

LAKE SHORE CONNECTION

VOLUME 2, ISSUE 3, FEBRUARY 2001

From the Editor

Here it is, the start of a new Millennium. I don't really make resolutions, per se. However, this has been a time for me to take a good look at my current tasks, priorities, and responsibilities.

As part of this effort, I have been taking a look at our current newsletter practices. More and more STC Chapters are contacting our Board to ask if we are currently online with our Chapter newsletter or if we are looking at heading that direction.

After having served in an editorial role for a year and a half, I am inclined to think that a move toward putting the newsletter on our Chapter web site is a really good idea.

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February Chapter Meeting

February 13, 2001

Topic: "Distance Learning"

Speaker: Saul Carliner

Time:

5:30 p.m. - 6:30 p.m. Networking/Buffer

6:30 p.m. - 8:00 p.m. Presentation

Place: UWM

Architecture and Urban Planning Building, Room 170

2131 East Hartford Ave., Milwaukee, WI 53201

Parking is available in the AUP lot or in the school underground lot.

Meeting Description

Overview of Online Learning and the Opportunities It Presents to Technical Communicators

This online session uses online learning to introduce you to this fast-growing field of communication. Through a remote, Internet connection, your Boston-based speaker first introduces you to the variety of types of online learning (some of which sound awfully familiar as online documentation), then explains how the different technologies relate to one another (for example, what is an authoring system and what does it have to do with bandwidth?). Next, he identifies issues that you must address in any online learning project, and last, he identifies opportunities for technical communicators.

About the Speaker

Saul Carliner is an assistant professor of information design at Bentley College in Waltham, Massachusetts, with specialties in online learning, information design methodologies and techniques, and the economics of information design. His consulting clients include Berlitz, Guidant, IBM, Microsoft, ST Microelectronics, 3M, and VNU. He is the author of *An Overview of Online Learning* and *Eight Things that Training and Performance Improvement Professionals Must Know about Knowledge*, and co-editor of *Techniques for Technical Communicators*. He is a Fellow and past International President of the Society for Technical Communication.

Room and technical arrangements have been made with the cooperation of Rachel Spilka. The event is sponsored by the Milwaukee Chapter of STC and the UWM English Department/Professional Writing Program. ♦

There is no doubt there would be a cost savings for the Chapter, and the news could be posted in a more timely fashion. (Right now, there is a two-to-three week lag between the deadline for the issue and the time Chapter members receive the finished product.)

However, we simply can't make such a significant move without hearing from you, our Chapter members. In informal chats with members, some have expressed a real appreciation for continuing to receive a hard-copy newsletter. Some people wish to be able to put the newsletter aside in a "non-work" area, to be able to review at their leisure. Others state they would be less inclined to read the newsletter if it is only online.

On the other side, some people like the idea of receiving an email reminder that the newsletter is posted. And they like the idea of saving a few trees in the process.

I invite you to write to me at edit4stc@hotmail.com with any ideas, comments, or suggestions in this regard. I would really like to know what you think about such a move. I will present your comments to the Board.

Ann M. Greenseth, Editor ♦



To Be A Technical Communicator

This is the fourth in a series of articles exploring who we are as technical communicators and what we do.

Spotlight on Kathleen Asher

by Ann M. Greenseth

As the industries in which we work expand, contract, grow, and change, we as technical communicators find that we must develop and transform in ways that we never could have foreseen.

Take Kathleen Asher at Northwestern Mutual. She has been in the technical communication field since 1988, and at Northwestern Mutual for 10 years. In that time, she has performed the sort of work many technical communicators could put in their portfolios and résumés: technical manuals (primarily produced in paper format), help systems for Windows applications, and, more recently, web-based work (HTML) and usability.

Recently an opportunity arose. Kathleen's company begins implementing a revised software application designed for the company's underwriters. The software provides the underwriters with the ability to select from over 280 letter templates and customize letters to specific clients and their situations. It is evident from the beginning that this is a crucial interaction with the client, since it generally involves informing clients of underwriting decisions, the resulting changes in their coverage and/or premiums, and their rights to

receive more information about the decisions.

It became apparent that the system requires support. Perhaps it is safe to say that it requires a unique blend of skills to provide the kind of support the underwriters and the company need. Since it is a document-generation application, certainly it is necessary to have someone skilled in communication to assist in wording changes and development of new templates to add to the system. Usability skills are also required to make certain the application's interface and underlying functionality meet the underwriters' needs.

However, the system also requires technical and programming skills for maintaining and enhancing the system itself, including developing and implementing the dialogs and other features that prompt underwriters to provide the appropriate information, and assist them in completing their work in the most timely and productive way possible. Finally, the system requires troubleshooting support for users (underwriters) when they have questions about the system or the templates.

Enter Kathleen Asher. A year ago, she stepped into this newly created system administrator position. The role required the types of skills Kathleen possesses. Her years of end-user documentation work, usability skills and experience, and close and successful associations with end users made her a logical candidate for the position. Kathleen likes the fact that the position provides her with the opportunity to work with end users, and also provides a unique mixture of technical (programming) and

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communication tasks and responsibilities.

Kathleen relies heavily on her technical communication skills. “Underwriters,” she states, “are similar to developers” in that they can be “highly technical” in their communication, which does not always translate well to the client. Part of her role is the same as it is with other subject matter experts—help them communicate to their users in the clearest and most appropriate way possible.

Kathleen uses a variety of tools in her present position, including HotDocs, which works in concert with Microsoft Word to generate the documents in the system.

At the present time, Kathleen spends about 80% of her time in this role. The rest is spent in continuing to work in other technical communication areas, including HTML, brochures, and newsletter articles. She truly loves the variety and the challenges. In addition, she has been a member of STC for almost five years (heading toward Senior Member status!), and has been a member of the Wisconsin Chapter for those five years.

Technical communicators are being called upon to fill unique and important roles within their organizations. In so doing, we prove time and again that our skills are vital to our companies and their clients, and that we do so much more than dot i’s and cross t’s. Just ask Kathleen Asher. ♦



STC Mentoring Program Workshops

February 17, 2001

Topic: HTML Workshop

Time: 8:00 a.m. - 9:00 a.m. Registration/Breakfast
9:00 a.m. - Noon Hands-on Workshop

Speaker: Mary Ann Terry, Spherion Technology Architects

Location: MSOE, Allen-Bradley Hall of Science, Room 366,
432 E. Kilbourn Avenue, Milwaukee, WI 53202-3109

Cost: \$25 members, \$15 students, \$35 non-members
(Cost includes continental breakfast)

Workshop Description

This three-hour training session will provide you with a basic understanding of HTML and its application on the World Wide Web. You’ll get hands on training in creating a web page using some of the basic fundamentals of HTML including text formatting, background definition, image insertion, and table creation. You’ll also be provided information on a few of the more popular HTML editors, as well as some helpful web sites for web page developers.

About the Speaker

Mary Ann Terry is currently employed as a Senior Consultant with Spherion Technology, Inc. She has a Bachelor’s degree in English and possesses more than twelve years of experience as a Technical Writer. Mary Ann’s background includes computer based training, paper documentation, training videos, and web site development. She has been using HTML for the past four years to produce web pages and web-based training.

March 10, 2001

Topic: XML Workshop

Time: 8:00 a.m. - 9:00 a.m. Registration/Breakfast
9:00 a.m. - Noon Hands-on Workshop

Speaker: Susan Archer, Spherion Technology Architects

Location: MSOE, Allen-Bradley Hall of Science, Room 366
432 E. Kilbourn Avenue, Milwaukee, WI 53202-3109

Cost: \$25 members, \$15 Students, \$35 non-members
(Cost includes continental breakfast)

Workshop Description

This workshop will include an overview of XML and the opportunity to use XML including:

- XML documents
- XML Data Islands
- XML Object Model
- XML Namespaces
- XML schemas and DTDs

About the Speaker

Susan D. Archer is a certified trainer of “GUI Design for Web-based Applications™.” She has been a technical communicator for more than fourteen years. Her writing projects have included printed manuals, Windows 98 online help, HTML help, Web pages, marketing materials, articles, and books. She is currently a Consultant with Spherion Technology Architects.

Getting Started with Usability Testing

An STC Telephone Seminar

submitted by Maurice P. Martin, STC Communication Director

If you want to conduct usability testing but don't know how to get started, this telephone seminar will answer your questions, including how to determine what to test, how many subjects to test, and where and when the test should occur. You will also get a toolkit of forms and examples.

Seminar Objectives

- Present an overview of the usability testing process
- Define qualitative and quantitative goals for testing
- Define the user profile precisely for a sample of participants
- Create scenarios that match the goals of the test
- Develop a plan to record and analyze the results of the test
- Create a plan for ranking recommendations for change

Date and Time

Part I: Principles
Wednesday, March 7, 2001,
1:00-2:30 p.m. EST

Part II: Practice
Wednesday, March 14, 2001,
1:00-2:30 p.m. EST

What Is a Telephone Seminar?

A telephone seminar is much like a large conference call—but in a more

controlled, radio-like environment. You simply dial the 800 number from your phone, enter your personal identification number, and you're connected! You then sit back and listen to the presentations, follow along with the handout material, and join in the lively Q&A sessions.

Benefits

A telephone seminar offers participants these benefits:

- No travel time
- Pay per site and not per person
- Opportunity to train employees in your own offices

Cost

With a telephone seminar, the cost is per site, not per person. Train as many people as your conference room can hold for one flat rate!

- U.S. sites: \$250.00
- Canadian sites: \$280.00
- All other sites: Please contact the STC office

An additional \$8.00 will be charged for registrations received less than five days before the seminar.

About the Speaker

Carol M. Barnum is a professor of technical communication at Southern Polytechnic State University in Marietta, Georgia. She is also an award-winning author, a presenter at STC annual conferences, a fellow of STC, and, most recently, a recipient of STC's Jay R. Gould Award for Excellence in Teaching Technical Communication. Her book, *Usability Testing and Research*, will be released in August 2001 as part of Allyn and Bacon's Technical Communication series.

Want More Information?

Contact Ann M. Greenseth at edit4stc@hotmail.com to obtain a registration form. ♦

Region 6 Conference Announcement

Mollye Barrett (Wisconsin Chapter) has graciously agreed to serve as General Manager of the 2001 Region 6 Conference. The Twin Cities Chapter will host the conference, probably at a conference site outside of the metropolitan area.

The conference will be in late September or October; more details will be available early 2001. If you or someone you know is interested in working on this conference, please contact:

Mollye Barrett
(mbarrett@execpc.com) or
Susan Jensen,
Region 6 Director-Sponsor
(smjensen@mindspring.com). ♦

STC 48th Annual Conference

May 13-16, 2001

Chicago, Illinois

The Preliminary Program for the Annual Conference will be mailed to all STC members with the March issue of *Intercom*.

This program contains information on the sessions as well as details on registration.

Watch for your copy to arrive in February 2001! ♦

Competition Winners

submitted by Catie Lukas-TerHorst

Denise Allan and Cheryl Schmelzer

The Publications Department at McHugh Software International received two Excellence awards from the St. Louis Chapter's technical communications competition. The awards were presented to them for their work on the DCS and Warehouse Slotting online help systems.

The Distribution Control System (DCS) is a warehouse and distribution center management system that is designed to provide McHugh's customers with an effective real-time management solution, either as a standalone system or as a fully integrated component of McHugh's Logistics Suite.

The Warehouse Slotting tool is an add-on feature for McHugh's warehouse management solutions, and it provides customers with a quick and effective way to create and maintain

slotting plans (effective product placement strategies) for their facilities.

Both of the online help systems are HTML-based, and they provide end users with overview, conceptual, procedural, and field-level information to help them learn about and work with the functions within the products.

Cheryl Schmelzer and Denise Allan were the information architects responsible for delivering these two help systems.

All Chapter Members

Please continue to keep us informed of your competition awards. ♦

New Members

provided by Verla R. Gatchell

We recognize the following Chapter members who joined or transferred to our Chapter since the last issue of the newsletter:

New Members

- Susan A. Haydock
- Dennis E. Lane

- Arthur J. Orchel
- Erin T. Ruggaber
- Terry W. Sexton

Transferred Members

- Carlye C. Fuller
- Janean B. Voss

We welcome you to the Wisconsin Chapter of STC! ♦



2000-2001 Chapter Officers

President, Catie Lukas-TerHorst
email: catherine.lukas-terhorst@na.manpower.com

Vice President, Louis Costanzo
email: lccostanzo@juno.com

Secretary & Job Exchange, Sigrid Schoepel
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Treasurer, Open

Membership, Verla R. Gatchell
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Programs, Jan Wefler
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Public Relations, Linda Verwey
email: linda.verwey@metavante.com

Newsletter, Ann M. Greenseth
email: edit4stc@hotmail.com

Mentoring, Mollye Barrett
email: mbarrett@execpc.com

Web Chair, Open

Webmaster, Open

SIG News

Our Chapter has two Special Interest Groups: Consultants & Independent Contractors and the newly formed group, Information Architecture.

The C&IC SIG has been meeting for many years. The group includes many experienced writers who get together to discuss marketing and other business issues. The C&IC SIG presented a panel at the October chapter meeting. They meet on alternate months at Heinemann's Restaurant. For more information contact Eric McAttee at emcattee@execpc.com or call (414) 258-8663.

The IA SIG had its first meeting in January. It was a joint meeting with Milwau-CHI, the local computer human interface group. For more information, contact Brian Molstad at brianm@wirestone.com or call his work number: (262) 790-9327. ♦

Board Bio

Louis Costanzo

Louis C. Costanzo is the Vice President and acting Treasurer of the chapter. He is a self-employed technical writer and trainer and has been in business for over 15 years.

As an independent contractor, he has worked with a variety of subjects. Louis uses both Windows and Macintosh computers. His experience includes everything from mainframe computers to laptops.

Louis joined STC in 1983 and had been very active in the Twin Cities before moving to Milwaukee.

Louis is looking for a volunteer to take over the treasurer's position so

that he can concentrate on his goals as vice president. These goals include the formation of more special interest groups (SIGs) and writing the chapter bylaws. ♦

November 2000 Newsletter Contributors

Ann Greenseth, Editor

Mollye Barrett

Verla Gatchell

Catie Lukas-TerHorst

Paula-Joy Trencaroff

Please contact the Editor at edit4stc@hotmail.com if you would like to contribute to future issues. ♦

Wanted!

Chapter Treasurer

As Louis Costanzo mentioned in his Board Bio, your Chapter is in need of a volunteer to serve as our Chapter Treasurer for the balance of the 2000-2001 program year.

Requirements:

A little time and a little energy!

Training:

None required. We will train you!

Contact:

Talk or write to any of your Board members, or write a message to edit4stc@hotmail.com. ♦



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