

# STC Lakeshore Connection

Wisconsin Chapter, Society for Technical Communication

November 2008  
Volume 8, Issue 5



## Letter from the President

### Thinking about Usability

By Mike McCallister

World Usability Day (WUD) is November 13. This is an effort by our colleagues at the Usability Professionals Association to "ensure that services and products important to human life are easier to access and simpler to use." The purpose of the day is laid out quite well at [www.worldusabilityday.org](http://www.worldusabilityday.org):

...Technology today is too hard to use. A cell phone should be as easy to access as a doorknob. In order to humanize a world that uses technology as an infrastructure for education, healthcare, transportation, government, communication, entertainment, work and other areas, we must develop these technologies in a way that serves people first...

Technical communicators are often on the front lines of the battle for usability for the products we work on. No software interface is so intuitive that users don't benefit from the words and pictures we add. And who hasn't picked up some new gadget at the home improvement store and marveled (in wonder or disbelief) at the instructions that accompany them?

This year's WUD focus is on transportation. What does usability have to do with transportation?

One mundane example: Last summer, my wife and I were looking for a restaurant out in the country some miles from home. Armed with a Google Map, we looked for a county highway that never quite appeared. At one point we turned around, and turned at a bridge that seemed like the right place. Maybe a quarter mile later, we saw the first sign with the right marker on it! But where we turned—no sign anywhere.

UPA is also launching the Global Transport Challenge on November 13.

On or after that day, visit <http://www.worldusabilityday.org/globaltransportchallenge> to pick up a tool to determine your personal transport carbon footprint, and learn a little more about small changes that can make a big difference. We'll see you at the next meeting! ♦

## World Usability Day

<http://www.upassoc.org/>

World Usability Day was founded in 2005 as an initiative of the Usability Professionals' Association (UPA) to ensure that services and products important to human life are easier to access and simpler to use.

Each year, on the second Thursday of November, over 225 events are organized in over 40 countries around the world to raise awareness for the general public, and train professionals in the tools and issues central to good usability research, development and practice.

The UPA supports those who promote and advance the development of usable products, reaching out to people who act as advocates for usability and the user experience. Members come from across the broad family of disciplines that create the user experience. We invite you to network in our community. ♦

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## November Chapter Meeting: Usability Exercise

### *November: Usability Exercise*

In honor of November 13, World Usability Day, and building on what you may have learned in the recent webinar on usability, we will conduct a usability exercise.

You will participate in assessing the usability of something very familiar to chapter meetings.

Roane Simkins, Usability Specialist will join Trina Grieshaber, Wisconsin Chapter VP in leading us in an interactive program.

Our guest Roane Simkins is a specialist in Human Factors engineering,

Usability engineering, and Cognitive Processing. She has worked on projects for clients such as: Primavera, Inc, Journal-Sentinel, Inc., eFunds Corp., CUNA Mutual Group, State Government Agencies in WI and CA, bioMérieux, Inc., Intel Corp., Genesys Laboratories, Carta, Inc., Synacom Technology, Cardinal Health, CSC, and Honeywell.

A compulsive fixer of things that don't quite work, Roane went into

technical writing after tackling unintelligible technical manuals, and continued on into human factors engineering as a matter of course. She specializes in software interfaces on both the user-facing end and the developer-access end.

**Don't miss this interactive and fun meeting! ♦**

### *New STC Member Benefits*

## New Benefits at STC From STC Headquarters

Recently, these benefits were added to your STC membership:

- Software discounts for members only (10 percent from MadCap, 15 percent from ComponentOne). The savings for members taking advantage of the discounts can be hundreds of dollars—much more than the cost of STC dues.
- STC's expanded Salary Database, an exclusive membership benefit, showed an overall growth in technical communication jobs of 3.1 percent with 60 percent of states indicating an increase in the number of jobs. The 2007 data, provided by the Bureau of Labor Statistics, also identified those states with the largest increases and those with the sharpest decrease in tech comm jobs.
- STC's online Career Center gives STC members a 14-day advance look at new job postings before the rest of the field sees them. This can be a real advantage if your employment status changes during these tough economic times.
- With STC's research partner, Aberdeen Group, members receive exclusive, one-year free access to 5,500 targeted research documents on best practices, benchmarks, market perspectives, and key performance indicators—a \$995 value. ♦

## STC Webinars

### November

Wednesday, 19 November  
12:00 – 1:30 pm CT

[How to Avoid Common Graphical Mistakes that Technical Communicators Make](#)

Presented by Naomi Robbins

#### Speaker Bio

This session will use examples of real graphs to illustrate common mistakes that many professionals from all fields and positions make when using graphs to display data. It begins by discussing human perception and how we decode information from graphs, which helps explain why some graphs work and others don't. The presenter will describe a number of common mistakes, including problems with scales, tick marks, and labels; difficulties with making the data stand out; and issues involved with grouping several charts. The audience will also be given tips for creating better tables. We end with some useful little-known graph forms that communicate the data more clearly than the everyday graphs that are more commonly used.

### December

Wednesday, 3 December  
12:00 – 1:30 pm CT

[Printed Books and Online Help Using a Wiki](#)

Presented by Rahul Mehrotra

#### Speaker Bio

This is a case study of a successful migration from a FrameMaker-WebWorks based authoring and publishing system to a Wiki-based mechanism to produce printed books and context-sensitive help. It describes how 20,000+ pages of software documentation were moved while keeping to a quarterly update and release schedule. You will hear about how we figured out what to do, what we changed, how simple it is to implement, why we will not be going back to our old ways anytime soon, what your plans will need to include, and how you can avoid the pitfalls that came our way.

[Register for a Web seminar here](#), or for more information, contact [Elreatha Matthews](#). ♦

## Chicago Manual of Style

Q. I use Microsoft Word and it has a "reference" feature that does part of the work of endnotes/footnotes for the author. Should I use the reference feature, or should I do this "manually"?

Q. What's the difference, if any, between the words "existing" and "preexisting"?

To read the answers to this month's questions, go to the Chicago Manual of Style Web site, at <http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/>. ♦

## Wisconsin Chapter Contacts



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## Upcoming STC Webinars

STC Webinars are  
held at

Compuware 700 W. Virginia  
St. Suite 500 Milwaukee, WI  
[MapQuest Map](#)

**Wednesday, Nov. 19**

**12:00 – 1:30 pm CT**

**How to Avoid  
Common Graphical  
Mistakes that  
Technical  
Communicators Make**  
Presented by Naomi  
Robbins

**Wednesday, Dec. 3**

**12:00 – 1:30 pm CT**

**Printed Books and  
Online Help Using a  
Wiki**

Presented by Rahul  
Mehrotra

**Watch your email for  
more details!**

The next  
newsletter  
deadline is  
December 20

## Upcoming Chapter Events

### November 11

**Topic:** Usability Exercise

**Time:** 5:30 networking, 6 dinner, 7-8 presentation

**Location:** MSOE Alumni Partnership Center, 1120 North Broadway

**Cost:** \$15 members, \$20 non-members, \$10 students, \$5 no dinner

**RSVP:** by noon on Friday, November 7 at [www.stc-wi.org](http://www.stc-wi.org)

### December 10

**Topic:** Watch your mail for the announcement!

**Time:** 5:30 networking, 6 dinner, 7-8 presentation

**Location:** To be announced

**Cost:** \$15 members, \$20 non-members, \$10 students, \$5 no dinner

**RSVP:** by noon on Tuesday, December 2 at [www.stc-wi.org](http://www.stc-wi.org)

We're still looking for volunteers to serve as Chapter Secretary and Chapter Program Manager. The Program Committee is most productive with multiple members, so we'd love to hear from several volunteers with bright ideas.

Please contact Mike McCallister at [workingwriter@gmail.com](mailto:workingwriter@gmail.com).

## Call for Presenters

Documentation and Training West 2009

March 17-20, 2009 Palm Springs, CA

<http://www.doctrain.com/west/2009>

The call for presenters is now open for Documentation and Training West 2009 (March 17-20, 2009 in beautiful Palm Springs, CA). The event organizers are seeking presenters to deliver case studies, lessons learned, and instructional workshops on topics that relate nicely to the theme of the event: "Moving from Unstructured to Structured Content". The event also features a special focus area on the Darwin Information Typing Architecture.

STC members are encouraged to submit presentations to speak at Documentation and Training West 2009. Presenters receive complimentary access pass to the entire four-day event (valued at \$1299), including access to the pre- and post-conference software training workshops.

If you are interested in presenting, submit your speaking proposal here: <http://www.doctrain.com/submit>

Questions? Contact Scott Abel, Documentation and Training Conference Series Program Manager at +1 317-466-1840 or [scottabel@mac.com](mailto:scottabel@mac.com). ♦

## Member News



Join our membership manager Verla Gatchell in welcoming the new 2008 members:

James Houck  
Andar Jones  
Trevor Schara  
Timothy Dean Wester  
Jean Zyla

**Tranferring Member**  
Bernadette Koontz  
**Welcome!!**

The following members have attained a new stage in their affiliation with the STC

**Senior Member**  
Diana Bankston

**20-Year Anniversary**  
Richard Gage

**15-Year Anniversary**  
Peter Grzechowiak

**10-Year Anniversary**  
Sharon Harney

### **Congratulations!**

Thanks for your staying power, and for giving your best to the Wisconsin chapter.

Win AWESOME prizes by participating in the STC Reach for the Stars Member-Get-a-Member Campaign! Invite your colleagues to join STC—we'll help you

### **PRIZES FOR Individual Recruiters**

For every ten members you recruit, your name will be entered to win:

An Apple iPhone

For every five members you recruit, your name will be entered to win:

One of three full conference registrations to the [STC 2009 TechComm Summit](#) (a \$795 value)!

For every three members you recruit, your name will be entered to win: One of five live [Web seminars](#) in 2009.

For every member you recruit, your name will be entered to win: A twelve-month [membership](#) for the 2009 membership year.

### **Get started today!**

Check out the resources on the STC Website (sample recruitment email, new list of benefits, talking points, tips and ideas for recruiting colleagues).

Everything you need is online: [www.stc.org/membership/mgam-about.asp](http://www.stc.org/membership/mgam-about.asp)

### **PRIZES FOR Chapters & SIGs**

Your efforts could also win prizes for your chapter and SIG. Prizes are based on the total number of new STC members recruited by the individuals of each chapter or SIG. Using the online application, the new member identifies the name of the person who referred them, plus the chapter or SIG that will receive credit.

One 19" flat screen television

One Apple iPhone

Up to five full registrations to the [STC 2009 TechComm Summit](#)

Up to ten Web seminar registrations to an educational "hot" topic of your choice

Up to four iPod shuffles

Up to four \$25 Amazon.com gift cards, plus recognition in *Intercom* magazine

In addition, each winning chapter president's picture and biography will be featured on the leadership section of [www.stc.org](http://www.stc.org). ♦

### **Call for Articles**

Members, this is your newsletter! Use it to learn something and, perhaps, to teach something.

Please submit the articles, opinions, announcements, book reviews, upcoming events, job changes, and promotions that you want to share with your fellow chapter members.

*Judith Blackbourn, Newsletter Editor*  
[newsletter@stc-wi.org](mailto:newsletter@stc-wi.org) ♦

STC Lakeshore Connection is published six times a year for members of the Wisconsin Chapter, Society for Technical Communication. Permission is not needed to reprint articles from *Lakeshore Connection*; you can simply credit the author and the newsletter. As a courtesy, please send a copy of the publication to our editor.

We welcome articles from all members. The next deadline is December 20. Feature articles and articles of general interest should be about 300-400 words. Articles should be submitted as an MS Word file attached to an e-mail. Please include your name, title, and company.

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