

TECH comments

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

November 1999

Volume 9, Issue 2

Introduction to Digital Video with Practical Tips

November Program Meeting Features Three Speakers

Digital video (DV) is the topic of the November program meeting to be held at the Unisys facilities in Plymouth. DV that has an expanding role in technical communication. It is a powerful communication medium that can be included in online help, web pages, and computer-based training, and is relatively easy and inexpensive to produce. The program will introduce DV concepts and give practical tips for producing video and audio and investing in DV equipment. The presentation will be made by three knowledgeable speakers.

DAVE ROBBINS has more than 16 years of experience as a technical communicator and has been with Unisys since 1986. During the last two years, he has planned, filmed, and produced video clips for two help systems and created a 12-minute training video for a recently released product. He has been instrumental in setting up the video production system for the Plymouth Product Information group at Unisys.

KATHY WYRWAS has worked as a technical communicator for three years, following ten years as an IT programmer/analyst. Her responsibilities include producing service and operations videos and supporting paper-based documentation and reference online help systems for programmers.

ALICE DAVINICH has been writing technical documentation since 1985. She has drawn upon her education and training in another career and resumed voice and singing lessons to narrate help and training videos.

Coming Events

December is a busy month for everyone, so the Chapter will not hold a program meeting, and there will be no Ann Arbor networking luncheon next month, so there is little to announce. The information on the January program meeting will allow you to plan ahead.

January Program Meeting

Thursday, January 20
6:30 Social Hour with snack
7:30–9:00 Program
XML and the Technical Writer
Sandy Corporation
Troy, Michigan

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society for technical communication

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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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Letter from the President

By Michael J. Dailey, President, STC/SM

GOOD DAY EVERYONE!

And a wonderful time it is to be a technical communicator. There is work to be had and wages to earn! Many of us are so busy with work that other parts of our lives are scaled back or put on hold. While it is great to have so much work available, there is also a downside to the situation.

I say that because, as a member of the Chapter Board, I have noticed a decline in the number of volunteers participating in chapter functions and activities. The main reason for this decline? Our members working more and have less time for other things. So, what does that mean to you?

I will try to answer that question succinctly. Let me point directly to one situation in our Chapter that developed from the decline of volunteerism. Last year, we paid \$20 for each program meeting and received a full meal as well as a presentation. This year, we pay \$15 for program meetings that include munchies, but no full meal. Shouldn't this mean even lower fees for program meetings? Why are fees \$15 instead of \$10? It is a matter of simple economics.

Last year, our chapter spent about \$2000 more than we received from STC dues rebates (@\$23.00 per member) and program registration fees. Our expenses included covering administrative costs for program meetings, the newsletter, and other items needed to maintain the daily operations of the chapter. We also subsidized some of the meeting expenses in order to increase attendance.

This is at least the fourth year that the expenses of this Chapter have exceeded income. We are fortunate to have some savings upon which we can draw, but it won't last long at this rate. One of my responsibilities as President is to ensure the long-term financial stability of the Chapter. To me, that means living within our means. To that end, I asked our Program Team Leader to set fees that would cover the total cost of each program.

So, again, what does that mean to you? Well, the Chapter can return to subsidizing programs only if we find the money elsewhere. We can cut expenses or increase revenues. As we move toward consolidating our mailings and publishing the newsletter electronically, we will free up money we can use elsewhere. We could also increase revenues by soliciting companies for advertising and corporate sponsorships. We could, that is, if we had the people to do so. Right now we do not.

That is where you fit into the picture. If you feel strongly that fees should be reduced, help us make it so. Otherwise, we must continue to live within our means and set fees accordingly. I appreciate your support and understanding as we work through these challenges this year.

STC Calls for Entries in Ken Caird Student Article Competition

STC invites eligible students to participate in the 1999/2000 Ken Caird Student Article Competition. This competition recognizes excellence in technical communication articles written by college students.

Who is eligible

An author must be enrolled full-time (as defined by the school's criteria) in a post-secondary technical communication program as a major, minor, or in a field of concentration at the time the article was submitted or accepted for publication. Co-authored articles are eligible as long as each author meets this eligibility requirement.

What can be entered

Any article that has been published in a serial publication since October 1, 1997 may be entered. The article must contain sufficient technical content to qualify as technical communication.

Eligible publications include:

- STC publications (such as *Technical Communication*, *Intercom*, and chapter or SIG newsletters)
- Other professional society journals and newsletters
- Trade publications and newspapers

All copies of entries become the property of STC.

Awards are as follows:

Undergraduate: Distinguished \$1,000; Excellence \$500

Graduate: Distinguished \$1,000; Excellence \$500

Submitting Entries

There is no entry fee. Entries must be received by January 15, 2000. Entries must include an entry form, proof of student status, one original copy, and two photocopies of the published article. For more information, contact

Bonnie Fink

Department of English

Bowling Green State University.

Phone: 419.372.7551

Email: bfink@bgnnet.bgsu.edu

STC Announces Scholarships in Technical Communication

STC has announced its 2000-2001 scholarship program to assist students who are pursuing established degree programs in some area of technical communication.

Eligibility

Applicants must have completed at least one year of post-secondary education.

They should be studying communication of information about technical subjects.

Students should have at least one full year of academic work remaining to complete their degree programs.

Applicants must be full-time students. They may be either graduate students working toward a Master's or Doctor's degree, or undergraduate students working toward a Bachelor's degree.

Awards

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

Application Deadline

Applications must be received by February 12, 2000.

Additional Information

Society for Technical Communication

Attn: Scholarships

901 N. Stuart Street, Suite 904

Arlington, VA 22203-1822

703.522.4114

or

Ms. Lenore S. Ridgway

19 Johnston Avenue

Kingston, NY 12401

914.339.4927

Welcome New Members!

Ellen Bauerle

Ellen is a student at EMU.

Elizabeth Donaghue Colvin

Elizabeth has returned to school at EMU to prepare for a second career.

David Fuller

David works for New World Systems in Troy.

Adrienne Haywood

Adrienne is a student at EMU.

Kelly Hill

Kelly is a student at EMU.

Teri Mastrovito

Teri works for The Bishop Company

David Melkonian

David writes online help for Ford Motor Company.

Alice Parisi

Alice come to us from the Medical College of Ohio.

Marianne Patten

Marianne is a student at EMU and an intern at Parke Davis.

Mark Carl Paul

A former programmer, Mark is now a writer for Compuware at its offices in Troy.

Lori Shifflett

Lori is a student at EMU and works at GM Powertrain.

Lisa Smith

Lisa is a student at EMU.

Mark Thompson-Kolar

A former reporter and computer systems manager, Mark is now Deputy Graphics Editor of the Detroit Free Press.

And Transferring in is:

Stephanie Sines

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Employment Opportunities

Permanent Full Time

Develop and document online help for new Web-based network management and optimization software products.

Requires 3 years of experience developing and writing Windows-based online help systems and experience documenting complex software products. Experience developing and documenting print manuals with FrameMaker and MS Word preferred. Job locations: Austin and Houston, Texas

Contact Brad Putman, Technical Recruiter

Pedley-Richard & Associates, Inc.
7719 Wood Hollow Drive, Suite 216
Austin, Texas 78731
Phone: 512.418.3252

Do tech writing for an accounting software company.

Requires Adobe FramdMaker and a good working knowledge of accounting practices.

Foresight Solutions, Inc., Okemos, MI
Contact Michelle Carlson
Fax: 517.347.8459
Email: mcarlson@foresight.com
No phone calls, please.

Write customized proposals for Web design services and maintain a proposal database.

Requires minimum of 2 years of tech writing experience, background in information design, and knowledge of MS Word and MS Powerpoint.

Preferred, strong understanding of the Web design process, knowleged of PageMaker, Adobe Acrobat, and MS Excel.

Fry Multimedia, Ann Arbor, MI
Contact Erin Bradley
Email: recruitment@frymulti.com

Develop user interfaces, online help systems, and manuals for a product that provides interactive media on demand.

Requires 4 years experience, expert knowledge of MS Word and HTML. Knowledge of multimedia CE-ROMs a plus. Experience with Excel, Photoshop, Paint Shop Pro, and Visio highly desirable.

Media Station, Inc., Ann Arbor, MI
Contact Tom Buehrer
Fax: 734.975.9501
Email: tomb@mediastation.com

Contract

Maintain existing product documentation and create a new Web site for a software company that is moving to FrameMaker+SGML.

Requires knowledge of FrameMaker. FrameMaker+SGML, and Web authoring desired.

Full time contract to March 31, 2000
Job Location: Farmington Hills, MI
Contact Len Schultz
ECS, Inc.

Phone: 248.624.0934
Email: cfhlfs0@yahoo.com

Be a trainer / facilitator in the areas of IT and telecommunications. Locations are anywhere in the U.S.

All travel expenses are paid.
Must attend train-the-trainer classes.

Contact Pam Bauer
Email: pambauer@aol.com

Quote of the Month

Even if you're on the right track, you'll get run over if you just sit there.

—Will Rogers

Volunteers Needed for STC–ISEF Technical Conference

In her column last month, Thea Teich, Region 4 Director-Sponsor, described the Intel International Science and Engineering Fair (ISEF), which is to be held in Detroit this year, in May. ISEF is administered by Science Service, a non-profit, Washington, DC-based organization, which established the Science Talent Search in cooperation with the Westinghouse foundation in 1950. It is the world's only project competition open to students in grades 9–12.

STC grants awards for written reports and for displays, communications about projects, to students who have entered projects in the Fair. Marian Barchilon, STC Associate Fellow and Senior Member, Phoenix Chapter, is this year's Manager of STC's ISEF Technical Communication Competition. She has asked us to recruit a local coordinator and five local judges, the latter of whom will need to be available on May 9 and 10, 2000. If you would be interested in participating in this event, please contact Chapter President, Michael Dailey.

The TECHWR-L Listserv List

By George Hinman, Member STC/SM

The Techwr-l listserv is a valuable resource for technical communicators everywhere. It is an unmoderated discussion forum for technical communication topics with over 4400 subscribers. Listservs were created long before the World Wide Web became popular for the purpose of reaching large audiences. A listserv is actually a list of email addresses of subscribers who correspond with one another publicly in a forum. Many are moderated by a list "owner", usually the person who organized the list in the beginning. There is a listserv for almost any activity or profession you can think of; many of the listservs are also available through usenet news servers.

I have subscribed to this listserv for many years and found it very helpful. There is everything on this list from discussions on grammar, usage, salaries, industry trends, as well as the very helpful want ads posted from all over the world. I have gotten job interviews from want ads posted to this listserv that I have not seen posted anywhere else. The list owner can be a little strict about off-topic postings such as jokes and trivia, but this is understandable, since there are so many postings everyday.

For information on subscribing to the list, visit:

<http://www.raycomm.com/techwhirl/subscribercentral.html>

One recommendation I make is to establish an email account with a portal (I use www.deja.com), which also allows you to subscribe to a number of other listservs. That way, you can reserve your portal email account just for lists, and not have your regular email flooded with hundreds of list postings. Admittedly, it can be a task to wade through the chaff to get to the wheat sometimes. But on the whole, I have been more than satisfied with the helpful postings on techwr-l.

You can subscribe using your current email address by doing the following:

To subscribe

Send a message to: lyris@lists.raycomm.com

Leave the subject line blank, and include on the first line of the message:

SUB TECHWR-L first_name last_name

For example:

SUB TECHWR-L Deb Ray

To unsubscribe

Send a message to: lyris@lists.raycomm.com

Leave the subject line blank, and include on the first line of the message:

UNSUB TECHWR-L

Message from Our Director-Sponsor

By Thea Teich, Region 4 Director-Sponsor



Neither rain, nor snow, nor dark of night ... but Floyd, that's another story! Thanks to hurricane Floyd, STC had its first "virtual Board meeting" ever.

We may not have executed business in the environment we had planned – we were supposed to meet on the South Carolina coast on the same day that Floyd came through – but we managed to handle the "bare bones" business. In so doing, we discovered that teleconferencing cannot take the place of face-to-face meetings when your agenda is lengthy and the subject matter diverse. Plus, trying to compress what usually takes a day and a half into two, two-hour phone conversations with 22 other people . . . well, it may work under certain circumstances, but it's not perfect.

The following paragraphs describe some of the decisions made at the Board meeting, *i.e.*, the two, two-hour teleconferences we held to handle the business that simply had to be covered:

- The FY 2000 budget was approved. With expected income of \$4,574,500 USD, our budgeted surplus for the year is \$12,019 USD.
- The board approved a new dues structure effective January 1, 2000. Regular member dues will be \$110 USD. Student member dues will be \$45 USD.
- Five merit grant or loan applications were approved:
 - The Atlanta chapter's \$3,000 USD grant will help establish their scholarship program.
 - The Chicago chapter's \$1,000 USD loan will support a series of technical training programs, and its \$2,000 USD grant will be used to start a public relations program.
 - The Wisconsin chapter's \$3,000 USD grant will be used to develop and expand their mentorship program.
 - The Aloha and Los Angeles chapters' multi-chapter \$6,000 USD loan will be used for the joint Region 7–Region 8 Pan-Pacific Conference to be held in October 2000.
- The External Relations Committee presented a two-year plan that will develop and roll out the STC brand. The first step in this plan will be to publish the *Request for Proposals (RFP) for Brand Development*, which was reviewed and approved by the Board.

The vendor selected for this phase of the plan will conduct branding research—interviewing and surveying various STC

audiences—and work with a team representing all aspects of the Society to determine preliminary brand components and tools. At the May 2000 Board meeting, the brand and tools will be presented to the Board for approval. Keep your eyes open for the RFP, which will be posted on www.stc-va.org in October.

- The guideline for the Teaching Fellowship for Practicing Professionals was approved. Under this new program, which is similar to the existing Faculty Internship Grant Program, the Society may award stipends to enable practicing professionals in the field of technical communication to serve as adjunct or visiting faculty in colleges and universities. If you are interested in learning more about this program, the guidelines will be posted on www.stc-va.org in October.

This is an excellent opportunity to encourage practicing professionals to serve as adjuncts in technical communications programs. The money award adds to the salary provided by the school, plus the professional is not required to teach more than one course. Obviously, adjunct must apply and only a few awards will be made. Recipients will be required to submit a report for possible publication in *Intercom* or *Tieline*, but they do not have to be STC members to be eligible.

- Many committee management appointments were approved. Included in these appointments are the managers of the External Relations committees: Donna Sakson (Puget Sound), Corporate Identity; Amy Dolcourt (Los Angeles), Community Outreach; Jeff Staples (Houston), Public Relations Resources Network; Deborah Silvi (Houston), Corporate Support; Katherine Staples (Austin), STC 50th Anniversary; Dave Garrett (Rocky Mountain), Special Project–Promotional Booth; Mollye Barrett (Wisconsin), Special Project–Technical Communications Celebrations; and Lottie Applewhite (North Carolina), Special Project–Journal Editor's Fellowship.
- The appointment of Charles Fisher (Washington, DC) as Technical Program Manager for the 49th Annual Conference in Nashville, Tennessee was approved.

You can reach Thea Teich at:

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The mission of the Society for Technical Communication is to improve the quality and effectiveness of technical communication for audiences worldwide.

The mission of the Southeastern Michigan chapter of the Society for Technical Communication is to:

- foster a sense of community among technical communicators and provide a forum for professional development,
- enhance the professionalism of the members and the status of the profession by promoting the technical communication profession to business, government, and academic organizations,
- provide information through publications and reports,
- promote the education of members and encourage professional and academic mentoring,
- encourage the development of university, academic and professional courses and research activities in the field of technical communications,
- encourage professional development through competition; technical programs that provide professional education related to communication technologies, methods, and applications; and networking opportunities.

TECH comments

STC/SM

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