STC/SM
Society for Technical Communication Southeastern Michigan Chapter

TECH*comments*

Please visit our website next month for information on our April and May chapter programs.

Letter from the President
by Andrea Frazier

Welcome to the February issue of TECH*comments*, the STC/SM chapter newsletter!

In this issue, we recap our recent program meetings and provide information on upcoming programs and related events.

Programs

- In December, Dr. Jose Nazario of Arbor Networks gave a presentation on Internet security and the global effects of Internet threats on governments for the everyday user.

- In February, Richard B. Sheridan, CEO of Menlo Innovations, gave a presentation on practical ideas to greatly improve the odds of creating a successful software product or service, entitled "3 Keys to Creating Unusually Usable Software and Other Tales of High-Tech Anthropology.®"

- Our March program will be a presentation by Fred Meinberg of Techworld on the subject of localization and translation.

Volunteers and chapter elections

Chapter elections will soon be underway. We have several nominees for elected positions, but we are seeking members to run for Vice President and for the Nominations committee. If you or someone you know would like to run for office, please contact Erin Moulton, Nominations manager, or send a message to nominations@stc-sm.org.

The chapter is also looking for members to volunteer for the following:

Web volunteers: Our Vice President and Web manager, Mark Lockwood, is working to enhance our chapter website's content and improve the overall user experience. In so doing, he has identified a number of projects that would provide great opportunities for collaboration. If you or a fellow chapter member is looking for an opportunity to use (or learn) some web skills, please contact us! You may be able to contribute.

Programs manager: Identifies guest speakers and schedules the events; sends out announcements.

Venue coordinator: Helps arrange for the facilities for program meetings

Greeters: Register attendees at program meetings. Members usually volunteer to greet at program meetings that are conveniently located at or near their home or workplace. We have a couple, but we could always use more!

STC/SM email list

Reminder: If you are not yet subscribed to the STC/SM email list, you can do so by visiting our website (www.stc-sm.org), clicking the Listserv button, and following the instructions provided. If you have any questions about subscribing, you can contact the email list administrator at listservadmin@stc-sm.org.

The listserv is a place where all chapter members can voice opinions, share ideas, and communicate with each other. You can also send an email to me (president@stc-sm.org), our newsletter committee (newsletter@stc-sm.org) or to any of the council members (http://www.stc-sm.org/contactUs.htm). Please feel free to send us your thoughts, ideas, and suggestions for programs. I hope to hear from you!

Regards,

Andrea Frazier, STC/SM President

December Program Recap: Understanding and Thwarting Cyberattacks

by Elizabeth Donoghue Colvin

On December 11, Jose Nazario, PhD, of Arbor Networks in Ann Arbor talked to an interested STC/SM group about cyber attacks—specifically, about bots and botnets, including distributed denial-of-service (DDoS) attacks. Dr. Nazario talked about how cyber attacks work, how they are being addressed, and what the personal computer user can do for protection.

As part of his responsibilities at Arbor Networks, Dr. Nazario studies Internet robots (or bots, for short), which run automated tasks over the Internet, and botnets, which are a collection of PCs that have been infected by software installed by an attacker. The attack software forces computers to obey the attacker's commands and talks to a central server to listen for those commands. The malicious software (malware, for short) arrives through email, websites, or a wormlike exploitation of the system into which it is directly loaded. In the early years of malware, computer geeks and hackers with relatively benign purposes were responsible for most of the attacks. Currently, much malware is generated by criminal enterprises with a profit motive.

Once installed on a PC, the malware bot might use a network of computers to harvest information, grab the content of websites and reuse it without permission, or act as a virus or worm. The bot may use a rootkit to hide its presence, load adware on the system, or use its spyware components to log keystrokes for the purpose of stealing confidential information.

Bots, which come in different languages (C, C++, Perl, or Tcl, for example), use different platforms (predominantly Linux and Windows), have different goals, and get their commands from a server. On an Internet relay chat (IRC) server, a bot may check into the server, join a channel, and listen for commands in the form of written code. The bot may be commanded to scan and attack PCs in the same network and launch exploits against other PCs near them. Bots will infect PCs with a botnet executable, thus growing the zombie army. On a Web server, a bot may request a web page, poll every few minutes, parse the page, then act on the commands.

The goal of DDoS bots is to render a computer resource unusable. To achieve this goal, a DDoS bot may saturate the target machine, site, or network with an extraordinary number of communication requests so that the target's resources are exhausted and it cannot respond to legitimate requests with appropriate speed or at all. These attacks have been known to occur as part of a military offensive, such as that of Russia against Georgia, the former Soviet bloc nation, in 2008, possibly generated by discontented ethnic Russians living in pro-West areas within former Soviet bloc nations.

To address cyber attacks, Internet security experts such as Dr. Nazario continually analyze code, track bot behavior, collect information from customers, and predict attacks in time to thwart them.

Dr. Nazario's advice for the personal computer user seeking to protect himself or herself from cyber attacks is to procure and maintain antivirus software, accept patches and updates to software, use a credit card with fraud protection, monitor credit card usage, and stay with trusted vendors.

Note: For more information on Arbor Networks, which hosted the December STC/SM program, refer to Arbor Networks on the Web. For additional information on Jose Nazario, PhD, Arbor Network's Senior Security Researcher and presenter for the December STC/SM program, refer to Dr. Nazario's biography on the Arbor Networks web pages.

STC/SM Leadership
2008-2009

Administrative Council

President
Andrea Frazier
president@stc-sm.org

Vice President
Mark Lockwood
vicepresident@stc-sm.org

Treasurer
Erin Moulton
treasurer@stc-sm.org

Secretary
Julie Wingett
secretary@stc-sm.org

Committee Managers

Job Board/Listserv
Deb Stacey
jobboard@stc-sm.org
listserv@stc-sm.org

Newsletter
Elizabeth Donoghue Colvin
Meghan Oliver
newsletter@stc-sm.org

Professional Liaison
Jill Money
profliaison@stc-sm.org

Programs
Volunteers needed!
programs@stc-sm.org

Webmaster
Volunteers needed!
webmaster@stc-sm.org

Education Liaison
Elizabeth Ali
educliaison@stc-sm.org

Membership
Sharon McDonnell
membership@stc-sm.org

Member Spotlight: Ann Blakeslee

Why did you decide to join STC?

I was working on my master's degree in technical and scientific communication at Miami University of Ohio. We attended an STC meeting as a class one week. The organization seemed to be significant, given my career aspirations, and it was and has remained so even as I've pursued an academic career in the field.

Why did you pursue technical communication as a career?

I was pursuing a major in science and I wasn't enamored with the thought of having to get a PhD. I loved language and writing and was influenced by a professor I had, Philip Kelly, who encouraged me to pursue technical communication as a career. It seemed to be the best of all worlds since I could combine my interest in science and technology with my love of the English language.

Where are you currently employed?

I currently am a Professor of English at Eastern Michigan University. I also direct the Writing Across the Curriculum program at EMU.

What are your job activities?

I teach mostly upper level and graduate courses in technical communication and also research. I also perform administrative work in relation to the campus' writing across the curriculum program. I run workshops and institutes for faculty members who are infusing writing into their courses. I also do research in the field and have published extensively.

What is an example of a project you are particularly proud of?

I recently wrote a textbook on research methods with my colleague, Cathy Fleischer. Our book is targeted at students in all areas of writing—technical communication, composition, English education. Its focus is on helping individuals—whether they're heading for academic careers or careers in industry—develop their identities as writing researchers.

How has your STC membership helped you with your career?

It's provided me with resources, guidance, and mentoring through various individuals I've met and gotten to know. I think, most importantly, it has helped me as an educator in regard to helping my students become professionals within the field.

What advice do you have for students as they are entering the field of technical communication?

Join STC, attend meetings, get to know people. Be open to change and prepare yourself to be a lifelong learner. Read a lot, and read a lot of different things. Good writers are prolific and good readers! It's a profession that offers a lot of challenge and fun -- embrace and enjoy that and be open to wherever it might take you!

Note: Click for information on the Eastern Michigan graduate program in Professional Writing, with which Dr. Blakeslee is affiliated.

February Program Recap:
Taste of Success Seminar: 3 Keys to Creating Unusually Usable Software and Other Tales of High-Tech Anthropology

by Erin Moulton

On February 19, Richard Sheridan, President and CEO of Menlo Innovations, LLC spoke to the STC-SM chapter about Menlo's unique philosophy of using High-Tech Anthropology® in order to create successful software applications.

Sheridan highlighted three keys of success for software:

- Widespread adoption
- Better business results
- Competitive advantage

Menlo's mission is to help a company create successful software by filling in the missing link between user needs and the software development. High-Tech Anthropology, Sheridan suggests, is that missing link.

High-Tech Anthropology allows you to observe your users in order to identify their needs and discover how they use the application. Then, you can apply these findings to your software.

In this process, you discover different user personas. You must then focus on the primary persona—the persona that drives the design.

When creating personas, Sheridan warned against using a "mirror persona," meaning your own persona. Mirror personas cannot accurately portray the user's level of expertise with a product or recreate their processes.

Other design traps include:

- Building for all personas
- Relying on focus groups
- Using a "power" user
- Mimicking Microsoft® design

Sheridan suggests using the following anthropologic process to identify your users' needs and then refining and repeating the process:

- Identifying the target audience
- Discovering the audience's needs and goals
- Studying the users
- Observing real work
- Uncovering barriers

Sheridan provided several examples from Menlo's own clientele to illustrate how High-Tech Anthropology can work for multiple fields and different software types. He also encouraged audience participation, welcoming the audience's questions and stories of failed experiences in Web development.

Approximately 25 people attended the event at the Menlo Innovations office in downtown Ann Arbor. Menlo hosts this event monthly.

Note: For more information on Menlo Innovations, which hosted the February STC/SM program, refer to [Menlo](#) on the Web. For additional information on Richard Sheridan, Menlo Chief Executive Officer and presenter for the February STC/SM program, refer to [Mr. Sheridan's biography](#) on the Menlo web pages.

internet user experience

Internet User Experience 2009

Spotlighting methods for dramatically improving today's user experience
March 30 - April 2, 2009, Ann Arbor, Michigan, USA

Conference overview and website: www.iue2009.com

The Internet User Experience conference is back for its fifth year!

This two-day conference features top speakers addressing aspects of web site design and strategy, including usability, marketing, writing for the web, writing effective use cases, social networking, accessibility and more.

Susan Weinschenk, PhD
Neuro Web Design: What Makes Them Click

Lisa Mullinaux and Rich Briggs
Lessons Learned from the World of Game Design

Linda Girard
Bringing the Left Brain and Right Brain Together Online: Branding + Optimization

Edward Vielmetti
Anatomy of a Bus Map

Marta Strickland
Doing Social Networking Right in 2009

Register now for this conference!

STC members receive an organizational discount on their registration. If you register by March 10, you'll get the "early bird" price and a free copy of Susan Weinschenk's new book, *Neuro Web Design: What Makes Them Click*.

- Click to see the conference rates and to register.

- Click to find out more about the conference presentations.

- Click to learn the conference location.

- Click to see the conference sponsors.

- Click to find out more about the conference.

Reading Round-Up:
A Review of *Microsoft® Word for Medical and Technical Writers*
by Sharon McDonnell

Some of us medical and technical writers are lucky enough to be able to write our user guides, training manuals, and other lengthy compositions using Adobe® FrameMaker®, Corel Ventura®, QuarkXPress®, or other user-friendly software. Others, like me, have nothing but Microsoft Word to use. Ubiquitous as it is, Word can be rather difficult when you are writing the types of reference material that we are frequently called upon to produce. Drs. Aitken and Okazaki have written this technical manual, billed as "Techniques and best practices for using Microsoft Word to create long, complex documents," in an effort to share their experience with Word and explain how to circumvent some of the problems that its features present.

This 158-page, spiral-bound, soft cover book has a companion web site (www.tech-word.com) where you can order the book or report errata. You may also check for corrections to known errors in the book. The book has nine chapters, eight of which are specifically aimed at the concerns of most medical and technical writers. The illustrations used to aid the explanation of the various options are very clear and callouts have been added where necessary.

The first chapter jumps right into what options you should set to get maximum value from Word. There are many "unexpected consequences" of Word options that the authors explain and provide solutions for gaining control over your documents. I found these options very helpful in my writing and wish I had known about them a long time ago.

The last chapter is a list of dos and don'ts that the authors have developed through their years of experience. One example is: "**Don't** create tables using the Draw Table command. Tables created this way seem to be more prone to formatting and other problems. **Do** create tables using the Insert Table button on the toolbar or the Table, Insert, Table command on the menu."

This book is a terrific reference, but it isn't dry at all. There is humor sprinkled throughout, which makes for easier reading. For example, "Our Recommendation for Edit Options: Not to be too subtle, but whoever came up with the Prompt to Update Style and Keep Track of Formatting options should be banished to a desert island with nothing but cereal boxes to read. We suppose someone, somewhere has found them useful, but we cannot imagine why…***Turn these two options off*** and banish them from your thoughts, forevermore."

If you are composing reference materials using Microsoft Word, this book should be on your bookshelf.

Book Information

Microsoft® Word for Medical and Technical Writers

Authors: Peter G. Aitken, PhD and Maxine M. Okazaki, PhD

ISBN 978-1-60402-445-6

About the authors: Peter G. Aitken and Maxine M. Okazaki have a combined total of more than 50 years of experience working and writing in scientific, medical, and technical fields. They met while on the faculty at Duke University Medical Center and left to pursue careers in medical writing. Their company, Piedmont Medical Writers LLC (Chapel Hill, NC), prepares regulatory and educational documents for the pharmaceutical industry.

--from www.tech-word.com

About the reviewer…

Sharon McDonnell has been employed as a Senior Analyst with Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan since 2002. Ms. McDonnell is currently the Membership Chairperson of the STC/SM chapter.

Read other reviews of this book…

In March, 2008, this book was reviewed in the newsletter of the Houston, TX STC chapter. Click to read the Houston review.

This book was also reviewed in the May 2008 issue of *Technical Communication*, the journal of the Society for Technical Communication.

Links to Professional Organizations

Check out what other organizations are doing. Get information on programs you can attend and activities you can participate in.

stc-sm.org
Society for Technical Communication
Southeastern Michigan Chapter

wms-stc.org
Society for Technical Communication
West Michigan Shores Chapter

neostc.org
Society for Technical Communication
Northeast Ohio Chapter

http://www.hu.mtu.edu/~stcclub/
Society for Technical Communication
Michigan Tech Chapter

miupa.org
Usability Professionals' Association
Michigan Chapter

amwa.org
American Medical Writers Association

iabcdetroit.com
International Association of Business Communicators
Detroit Chapter

prsadetroit.com
Public Relations Society of America
Detroit Chapter

cmprsa.com
Public Relations Society of America
Central Michigan Chapter

detroitastd.org
American Society for Training and Development
Greater Detroit Chapter

astdannarbor.org
American Society for Training and Development
Ann Arbor Chapter

mm-astd.org
American Society for Training and Development
Mid-Michigan Chapter