprise that as time goes on, different requirements are demanded of us. It seems that just as soon as we feel comfortable with a particular work flow, software package, or job description, it is "folded, spindled, and mutilated," i.e., transformed into something new that we must adapt to, learn, and use.

If we agree that change is a guaranteed, albeit sometimes unwelcome, component of our profession, then it follows that the associations, organizations, activities, and avocations that we turn to for support, assistance, relationships, and education must also change so they can continue to meet our needs and the needs of the technical communicators who are currently in training.

This is the essence of the purpose of the STC transformation initiative: basically, it's to keep up with you. So with that in mind, the overall goals of the Transformation effort have been defined as follows:

- Increase the breadth, relevance, and value of services delivered to members.
- Create a long-term platform for financial stability.
- Promote membership growth.
- Enable STC to be a leader and advocate for the Technical Communication professions and their practitioners.

In defining the goals for transformation, it is equally important to be clear about what this transformation effort is NOT trying to do.

- It is not focused on solving our short-term financial pain (though that certainly is being addressed separately). It is about evolving to a more stable business model for the future.
- It is not about dismantling, strangling, or in other ways undermining the Chapters.
- It is not a secret agenda to eliminate the publications.

Obviously, this transformation effort is not something we have just suddenly undertaken. The board's work on governance in 2000–2001 first identified the need for the Society to change how it operates in order to assure its future. One major change that resulted from that governance work was an increased reliance on the professional staff in the STC office for our burgeoning operations, with the board moving toward a policy-setting orientation. Although we're not completely there yet, we know this is the correct and inevitable path for an organization of our size and aspirations.

This transformation effort will not be completed by June of 2004; indeed, no recommendations have yet been made to the board. And while we anticipate quick adoption of some recommendations, implementation of some of the programs or operation changes may be several years away.

Transformation is a process and while change is rarely any fun, the STC as we currently know it must change—because our membership is changing. So please remember that all this focus and effort is directed at one thing only… to make things better for you, the members of the Society for Technical Communication.

The Business Landscape Analysis: Where We Are Today

STC at its core creates services for its members. As we venture into emerging communities, we are faced with the prospect of making important decisions with often very little information. The first and main task in inventive problem solving is to identify and formulate the problem. We ask, "What is the big picture? What are the trends shaping these communities? What are the detailed

scenarios that are creating value?" A landscape analysis answers these questions.

The Process

We solicited the input, ideas, and concerns of a significant representative sample of the leadership of the organization: past, current, and future presidents; past and current executive directors; board members; and representatives of chapters of all sizes, SIGs, academia, and industry. We solicited input of the membership at large by way of the blog. We gathered internal information and competitive and noncompetitive comparisons. Once the information was gathered, John Nardone, consultant, created the Business Landscape: a "snapshot in time" of STC today. With this information, we will begin to create a model of what the transformed STC will look like in three years.

The Results

The following is a summary of key themes and issues from the STC Landscape Analysis:

- STC's best opportunity for growth is to lead its members and the industry into the future by focusing on emerging disciplines and growing opportunities within technical communication. STC must ensure that the needs of its core writer/editor base are met at the same time.

- STC would be better able to lead the industry if the organization had more members who were at higher management levels in their companies and in academia.

- STC's real value would be more visible if more corporate managers become members.

- STC's greatest benefit to its members is a forum for the exchange of information and ideas. Currently, STC is the world's largest organization providing such a forum to technical communicators—and by "technical communicator," we mean anyone who assists people in getting the most from the technology in their lives. STC would better serve the membership by leveraging new technologies to build this benefit.

- STC would better serve its membership if it had a formal structure to its education/training program. The popularity of the telephone seminar program has uncovered a significant demand for educational programming that is content-rich, valuable, and convenient in delivery. Now we need to develop a strategic education plan that uses a variety of formats.

- STC should celebrate volunteerism and reward the contribution of the individual. STC should provide better "cultural support" for its volunteers by recognizing and showing appreciation for volunteer effort at all levels.

- In STC, membership interaction is a key benefit that is primarily generated via involvement in chapters and SIGs. We need to enrich this benefit by developing means of encouraging and ensuring involvement by members early in their STC experience, and in that way, increase commitment to and longevity in the Society.

- STC would better represent the membership if more key communities were represented on the board. Currently, geography is the primary factor considered in nominations.

- STC will benefit financially by rethinking how services can be delivered in new and different ways to ensure financial stability and longevity.

Coming up next:

The next article in this series will share the "straw man model"—that is, a model of STC as it might look after transformation. This model, though speculative, will provide a starting point for our discussions about STC's transformation.

Deduct Your STC Dues

If you pay taxes in the United States, keep in mind that STC dues are tax deductible. You can claim dues as a deduction in several ways.

Charitable Donation

IRS publication 526 (rev. 2000) defines this option:
> You may be able to deduct membership fees or dues you pay to a qualified organization. However, you can deduct only the amount that is more than the value of the benefits you receive.

As a 501(c)(3) organization, STC is a qualified organization. STC's tangible benefits can be estimated at $30 for the two publications. You can claim the cost of membership minus $30 as charitable contribution.

Business Expense

Employees and self-employed consultants may claim the full amount of dues as a business expense.

Miscellaneous Deduction

Contact your local IRS representatives or your accountant about claiming your dues as a miscellaneous deduction.

Money, Not Time

Please be aware that, while dues, contributions, and out-of-pocket expenses may be deducted, personal services may not.

Networking and Learning Opportunities

April 17, 2004
Region 4 Conference
"Writers Without Borders"
Hosted by the Pittsburgh Chapter
8:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m.
Holiday Inn Select
University Center, Oakland
Technical communicators today do the traditional - write books, online help, white papers and requirements and specifications documents - as well as the untraditional - serve as usability experts, user interface designers, marketing support and internal consultants. They also explore, embrace and implement new technologies to improve their product deliverables as well as their efficiency. This one-day mini conference explores some "out of the box" roles that technical communicators peform today, looks at the latest technology trends and examines aspects of technical communication you may want to consider in the future.
www.stcpgh.org/conference
Darlene Mullenix
412-462-3581

April 20-23, 2004
International Performance Improvement Conference and Exposition, Tampa FL
www.ispi.org/ac2004

STC-SM April Program Meeting
Watch the Web site, listserv, and/or your mailbox for details. **No May Program Meeting due to Annual Conference**

May 4, 2004, 7:30 to 9:30 a.m.
Building the Bridge as You Walk On It: Entering the Fundamental State of Leadership.
Presenter: Robert Quinn, Professor, UofM Business School
Location: Ann Arbor IT Zone Launch Pad, 330 E. Liberty
www.annarboritzone.org

June Program Meeting
Awards Dinner and Member Showcase
See page 7 for details

July 1-3, 2004
The Research and Training Institute of the East Aegean (INEAG, Samos Island, Greece) and the University College of the Fraser Valley (British Columbia, Canada) will hold the **Fifth International Conference on Information Communication Technologies in Education** on Samos Island, Greece. The conference will provide an overview of current thinking and practices in applications of technology to education. For more information, contact INEAG, icicte@ineag.gr or www.ineag.gr/icicte

July 23-24, 2004
The annual conference of Tri-XML, the XML interest group for the Research Triangle Park, NC, area, will be held at the Sheraton Imperial in Research Triangle Park. An optional "Tools of the Trade Show" (a vendor showcase) is scheduled for July 22.
Kay Ethier, Conference Coodr
919-244-8559

July 25-27, 2004
Sacramento Chapter STC will host the **STC Region 8 Conference** at the University of California, Davis. The conference will feature seminars, a regional leadership summit, and a trade show and career expo.
Eric Butow
ceo@butow.net
www.stcregion8conference.org

September 30 - October 2, 2004
Focusing on Results: 2004 Performance-Based Instructional Systems Design (ISD) Conference Chicago, IL
www.ispi.org/isd2003

51st Annual Conference
www.stc.org/51stConf
STC's annual conference is the world's largest gathering of technical communicators. Among the many highlights of the conference are educational sessions, workshops, vendor exhibits, and displays of the winning entries of the Society's international competitions. Technical communication professionals also benefit from numerous networking opportunities and employment resources. In addition, STC chapters organize regional conferences to address the specific needs of technical communicators in a particular geographic area.

May 9-12, 2004
Baltimore, MD
April 23 deadline for early registration rates

September 29 - October 2, 2004
The Professional Communication Society of the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers (IEEE/PCS) will hold its International Professional Communication Conference at the Radisson Hotel Metrodome, Minneapolis, MN.
www.ieeepcs.org

October 21-24, 2004
The Intermountain Chapter STC will host the **2004 STC Region 5 Conference** at the Wyndham Hotel in Salt Lake City. For more info on "Ascending the Summit: A Technical Communication Expedition," contact
Marj Hermansen-Eldard
650-842-9486

. . . and don't forget the Networking Lunches!
www.stc-sm.org, click on Network Lunches for details (or see page 5)

TECH*comments*

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

Managing Editor	**Layout Editor**
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Deadline: April 10

May-June
issue of TECH*comments*

E-mail submissions to
Newsletter@stc-sm.org

STC/SM Leadership 2003-2004

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