



# Lakeshore Connection

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Wisconsin Chapter, Society for Technical Communication

Volume 4, Issue 1 Winter 2003

## Award-winning author to be featured speaker at February meeting

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The featured guest speaker for our February 11, 2003 meeting will be John Hedtke, a member of the STC's Nominating Committee and an Associate Fellow of the STC. He is currently President of the Hoosier STC Chapter.

His topic will be **"Seeding the Clouds: How to make it rain on you even during a dry spell."**

"Seeding the Clouds" is a presentation for technical communicators who have been affected by the rotten economic conditions... which is to say, all of us. Whether you're a salaried employee, a contractor or an independent; whether you're looking for work or you think

you might be looking for work soon, this presentation will present dozens of ideas that can improve your own financial outlook, including:

- how to be more competitive when you're looking for work
- ways to prime the pump for future work
- how to improve your own visibility
- new places to find work
- new types of technical communication to try
- ways to keep your spirits up while job-hunting



*John Hedtke*

John Hedtke is the award-winning author of 23 books, over 70 manuals, and almost 100 magazine articles.

The meeting will be at the MSOE Alumni Partnership Center, 1120 North Broadway (located just south of the intersection of Juneau and Broadway). Parking is available in the lot next to the APC (south side).

The meeting schedule is:

5:30 p.m. -- 6:00 p.m.  
Networking

6:00 p.m. -- 7:00 p.m.  
Dinner and brief announcements

7:00 p.m. Presentation

The cost (which includes dinner) is \$13 for members, \$18 for future members, and \$10 student members.

You can make reservations by email to [kgorski@execpc.com](mailto:kgorski@execpc.com) or via the STC telephone reservation line at 414-299-0048. Additional information will be sent via e-mail to chapter members. ♦

## December 2002 meeting

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Tom Hughes, technical communications manager at Adaptive Micro Systems, was the speaker at our December 10 meeting. His topic was "A CD ROM-based Technical Support Tool using Macromedia Director and XML."

Adaptive Micro Systems manufactures indoor and outdoor LED (light emitting diode) signs, which are used by industrial, retail and other applications. The company also creates the software that displays the text and graphics on the signs.

The company needed to provide up-to-date technical support. Tom's solution was to:

- put the company's technical manuals on CD ROM;
- create an XML (extensible mark-up language) index of available updated manuals and material on the web; and
- use Macromedia's Director to create an interface on the CD to access this index (and therefore the most current versions of the manuals) via an internet connection.

When a user accesses the CD, it automatically checks for an internet connection. If a connection is there, it downloads the index file in XML format. This index lists the most current versions available for the company's manuals, and provides access to these manuals.

A user whose PC does not have an internet connection can still access the manuals that are on the CD.

This solution has worked well for technical support, according to Tom. This approach also plays an important role in the pre-sales process - it shows the company's commitment to, and willingness to provide, the most current technical support information. ♦

## Chapter member succumbs to guilt, becomes newsletter editor

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After succumbing to an acute attack of guilt, a member of our local chapter has agreed to become editor of the chapter's newsletter.

James Green, a senior member of the Wisconsin Chapter, agreed to become editor after being approached by several other members.

Green had previously expressed an interest in helping out the chapter in one way or another. "I have an interest in helping out the chapter in one way or another," he had previously told several other members.

Green has been employed as a technical writer at Fiserv, Inc., since 1986.

Fiserv, Inc. does data processing for the financial industry.

Although no longer suffering from guilt, Green reportedly now suffers from attacks of anxiety.

Members who wish to submit articles to the newsletter - and who wish to help alleviate Green's anxiety - may send articles to him via e-mail at:

Jim.Green@Fiserv.com

You may also reach him via telephone at (262) 879-5148.

Please feel free to contact him with any suggestions or comments about the newsletter, or with suggestions for future articles. ♦

## STC Usability SIG meeting, December 12

The discussion at the first meeting of the STC Wisconsin Chapter Usability SIG (special interest group) on December 12, 2002 at eFunds was very interesting and had a momentum of its own. The designated topic was "Initial User Research" which included User Profiling and Task & Functional Analysis. User Profiling (and other impromptu topics) turned out to be large enough to take up the majority of the meeting and so Task and Functional Analysis were not discussed in detail. Highlights from the discussion included:

### User Profiling

The use of cameras in gaining user profile information - Most attendees felt that cameras are to be used only if absolutely necessary since users are sometimes intimidated by them.

Users are often excited to have someone that will actually listen to their problems. If you emphasize that you are there to evaluate the system and not the user, the response will be much better.

Questionnaires offer more responses but less personal feedback. A couple of the attendees have used this approach with some success.

Artifacts to collect:

- Sticky notes
- Written notes in operational manual
- Anything that the user has written/created that serves as a work-around for an unusable system

The attendees felt that leaving disposable cameras at the location would not be useful since for the most part, the users would not take advantage of them. Only to be used if you have complete buy-in from the client.

Once you have user profiles created, role-playing as these personas is very useful for internal teams as a testing tool.

Shortcuts for User Profiling:

- Instead of talking to real users, talk to the marketing department.
- Better yet, talk to the Help Center people that have actual experience dealing with user's problems.

- Best yet, talk to the people that have been called to the site because of system problems.

Other topics that were discussed include:

- Who in the company introduces you as the usability specialist can have a big impact. If it is a high-ranking manager, the employees may feel too much pressure to perform
- Obtaining complete user buy-in for the process is absolutely crucial and is one of the most important issues facing usability professionals today (may be a meeting topic on its own).

The next meeting will likely be in February. Details should be coming soon. Possible meeting topics include:

- How do you create a Usability Champion?
- Practical Definitions of Usability Terms
- Cost Justifying Usability

If you'd like to be notified of upcoming meetings and/or would be willing to host a meeting at your company, contact Brian Molstad at [brian@molstadconsulting.com](mailto:brian@molstadconsulting.com). ♦

## Upcoming events and meetings

### **February 5, 2003 STC telephone conference**

Noon to 1:30 p.m. on  
"Creating Persuasive  
Executive Summaries,"  
Ken Cook Co. (9929 W.  
Silver Spring Dr.).  
Contact Kathie Gorski  
(kgorski@execpc.com)

### **February 11, 2003 Seeding the Clouds: How To Make It Rain on You Even During a Dry Spell**

Speaker: John  
Hedtke. See page 1.

### **February 13, 2003 STC Telephone conference**

Noon to 1:30 on "Fast  
and Easy Time  
Management," at  
Manpower. Contact  
Kathie Gorski (e-mail  
kgorski@execpc.com).

### **March 11, 2003 Writing for the Web** Speaker: Dave Freedman, D.M. Freedman Consulting, Chicago

### **April 8, 2003 Writing and Editing Like a Pro**

Speaker: Bill Van Pelt,  
Associate Professor of  
English, University of  
Wisconsin - Milwaukee

### **May 13, 2003 Managing Multiple Responsibilities**

Speaker: Michael Tobis,  
Ph.D., Ducks in a Row  
Consulting, Madison  
(Joint meeting with  
ASTD and possibly PMI)

### **June 10, 2003 STC's 50th Birthday!** Panel Discussion on STC Past, Present, and Future Panelists: Mollye Barrett, Michelle Berkes, and Ken Cook ♦

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