STC

Lakeshore Connection

Wisconsin Chapter, Society for Technical Communication Volume 7, Issue 1 February/March 2006

Mission: Creating and supporting a forum for communities of practice in the profession of technical communication.

March Chapter Meeting: User-Generated Metadata vs. Controlled Vocabularies

Krystyna Matusiak works as Digital Collections Librarian at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Libraries. She has designed and managed digital collections since the initiation of the digitization program at UWM Libraries in the fall of 2001. The list of the digital collections she managed and designed is available at: http://www.uwm.edu/Library/digilib/. Krystyna is also a Ph.D. student in the Professional Writing Program at UWM.

User-created metadata, often referred to as folksonomy or social classification, has received a considerable amount of attention, with some enthusiasts calling it "a revolution in the art and science of categorization". This presentation provides an overview of the pros and cons of user-generated metadata in the context of information organization for web delivery and compares it to professionally created metadata schema and controlled vocabulary tools.

Where:
Midway Hotel
1005 S. Moreland Road
Brookfield, WI 53005
(See www.stc-wi.org for map)

When:
Wednesday, March 15th

Schedule:
Networking
5:30 P.M. - 6:00 P.M.
Dinner
6:00 P.M. - 7:00 P.M.
Presentation
7:00 P.M. - 8:00 P.M.

Members:
Watch your email for RSVP information. You may also RSVP at: www.stc-wi.org

January Meeting Recap

The January STC Chapter meeting was held on January 10th at the MSOE Alumni Partnership Center. The meeting featured Sally Spahn, a senior STC member from the Quad Cities who spoke about successful proposal writing.

Sally explained that the main goal of a proposal is to persuade a potential customer to purchase goods or services, or to get an organization to support potential ideas or programs. To achieve success, the proposal must answer questions about satisfying the potential client's basic

Continued, page 2

In this issue:

March Meeting..... 1
January Recap..... 1
Jim Romano Address..... 2
Chapter Contacts..... 3
February Recap..... 4
Meeting Schedule..... 4

Continued from page 1

and unique needs. These needs are outlined in a Request For Proposal (RFP), a detailed and legally binding document that encourages the public to bid for the contract work. Similar to basic writing technique, the proposal team must answer basic questions:

1. **Who** it is written to?
2. **What** you are proposing?
3. **When** you plan to do it?
4. **How** you plan to do it?
5. **How** much is it going to cost?

Sally stressed that another key component to a successful proposal is clearly communicating to the potential client what makes your company unique, and how this uniqueness will deliver a great solution. This may include: service uniqueness, location, market segmentation/specialization, brand, market size/ dominance, price and people, to name a few.

In preparing the proposal, Sally indicated that it is very important for the team to build momentum with a kick-off meeting. This is where initial information is gathered and presented, objectives and goals for the project are defined, and tasks are assigned. Proposal meeting minutes are also very important at this stage so the team can assess any knowledge gaps that need to be addressed.

Sally Spahn can be contacted at: Sspahn@mchsi, if you have any questions. ♦

A New Year, A Renewed STC Experience

By Jim Romano,
STC Director,
Region 6

If technical communication were a medical condition, its symptoms would be something like this:

Numbness to budget cuts; *Vertigo* from the rate of change in the profession; Occasional *anxiety attacks* brought on by management's latest reorganization; *Coughing spells* caused by hysterical laughter at deadlines imposed on us; *General physical deterioration* from the "3 Cs" of tech comm: carbs, chocolate and caffeine; and… well, you get the picture.

At the same time, there are many "cures" at our fingertips that are making tech comm a more critical function than ever before in a company's enterprise:

Content management is growing and becoming more affordable and accessible; *Style guides*, *glossaries*, and *translation memory tools* are bringing higher levels of consistency to our documentation across many languages; *Media* are becoming easier to cross, and to manage across; *Management* seems to be gradually understanding the role of communication products in projecting their brand.

So as we enter 2006, we must ask ourselves: is the glass half-empty, or half-full? Is our profession's medical condition "business as usual," or—as some might say—terminal? While the answer depends on where you sit—which could be in a corporate cube, a home office, or an employment line—there are several basic truths that seem to characterize our field as we begin 2006. Let's look at three of them, and see how STC is helping you prepare for the challenge of meeting them:

1. Education and learning is more critical than ever. The rule of thumb used to be that every 18 months technology would turn over. It seems in our field that the learning curve is compressing to about half that. After all, who would dare think they know enough to go on auto-pilot for a year, without building a continuous learning component into their schedule?

STC is a great way to keep in touch with professional trends, tools, processes and best practices. Whether at the local level, Society level, or virtually, STC offers a

wide range of ways to keep abreast of the many elements that shape the way we do business in technical communication.

2. It's still all about networking. In this age of web-based everything, monster.com job hunting, and virtual commuting, there is still no substitute for face-to-face networking and communication. This is true as much for colleague-to-colleague interaction as it is for vendor-client interaction, as much for professional development as it is for drumming up business.

STC is pushing the virtual envelope with Webinars, online learning, telephone seminars, and virtual communities (SIGs); at the same time, our local Chapter/Community meetings are irreplaceable opportunities for networking, information sharing, learning, and occasionally commiserating about a common client issue. If you haven't been to a local STC meeting recently, your batteries probably need recharging, and that's a great place to plug in.

3. Want to think outside the box? Try: There is no box! The role of innovative thinking in technical communication is more critical than ever. Our clients—internal and external—look to us for solutions, not just documentation. We are quickly becoming aware of the need to go beyond our traditional roles to come up with genuine solutions for the communication products and services we support.

While STC cannot force its members to become outside-the-box thinkers, we can provide a fertile place in which innovative thinking is welcomed, nurtured, and shared. Many long-time STC members keep returning and renewing their membership for that *je ne sais quois* that characterizes the STC experience. It is a combination of solution-oriented thinking, doing more with less, and thriving in the face of what for many is corporate adversity in these days of "leaning the enterprise" (translation: budget cuts).

So, is our professional medical condition a healthy, lean diet, or corporate starvation? Whatever your perspective, STC provides the professional sustenance to help you deal with it, and to thrive in this Age of Lean. As you consider renewing your STC membership for another year, think about how you can really use the value STC offers you in order to make the most of your work as a healthy technical communicator.

In the meantime, there are many STC volunteers and staff members who are working tirelessly to ensure that you see the STC glass is half full, not half empty—and we are working hard to fill it up even more for our valued members. ♦

Chapter Officers and Contact Information

STC WISCONSIN CHAPTER

www.stc-wi.org

President:
Mollye Barrett
414-331-1378
president@stc-wi.org

Immediate Past President:
Kathie Gorski
262-628-1339
pastpresident@stc-wi.org

Vice President:
Susan Duncan
414-961-7279
vicepresident@stc-wi.org

Membership Manager:
Christine White
920-893-9705
membership@stc-wi.org

Newsletter Editor
Jesse Kieck
262-544-1796
newsletter@stc-wi.org

Secretary:
Robert Graw
262-894-7662
secretary@stc-wi.org

Treasurer:
Philomena Sucharda
262-681-9666
treasurer@stc-wi.org

Website & Mentoring:
Dave Clark
414-229-2643
mentoring@stc-wi.org

February Meeting Recap

By Bob Graw

The February meeting was "Customizing the XML Authoring Environment" presented by Peter Meyer. Peter is the Managing Director at Elkera, an Australian-based company that provides software and services for content management development and document publishing systems.

Peter opened his discussion with a brief explanation of Extensible Markup Language (XML) and why it has become the tool of choice for single source publishing requirements. XML is recognized for handling complex documentation that is not easily managed by manual processes. However, many current "out-of-the-box" XML editing applications require extensive customization.

Peter discussed the key issues involved in customizing XML editors and achieving higher usability levels. During his interactive demonstration, Peter opened files first in Blast Radius XMetaL Author and then Elkera Utilities for XMetaL Author. The Blast Radius file showed the basic XML elements and their start/end tags. The interface displayed a split screen between the work area and an "Insert Element" menu so typical elements within an XML hierarchy could be quickly inserted into the work area.

The Elkera Utilities file used only a less-than symbol (<) at the end of an element to distinguish between elements. Pushbutton icons allow the user to automatically insert an element within the work area. Therefore, this utility's interface looks and behaves more like a word processing program than an XML authoring program.

Peter also showed how Elkera Utilities made table creation easier and its print dialog box allowed many print/save options, including DOC, RTF, HTML and PDF. He then answered questions from the meeting attendees about the presentation.

In conclusion, Peter showed how companies such as Elkera are automating XML tasks so the authoring software interface is more like a word processing program. By reducing customization and learning time, the product is more cost-effective and can be used by more people involved in the single source content management spectrum.

For more information, visit http://www.elkera.com/ ;

http:/www.blastradius.com/

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Date	Location
Tuesday, April 11th, 2006	MSOE, 1120 N. Broadway, Milwaukee
Tuesday, May 2nd, 2006	MSOE, 1120 N. Broadway, Milwaukee *** NOTE** - Date changed from May 9th!
Wednesday, June 14th, 2006	Midway Hotel, 1005 S. Moreland Rd., Brookfield

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We welcome articles from members. Feature articles and articles of general interest should be about 300-400 words. Articles should be submitted as a Word file attached to an email. Please include your name, title, and company.

Mailing address: Lakeshore Connection – STC Wisconsin,
Attention: Jesse Kieck, 421 North Moreland Boulevard #1, Waukesha, WI 53188