

The LAKESHORE WRITER

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Wisconsin STC Chapter

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A new year – a new newsletter

Look Us Over

Janine Pilarski

August begins a new season of STC meetings and, this year, it also means a new newsletter.

The Lakeshore Writer is the new STC newsletter and we're very excited about it. We hope you will be, too. We hope to bring you a variety of articles that you'll find useful, fun and informative.

Anyone – EVERYONE - who belongs to STC is a technical communicator so how about communicating through the newsletter? This could be the outlet for all those bottled-up creative talents you may not get to display on your job. It's fun and it could be rewarding as well.



If you have an article or an idea for an article, submit it to the newsletter committee.

If we use your article in a future



newsletter, your name will be entered in a drawing for a thank-you gift.

Submit your ideas or articles to Lisa Schroeder at the address on the back of this newsletter. ~~~

Two perspectives on the 1998 STC Conference in Anaheim

Anaheim Revisited

Observations

Sue Simoneau

I work for a large financial data-processing company, developing Win95 online help systems. I went to the (Anaheim) conference with the goal of learning specific techniques or little "gems" of information that I could apply to current and future projects.

My most profound impression:

We are not alone.

Thousands of other technical communicators are asking the same questions that I was asking. And they're trying to produce the highest quality documentation, all things considered, just like I am. I sleep better at night knowing this...no kidding.

I attended eight sessions – some bad, some good, some excellent. These are some points of interest from two of the best sessions I attended. (For future conferences, if you have the same online help/doc interests as I do, I strongly recommend these presenters and any presentation they might be offering.)

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A message from the Wisconsin Chapter President

The President's Corner

Mollye Barrett

Welcome to the 1998 / 1999 Wisconsin Chapter season that officially begins with this issue of the newsletter!

Our goals this year are to develop new opportunities for members, and increase communication within the chapter. Many members are actively working to implement plans that include substantive programs, regular newsletter issues, timely meeting announcements, job exchange improvements, enhanced web site content, and a mentoring program. So, plan to attend meetings and participate in some aspect of chapter planning or implementation. Join us this season as we share information and opportunities. ~~~

Membership Update

Lauri Gerlach

I'd like to extend a warm welcome to the 29 new or transferred members to the Wisconsin STC Chapter for 1998. We look forward to making your acquaintance at our upcoming meetings.

Our chapter now has over 250 members. My goal is to keep our membership directory up-to-date and to be available to answer your questions about membership.

Have you changed your address, an e-mail address, or employment? Do you want to refer someone to us about membership? You can now keep your membership information up-to-date by calling me at 341-5377, or by e-mailing me at lauri.gerlach@deluxedata.com. I'll update the national organization directory as well as our local directory. ~~~

Take a Bow

This year at the annual conference in Anaheim, the Wisconsin Chapter received the Pacesetter Award for our role in planning, facilitating and hosting the 1997 Region 6 Conference. Congratulations! ~~~



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Revisited, Continued from page 1

Beyond Traditional Documentation by Jared Spool

Facts based on the results of hundreds of usability tests:

- Users expect context-sensitive help at the window level, not at the field level.
- Users don't seem to know what *What's This?* help is.
- Users prefer examples to explanations.
- Users rarely look at the contents tab; index is the primary user reference.
- Everyone at Microsoft turns off the Office Assistant (*Mr. Paperclip*) too!

The State of Online Graphics by Frank Elley

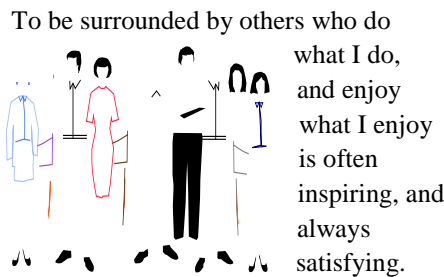
Advice for using online graphics effectively based on Elley's survey of more than 60 Win95 online help systems:

- Identify dead space in a screen capture and crop it down to essentials.
- Create tearaways for toolbars (to get toolbar graphics on two lines).
- Overlap elements for a 3-D effect.
- Display non-essential art in pop-ups.
- Think horizontal; use tables.
- Clearly identify where the hotspots are, using old-fashioned line-and-label callouts.
- Be wary of icons that don't do anything. ≈≈≈

What I Know Now

Janine Pilarski

When I attended my first annual STC conference in Minneapolis a few years ago, the sheer number of people overwhelmed me. There were so many Technical Communicators, and this was just the representative number who attended the conference. The sessions at my first conference were great – and I can testify they are now too, having just attended the Anaheim conference. But there's something to be said about simply having the opportunity to share stories and spend time with many other Technical Communicators.



I've made invaluable contacts attending the annual conference and gained so many creative ideas from spending time with other conference attendees, it would be worth it to attend just for that reason alone.

When I had that feeling of satisfaction at the first conference I attended, I chalked it up to naivete' – first conference excitement. But, four conferences later, I still feel extremely satisfied when I attend an STC conference. It's no longer naivete' – just the realization that doing what I like, and sharing it with others who understand, is one of the best reasons to attend the annual conference. ≈≈≈

STC Chapter Information

If you're looking for information on chapter activities or job possibilities, you'll find what you need with one of these information sources.

Chapter Voice Mail
414-299-0048

Chapter Web Site

<http://stc.org/region6/mwc/www/>

STC support survey

Help Us Help You

Let the Region 6 Conference panel know how your employer supports STC involvement. Take a few minutes to fill out the online survey at <http://stc.org/region6/survey.htm>. It has only eight questions and takes about five minutes to fill out.

If you add your e-mail address at the end of the form, the Region 6 folks will send you the results of the survey. The results will also be presented at the Region 6 conference (*see p.8*) in a panel discussion entitled "Help Us Help You: Keeping Up with Technology Through STC Involvement." ≈≈≈



A re-cap of the keynote address from Anaheim

Innovating and Communicating Change

Catie Lukas

Joel Barker is a noted futurist who has devoted his life to studying change. Through video programs, books, and his international consulting practice, he has generated insights, examples, and tools for organizations to use in interpreting and preparing for the future. Barker opened the 1998 STC Conference in Anaheim with a speech that focused on this year's theme: *Imagination, Innovation, and Communication*. He identified three principles of innovation and provided a list of tactics you can use to help promote your own invention in the workplace.



Innovation principles

1. The biggest breakthroughs in a field occur long before the need is perceived.
2. The person making the breakthrough is almost always someone who doesn't know very much, if anything, about the field.
3. The first problems solved with the breakthrough idea will be those problems deemed impossible to solve with old procedures.

Tactics of innovation

Before you introduce a new idea to the marketplace, refer to this list to evaluate your idea.

1. **Up side.** From the user's point of view, does the new idea have an up side?

2. **Down side.** What happens to the user if the idea fails?
3. **Seemingly simple.** Does it look simple to use?
4. **Small steps.** Can the new idea be introduced in small segments?
5. **Clear message.** Can you use familiar words to describe your new idea?
6. **Credibility messenger.** Does your reputation support your right to introduce the idea?
7. **Compatible fit.** How well does the new idea fit in with the present situation?
8. **Reliable performance.** Does the new idea do what it's supposed to do reliably? (Total Quality Influence)
9. **Easy In.** Compared to present cost, what is the cost of instituting the new idea?
10. **Easy out.** Can users easily get out of the idea after they start using it?

It's important to note that **Upside** and **Downside** tactics are mandatory, but you should make it a point to demonstrate as many tactics as you can.

Check out Joel Barker's web site for notes on his opening session and his TIPS Newsletter at <http://www.jbtips.com>. ~~~



Tips on the interesting, the innovative, the informative & everything in between

Techline

Take advantage of the Internet and all it offers. Here are a couple of web sites that can be informative and fun.

Technical Communicators Home Page

www.raycomm.com/techwhirl/home.htm

Here's a web site full of tips & info technical communicators (TCs) can really use. TECHWR-L has a variety of information, such as educational programs for TCs, and help for writing resumes. It lists books, publications and other Internet resources. You can add your own publication to the list on this web site.

An interesting note: the current web site has photos from the STC Conference in Anaheim. Log on and see if you were captured on film.

Calling All Movie Buffs

www.theatres.sre.sony.com/trailerpark/index.html

The Loews Theatres site shows you movie previews or "trailers." (You can't write *all* the time, can you?) Once you download the Quick Time viewer, you can see digital QuickTime videos in deluxe versions or economy size of movies that are "coming soon to a theatre near you!"

This column is a regular feature of the newsletter. Look for it in each issue.~~~



The 1999 Annual STC Conference

Looking Forward to Cincinnati

Thea Teich,

Region 4, Director-Sponsor

Next year's STC conference takes place in Cincinnati, Ohio, May 16-19, 1999.

The Southwest Ohio Chapter (SWO) would like to encourage you to put this event on your calendars and in your budgets now. SWO comprises the Ohio cities of Cincinnati, Dayton, Middletown, Hamilton, Lebanon, Oxford, Troy and everything in between, northern Kentucky, and southeastern Indiana.

The conference will take place in downtown Cincinnati, and blocks of rooms have been reserved at four hotels: the Hyatt (conference headquarters), Regal, Omni Netherlands, and Westin. These hotels are all within two blocks of the Sabin Convention Center. The Omni and the Westin overlook

Fountain Square, the heart of Cincinnati, where musical performances occur regularly at lunchtime and in the early evenings. The Omni is an art deco landmark with its own walking tour and observation deck, plus direct access to Tower Place, four stories of shops and restaurants. The Hyatt shares a building with



Saks; Tiffany's and Lazarus are across the street in the new Fountain Square West development. For those of you who want to avoid lugging multiple copies of presentation handouts across the country, there's a large quick print shop in the Westin lobby. All of these hotels and the convention center are connected by the Skywalk system.

Cincinnati is within an eight-hour drive of a large part of the country, and the airport – located in northern Kentucky – is a hub for Delta Airlines, with direct flights to and from London, Paris, and Frankfurt, as well as most major U.S. cities. So it should be a very convenient locale for a large portion of STC members – and probably a less expensive one.

Program tours will highlight Cincinnati's involvement in software development, manufacturing, communications technology, and scientific research. SWO is also recommending the organization of a hospitality tour that will take you to the Wright-Patterson AFB Museum in Dayton. The Wright brothers were brought up in Dayton, opened a bicycle shop there, and started the research that led to the famous flights at Kitty Hawk, NC. Other hospitality tours under consideration include trips to Mt. Adams for lunch at the Rookwood Pottery, where you can dine in a kiln, shopping, and checking out the Cincinnati Art Museum; a lunch or dinner cruise on a riverboat on the Ohio River; and depending upon the schedule, a

Cincinnati Reds baseball game at Riverfront Stadium.

Actually, many highlights, attractions, and fine restaurants are all within walking distance of the hotels. If you would rather not walk, you can hire a horse-drawn carriage to take you to the new brew pubs and night spots along Main Street. You can walk or ride across the bridge over the Ohio River to the Kentucky side and enjoy the view of the lighted Cincinnati skyline from one of the



restaurants over there, some of which are actually on riverboats. For those of you requiring a

morning run, there are paved trails along the Ohio River on the Cincinnati side through park areas developed for the city's bicentennial in 1988.

So join us in Cincinnati next year. We promise more Husman's potato chips (made just north of downtown since 1919) and butter toffee coated peanuts from Dayton Nut Specialties, just like we gave away at Anaheim. If it's not too warm, we should be able to offer Esther Price chocolates too! And, you'll all have to try Graeter's ice cream at their downtown store.

The SWO Chapter is really looking forward to seeing you. ~~~

Calendar of Events

It's time to start planning for the upcoming STC meetings. Here's what's on the agenda so far:

The **Edelweiss Cruise is September 8, 1998**. This meeting is the social / networking / kickoff meeting for the year. Registration will take place a 5 p.m.

On **October 13, 1998, STC sponsors a meeting on Instructional Design**. Registration and cocktails are at 5 p.m., dinner at 6 p.m., and the program at 7 p.m. The speaker and location have not yet been announced.

You'll soon receive more information on both these meetings in the mail and remember to call the STC Voice Mail number, 414-299-0048, for updated meeting information. ~~~

A new mentoring program

Mentoring: A Partnership

Barry Glasford

Mentoring is all about building a partnership between mentor and mentee that enhances the self-worth of both, sharing ideas, support, and successes. (Perrone Ambrose Associates web site)

We need to grow our own technical communicators. We need to nurture them, support them, and guide them. By doing so, we will have technical communicators with more of the skills we need, with experiences in technical communication, and a link to STC as a professional society.

Goals of the Mentoring Program

[Definitions:

Protégé is any person whose training or career is promoted by a mentor.

Crossover is a person entering technical communication from some other discipline.]

1. Provide career definition by helping proteges and crossovers:
 - learn about technical communication (instead of finding that after graduation they don't have the skills needed to be technical communicators).
 - grow professionally by developing the skills necessary.
 - build a link to STC as their professional society.
 - network with others in their chosen profession.
 - prepare writing portfolios, etc.

2. Increase the good visibility of participants by becoming better communicators. Visibility should increase amongst the following:
 - Crossovers
 - Peers and superiors
 - High school students
 - College students
3. Increase participation in:
 - college students studying Technical Communications
 - STC's local chapter
 - Technical Communication as a career.

How you can participate

We are looking for people seeking to be mentored or to be mentors. If you are interested, contact Barry Glasford (414-362-3127) for a participation questionnaire. The questionnaire will allow the Mentoring Committee to help match mentors and proteges.

Suggestions and guidelines to help both partners get the most out of their experiences will be provided. Participants may use the September networking cruise as an opportunity to meet. ~~~

An article from a technical communication intern

How Important is the Internship Experience?

Julie Otto

As a near college graduate, I have accomplished four years of course assignments and learning *inside* the classroom. But, as valuable as my

course work was, it couldn't completely prepare me for the outside workforce and a career in technical writing. I wanted to build relationships with professionals working in the field and test my writing skills in a corporate environment. I needed the chance to learn firsthand about the daily schedule, work experiences, and challenges facing technical writers today. My technical internship with Deluxe Electronic Payment Systems (DEPS) has become an important supplement to my college education by offering me all of these opportunities and more.

As an intern, I am treated as a professional. More importantly, I work with writers who welcome the chance to help me learn about the technical writing field. I value these relationships. In addition, I have been able to work with technical personnel to create and update documentation. It's an excellent opportunity for me to improve my writing, analytical, and communication skills.

My time is divided among many projects. Deadlines are real: my desk is covered with paper, and I have recognized the power of coffee. More importantly, I am gaining confidence in my skills as my work supports a successful company. I am constantly learning – whether it is about new software or how to maintain a schedule for projects.

My internship at DEPS has been a very positive experience. I would recommend becoming involved in an internship program to any student interested in becoming a technical writer. I am even more enthusiastic about beginning my career as a technical writer because I know I can succeed as one. ~~~

A presentation for technical communications specialists

SAP Presentation at UWM

Bill Van Pelt

A panel of three technical communication specialists from Software Applications and Products (SAP) in Waldorf, Germany will give a presentation at the University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee, on September 17 at 6:30 p.m. in Curtin Hall – room 118. The topic will be “Problems of Document Design, Technical Translation, and Usability across International Borders.”

The three speakers will be Dr. Margret Ammann from SAP Business Process Technology Waldorf; Brenda MacKay, Manager of Special Projects, SAP Labs, Inc. in Boston; and Susanne Rump, Information Products Engineer from Waldorf. SAP is a growing international software developer with about 120 technical writers and 120 translators at their international headquarters in Waldorf. The presentation will describe SAP integrated systems applications, give an overview of the company structure, and present the challenges faced by technical communicators who must design documentation for international markets. The speakers will also discuss the specific skills

and abilities they look for in prospective technical writers.

SAP was founded in 1972 and is on its way to becoming as internationally known as “Big Gate’s” Windows operating system. While Microsoft dominates the PC market with its operating system, SAP’s R/3 system, with its ability to standardize and record any type of business transaction electronically, is popular in the professional sector. It is used by most major German corporations as well as many multinationals (e.g., Coca Cola).

SAP closely collaborates with Microsoft and several management consulting firms. It is widely known for its innovative marketing and corporate culture: no titles or dress codes, unions and collaborative bargaining are taboo, emphasis on teamwork and flexible working hours as well as a generous profit-sharing plan. Its employees are widely considered the “elite soft workers” and their company a true job machine: 5000 new hires are forecast for ’98, of which 2000 are in Germany alone.

SAP’s rapid growth has created one major problem: until very recently, the expensive, monolithic software had to be installed by external consultants who did not always work in SAP’s or its clients’ best interests. The company is currently addressing this problem by selling its software in modules, thus enabling clients to install it step by step without having

to involve external consultants. The challenge of providing easy-to-install software modules for a diverse international customer base has prompted SAP to place increased emphasis on the importance of good technical documentation, and for this reason, the company expects to hire many more technical writers.

While SAP’s major competitors (Oracle, Peoplesoft, Computer Associates, and Baan) are gearing up, SAP (like Microsoft) is still considered the industry standard. A number of smaller competitors are carving out niches for themselves, but SAP’s sales are still five times the combined sales of its 5 biggest competitors.

Just as IBM became fossilized in its mainframe computer business without taking advantage of the PC revolution, SAP runs the risk of succumbing to the pressures for milking the standard software business and ignoring new and emerging software technologies.

In the years to come, SAP’s challenge will be to revolutionize its business without alienating its existing customers. Hopefully, SAP’s founders (all of them former IBMers) have learned their lesson.

For more information about the presentation on September 17, please visit the UWM Professional Writing Program web site at <http://www.csd.uwm.edu/Dept/English/bustech>. ~~~

The English Graduate program at UW-Milwaukee recently changed its name to “Rhetoric, Composition, and Professional Writing” to reflect a renewed interest at UWM in technical writing and professional communication. In addition to studying the traditional topics in rhetorical theory and the teaching of writing, graduate students can specialize in professional writing at either the MA or PHD level. To learn more about UWM’s professional writing program and faculty, visit their web site: <http://www.csd.uwm.edu/Dept/English/bustech>. ~~~

Region 6 Conference

Simple Solutions: Communicating for Tomorrow

October 15-16, 1998

Four Points Sheraton

Cedar Rapids, Iowa

Mark your calendars for the STC Region 6 conference in Cedar Rapids, Iowa.

The conference offers two days of sessions full of information on writing, editing, illustrating, managing and much more.

Go to the Region 6 web site: <http://stc.org/region6/index.htm> to register online, and for schedule, program, and location information. Get the EARLY BIRD rate --register by September 16!

Conferences like this succeed because people volunteer. If you plan to attend the Region 6 Conference, please consider volunteering. Contact Irv Emig at (319) 369-3721 or emigi@norand.com to volunteer.

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