

Desktop Publishing

Some Insight into the Art/Craft

By Noreen Hisaye Norris

Desktop publishing (DTP) is the process of combining various document elements—such as design, format, content, and graphics—into one publishable document. It is done entirely on the computer and generally requires specialized software to combine text and graphics into a pre-specified page layout.

The multiple-step process involves various types of software and equipment. The essential tools are:

- **Hardware.** A computer with a high-resolution monitor, a printer, a scanner, a camera for printed materials, and access to more complex instruments as needed.
- **Specialized software** that can integrate a variety of elements into a coherent document. Word processing programs, such as MS Word, are satisfactory for less memory intensive documents. QuarkExpress, PageMaker, and Interleaf are often used for marketing and advertising documents. FrameMaker is often used for large technical documents. Programs such as Macromedia Dreamweaver, Adobe GoLive, MS Front Page and Adobe Acrobat are used for online publishing. In addition, many commercial

printers have publication software to run large typesetting and other color-producing equipment for the highly glossed effect seen in magazines. Peripherals may include animation and multimedia software.

DTP software has extensive document layout capabilities that use information retrieved in alternative ways. For example, a DTP specialist may work with a report created in PageMaker and import tables from Lotus 1-2-3 or Excel, and graphics from Harvard

Graphics, CorelDraw, Adobe Illustrator or other drawing programs.

Development of the Craft

The first desktop publishing software was introduced in the mid-1980s. The term “desktop publishing” is attributed to Paul Brainerd, who developed the Mac PageMaker program for Aldus Corporation in Seattle, Washington. It was the first program to provide easy integration of text and graphics in a single document.

[DTP continued on page 6](#)

Inside This Issue

<u>The Presidential Podium</u>2	<u>Humor: Virtually Invisible</u>5
<u>The Editor's Desk</u>2	<u>Professional Development</u>7
<u>December</u>	<u>Introductions</u>8
<u>Meeting Notes</u>3	<u>Deduct Your STC Dues</u>8
<u>December</u>	<u>New Members</u>9
<u>Meeting Preview</u>3	<u>Book Review</u>9
<u>November</u>	<u>Director-Sponsor Report</u>10
<u>Meeting Review</u>3	<u>Tech Issues</u>11
<u>Visiting Author:</u>	<u>Web Site/Employment</u>12
<u>Solitary Refinement</u>4	<u>Humor:</u>
<u>Managers' Corner</u>5	<u>Sonnet on a Tech Writer</u>14

Publication Information

Signature is the newsletter of the San Diego Chapter of the Society for Technical Communication, a non-profit professional organization dedicated to educating and advancing the careers of technical communicators. Newsletters are published monthly during the chapter year (September through June). STC has more than 25,000 members and 150 chapters nationwide. For more information about the San Diego Chapter visit our Web site at www.stc-sd.org or call our hotline at (619) 525-7716.

Write to us at:

SD-STC,

P.O. Box 910577,

San Diego, CA 92191-0577,

or

Society for Technical Communication
1120 Sycamore Avenue, Suite 2B
Vista, CA 92083

This newsletter invites writers to submit articles to be considered for publication. Note: By submitting an article, you implicitly grant a license to this newsletter to run the article and for other STC publications to reprint it without permission. Copyright is held by the writer. In your cover letter, please let the editor know if this article has run elsewhere, and if it has been submitted for consideration to other publications.

*Unless otherwise noted, copyrights for all newsletter articles belong to the authors. The design and layout of this newsletter are © San Diego STC, 2001. Material printed in *Signature* may be reprinted if *Signature* is credited and a copy is sent to the editor at the above address.*

Submissions and letters to the editor are welcomed and should be mailed to the STC address above, Attn: Signature Editor or emailed to the editor at the address shown elsewhere in this issue. Submissions may be edited to meet space requirements. Submission deadlines are the 1st of the month prior to the publication month. Publication is dependent on space availability. ❁

The Presidential Podium



How to Find a Job In a Recession: a Primer

By Kris Oden

At the October meeting I discussed a couple of tips for job-hunting during these, uh, challenging times. Fortunately, technical writers are well suited to weathering the changing economic environment (have computer, will travel). With a little re-focusing, a change in strategy, and a little persistence, you can find a job in a recession.

The first thing to remember is the work hasn't gone away; it has just been re-prioritized. It has just been sitting there waiting for you to ask for it. Seriously. If you've been laid off from a company, offer to work on a contract basis to move existing projects along or start new ones that can be advanced to a certain point. As Uncle Walter says: Ask for the job.

Secondly, while large companies are laying people off, small companies tend to be growing even during a recession. Look through the trade journals and magazines in your technical field and write down all the small companies that have products, but are not public yet. Next research the company and find out if they are profitable. By "pre-qualifying" your prospects, you gain a lot more power in the selection process. Don't answer every job ad you see; that only makes you just another résumé. Select; don't settle.

Once you have your list of companies, research them thoroughly to identify business problems you can solve with your technical writing skills. Edit your résumé to show that you have the skills to solve the business problem. Write your cover

[President continued on page 7](#)

The Editor's Desk

Time Flies

By Rick Bradshaw, Editor

The days of the months pass swiftly, as does the year. "Yesterday" was Halloween, "today" is Thanksgiving, and "tomorrow" is Christmas. Time for another issue of *Signature*.

Speaking of time slipping away and accounting for our time, check out the article from our visiting author this month, Grant Hogarth. Grant writes a column for the Solitary Scrivener, the newsletter for the Lone Writer SIG. Do you hate filling out those time cards with charge numbers or some other equally distasteful method for tracking your time and don't understand why it's needed? Perhaps you are among those who wonder why you don't track your time? Read Grant's article for a quick intro into the world of time in the workplace.

This month our feature article is about desktop publishing (DTP), the art that writers and employers sometimes think "anyone" can do. If you have thought that, you might find this article interesting.

Looking for a job? Try our Web site. Jeff Freeman's article introduces you to another segment of your local chapter you might not be aware of.

Do you know what a "stakeholder" is? If you're a manager or someone who would like to become a manager, you should. If you think it is Buffy's able assistant or someone who stands by with your steak either before or after it is cooked, before you ask for the A-1, you'd do well to read Suzanne Hosie's management column.

Looking for ways to say it better and perhaps use fewer words? Check out our book review this month. *Envisioning Information* may

[Editor continued on page 8](#)

December Meeting Notes

By Elaine Tsang

Date: Wednesday, December 12, 2001

Time: 5:30—Networking
6:15—Dinner
7:00—Presentation

Place: Wyndham Garden Hotel, 5975 Lusk Blvd., Sorrento Mesa. Hotel is located east of I-805, at the corner of Lusk Blvd. and Mira Mesa Blvd. (behind Chili's Restaurant).

Phone: 858-558-1818

Menu: Buffet

- Tossed Caesar Salad
- Fresh Fruit and Berries
- Chicken Stir Fry Teriyaki
- Tortellini Basil Alfredo
- Fussilli Pasta with Fresh Herbs and Vegetables
- Market Fresh Vegetables
- Warm Dinner Rolls and Butter
- Dessert Table (Tortes, Brownies, and Cookies)
- Coffee, Tea, and Iced Tea

Cost (Including Dinner):

- Members \$20*
- Non-members \$25*
- Students \$15*

*Add \$5 if you do not make a reservation by 5 p.m. Sunday, December 9.

Cost (Without Dinner—No Reservation Required):

- Members: \$10
- Non-members: \$15

RSVP: Make a reservation online (preferred) by visiting www.stc-sd.org and clicking on Reservations or phone your reservation to (619) 525-7716 by 5 p.m. Sunday, December 9. Reservations are required if you choose the dinner option to ensure enough food is provided. ☼

December Meeting Preview

Employment Questions? Hit the Source!

By Elaine Tsang, VP Programs

So you're out there pounding the pavement day after day, hunting down all of the job leads you can find. You've been working hard, but nothing seems to pan out. You wonder, is it your interviewing technique, your skills, or just the job market? If only you could get inside the heads of hiring managers to discover their expectations, their hiring priorities, their methods of evaluation. Come to the December meeting, and you can!

This special meeting features a panel of managers who have experience hiring technical writers. This is your opportunity to ask them all of the

questions that have been plaguing you. Pick their brains to learn how you can position yourself in this challenging job market. The panelists include Barbara Newton-Holmes, Manager of Documentation of Peregrine Systems, Suzy Hosie, President and CEO of Write on the Edge, Inc., Cheryl Nemeth of Ensemble Communications and former Technical Publications Manager of Motiva Software, and Elaine Tsang, Staffing Manager of Technical Standards, Inc., just to name a few. If you are currently seeking work, or if you expect to be looking in the year 2002, then you shouldn't miss this meeting! ☼

November Meeting Review

"They're Worth the Challenge! They Are Our Future!"

By Pam Fridie, Co-copyeditor

With those words, our November meeting speaker, Carolyn Starr, encouraged us to consider doing volunteer work with high school students.

Starr is the Executive Director of Escondido Education COMPACT, "a nonprofit organization designed to provide youth with job readiness training and linkages to employment." COMPACT's Program Director, Gayla Powers, was also present.



Chapter President Kris Odin, left, and speaker Carolyn Starr

You tell COMPACT what you want to do and how often you want to participate, and they will make the arrangements with schools, faculty, and students. Some typical types of service are:

- **Mentoring and tutoring.** Writing skills, job applications, etc.
- **Leadership skills.** Such subjects as "How to ride a bus to X" and "Wardrobe for the workplace."
- **Community service.** Get an idea for a project and work with 20–30 students to get it done, thus providing a role model.
- **Training interns.** Provides the students with a window into industry—opens their minds to the many possibilities within a field.

November continued on page 13

Visiting Author

Solitary Refinement

By Grant Hogarth

Reprinted From *Solitary Scrivener* newsletter

Well, here it is, the end of summer, and time for another edition of my column. It has been an interesting time for me since I last wrote, and I've been wondering what to contribute. As some of you know, I was let go from the company I was with in mid-April, just in time for the last "Refinement" column and the Annual STC Conference in Chicago (and, yes, there is a lot of that going around...). It was a good conference, even if I only got to see a couple of days of it. I had the good fortune to present with a great panel of fellow Lone Writers, and hope that they enjoyed it as much as I did.

I've now taken a job with a contract company, and am working on an interesting pair of projects for them. It's a much different vibe from being the lone writer, or even the senior writer for a company. It has been stressful, but I've been able to learn a bunch of new things, and have had to tighten up my processes in areas where I'd let them get slack—most specifically, scheduling and managing workloads. And so that's what I'm going to make the topic of this column.

If you are like me, you wind up at the end of the week, quarter, and year, wondering where the time went. As I get older, I wonder this more and more. It's bad enough in my personal life, which I figure is mostly mine to spend as I wish. But what gets me is where all the work time goes, the time that I'm being paid for generating quality products. What if somebody asks me to account for what I've been doing in the past week, or to make a hard commitment as to how long it will take me to convert the reference manual to articles on the Web site?

Scheduling and tracking are necessary evils. I hate them, but I've had to learn to deal with them. Even if you

are on staff and the only writer, you should be tracking your tasks and time. Too often, lone writers are so accustomed to accepting tasks as they come in—either because they don't have any other choice or don't think that they do—that they don't fully understand just how much they're actually doing. The big advantage of getting into the habit of tracking your work is being able to quantify your value to the company. Whether that is to justify a raise or a second writer, or to determine what the Cost of Goods really is for a manual, more knowledge is better than less. This information, ugly as it may be, should be (initially at least) for your eyes only. You don't have to share the details with anyone; this is data for your own use—information that will make you stronger. Because this is for your own use, you can be honest about it, even if you spent three hours on Wednesday surfing the Web looking for a new car. You need to know your baseline if you are going to manage expectations, both your own and those of the people around you.

This brings me to the second point, which is managing your workload and commitment levels. If you don't know where your limits are, then you won't know when you are reaching them, or when you are getting overloaded to the point of failure. (I'm assuming that most of you recognize the point when the ice has cracked wide open under you and you are now in deep trouble....) Failure can be not meeting a deadline, or not reaching a quality goal, or ending up having to work extra and unplanned hours to meet those deadline and quality goals. You need to be able to predict how long it will take you to do a task, and then determine whether you are on track.

The other thing that time-tracking data can reveal is when you're spin-

ning your wheels. I'll admit that time-tracking can in itself be a great time-waster. Sometimes you spend so much time tracking all the pieces of the project that you don't actually get anything done (other than keeping your PHB [Pointy-Haired Boss] happy). This particularly applies to the truly inundated, who keep going back over their "to-do" and "completed" lists in a desperate attempt to prove that they're getting something (anything!) done each day. Unfortunately, all they really end up accomplishing is burning productive hours from their available supply of time.

So... how do you get a grasp on the useful numbers, without drowning in ephemeral data? You can purchase job- and time-tracking software from many sources, but you don't need to. I track my work through a simple (and I mean simple) Excel spreadsheet. It has four main columns: Date, Project, Hours (I track to 15 minutes), and Task. There is a fifth column that I use for daily summaries and for each project. I also summarize for the week (including week-ends) and month. I use a separate sheet for each month.

Like I said, this is very simple. I don't track every keystroke or task, and I generally round up my time. I didn't want to have to invent a whole analytical database for tracking my work life. I just wanted/needed to know where all my time goes. Once you know where the time goes, you can start to do something about it. Part of commitment is taking control of your life and time. If you have a commitment, you have a contract, and contracts work both ways. You have a right to your life (believe it or not), and your employer has a right to your time (after all, they are paying you for it). Having control of your time

[Solitary continued on page 14](#)

Managers' Corner

What Is a Customer and What Do I Do with One?

By Suzanne Hosie

Do you have customers? “Well,” you say, “I write documentation that’s used internally so I don’t really have customers.” Most of you know where this is going... all of us have customers. If we’re writing something, the hope is that someday someone will read it. That person is, of course, our customer. What if it’s just required documentation that nobody will ever read? You still have customers (the requirements group). What if you’re a contractor? You have many customers (the paying ones and the end-users).

Maybe a different word would help—stakeholders. If you think in terms of stakeholders, the “customers” for your product are now many. And if you consider the needs and wants (yes, they usually are different) of all your stakeholders, you might (in addition to feeling quite important) better understand the “why” of the requirements that are placed on your work. The table shows some examples of stakeholders and their wants.

Our job is to juggle priorities. It used to be that we just had to “document the thing.” But now it has gotten much more complicated. Production cycles are shorter, money is tighter, people are more self-interested, and....

Here are some ways we can balance all of our stakeholders’ priorities while retaining (regaining?) our sanity.

Remember the Basics

- Meet the schedule
- Charge a fair price
- Respond to requests quickly and appropriately
- Be pleasant to work with
- Be flexible and adapt to changing circumstances
- Produce a quality product

Consider Your Stakeholders

- Define who they are
- Make sure you understand their priorities and concerns

Develop Processes

- Know and use your processes
- Share them with your stakeholders (when possible); it helps them understand your needs better

Work as a Team

- With your stakeholders (again, when possible)
- With your group

By working closely with all your stakeholders, considering their needs, and letting them know that you’re

Stakeholder	Wants
R&D	Document every single cool feature in the product, no matter how its schedule coincides (or doesn’t) with the writer’s.
Marketing	Sell the product (never mind that the user has already bought it).
Manufacturing	Deliver on time and make sure the manual is cheap to print.
Management	Keep everyone happy.

Identify Metrics

- Set cost, schedule, and quality goals
- Consider your stakeholders’ priorities when you’re doing this
- Measure your performance against these goals

doing this, you can promote teamwork across the organization as well as produce a better product. You can’t please everyone, but if you make the effort to communicate the reasons why, your stakeholders just might understand. ☼

Humor

Virtually Invisible

By Karen Field

If you’re like me, you log on to your computer each morning, open your email, and find at least 20 messages waiting for you. If you’re like me, that blinking red light on your phone heralds your attention

as well. And if you’re like me, that last thing you want to do first thing in the morning is answer email and return phone calls.

Having grown weary of this daily barrage of techno-traffic, I tried to reframe the issue. People have been thinking of me, I told myself; that’s why they’re writing and calling.

But in the fluorescent light of a cube farm, delusion lingers for only so long. One morning not long ago, I

had to acknowledge that these people wanted something from me. They wanted me to write a document on the B2B server; they wanted me to edit a functional spec; they wanted my opinion on formatting a template. In other words, these people wanted me to work.

Knowing this, needless to say, did not alleviate my burden or lighten my

[*Humor continued on page 13*](#)

DTP continued from page 1

In the late 1980s, specialized software was used to incorporate office and data software into one coherent document. I remember training for six weeks on Ventura and then using PageMaker to make an internal yet public report which incorporated WordPerfect 3.1, Harvard Graphics, Db2, Lotus 1-2-3, and negatives of pictures too large to use in the program. We set up our dummy and handled necessary editing and placement or layout of materials. Kerning, sizing, changing character, and other DTP editing were necessary. Printing was handled by a printing company, but we viewed the final document before approving the print.

Before the Computer

Depending on the complexity of the document, artists or graphic designers were hired to lay out the information. Graphics and pictures, charts and photographs were chosen and taken to a photographic service to change into appropriate sized negatives for manual placement into the document. Copies were made to be pasted into the “dummy” copy (publication laid out for final publishing). Once laid out and approved, the document was sent to a printer along with the “dummy” used by printing staff to check their sheet/plate (metal plates were set up with typeset; later paper plates became the norm). The plates created a document called a “blue-lined” copy. This copy was sent back to the author and/or editor and checked and rechecked for accuracy. Normally a blue pencil was used to make corrections – hence the term “blue-lined.” These metal plates were used for printing the final publication. It was then stored for later use.

The DTP Process has come a long way since then; and other software products, particularly Adobe FrameMaker and the online help programs, have streamlined and quickened the efforts of technical communicators producing large scale products, such as multi-volume manuals, reports, and proposals. DTP has also enhanced and streamlined the marketing units and companies by making publication of an assortment of information products more cost effective. Additionally, information can now be collected into discrete packages and published or housed in warehouse databases or document repositories.

Desktop publishing has evolved into a cottage industry of independent desktop publishing professionals who can

choose to work for a company in-house, on contract through an agency, or as independent contractors.

Features of a Desktop Publishing Program

DTP has blossomed as technology has advanced. Today, any DTP program should include the following features:

- Multiple type sizes and styles
- Precise font and style manipulation (e.g., kerning, size, character and type changes)
- Ability to import text, graphics, and photos
- Ability to lay out multiple columns and various formats
- Ability to wrap text around graphics

- Ability to create bold graphics by distortion of text, pictures, and graphics.
- Ability to display documents on screen and print them in full color
- Document templates with pre-formatted layout and typestyle information for a variety of publications
- Online spell-checker, dictionary, or glossary

What Desktop Publishing Professionals Produce

Sixteen desktop publishing categories have been identified by Jacci Howard Bear in “Guide for Desktop Publishing” on the www.About.com

Web site (see list below). Category 17 is an example of what this technologically innovative advancement has recently brought about.

Categories of Work Products Using a Desktop Publisher

1. Annual Reports & Proposals
2. Business Forms
3. Catalogs, Menus, Product Lists
4. Collateral Materials (brochures, fliers, posters)
5. Corporate Identity (logos, letterhead)
6. Marketing Materials (ads, direct mail)
7. Presentation Graphics
8. Periodicals (newsletters, newspapers, magazines)
9. Packaging
10. Crafts, Creative Printing
11. Publication Art (book jackets, CD inserts)
12. Publications (books, manuals)
13. Résumés, Word Processing
14. Self-Publishing
15. Signage
16. Web & Electronic Publishing (websites, multimedia, pdf)
17. Electronically Published and Stored Information (Lotus Notes, documentation)

The Technical Publication Process

The publication process requires several specialists from the inception (creative idea) of the document through printing and distribution.

Writer/Editor: During the writing phase, the developing document goes back and forth between the writer, editor, and often subject matter experts.

Graphic Designer: Graphic designers use line art, pictures, charts, and photographs to illustrate information. They often work hand-in-hand with the writers and editors to create the material necessary to present an upscale and positive image.

[DTP continued on page 7](#)



Professional Development

Get That Job Workshop, January 12th

By Mary Larkin

Haven't looked for a job in a while? Rusty at interviewing? Don't know what the latest salary range is for tech writers? Need to know what a good résumé looks like? If you've answered, "Yes!" to any of these questions, then you should attend the "Get that Job" workshop on January 12, 2002, at Invitrogen. The following topics will be covered:

- **Résumés**—Dean Urban
- **Interviewing Techniques**—Walter Hanig
- **Portfolio**—Bonnie Graham
- **Job Offer/Salary Ranges**—Elaine Tsang
- **Networking/Career Development**—Kris Oden

When: January 12, 2002, 8:30 a.m.–4:30 p.m. (Check-in at 8:30 a.m.; workshop starts at 9:00 a.m. Lunch is included. The afternoon is devoted to résumé review, portfolio review, and

mock interviews.) Bring your résumé and portfolio!

Where:

Invitrogen
1600 Faraday Ave
Carlsbad CA 92008

Cost:

- \$10 for STC members
- \$10 for students
- \$25 for nonmembers

Send payment to:

STC San Diego
P.O. Box 910577
San Diego, CA 92191-0577

Reservations: Send an email to maryl@castandcrew.com. Include your name, email address, phone number. We must receive your check before you are enrolled in the workshop. You will be put on the waiting list until payment is received. This workshop will be limited to 30 registrants, so don't delay in paying. ☼

President continued from page 2

letter to directly address the business problem.

Next, identify the person who has the power to hire you. This is where you have to be creative. Identifying the person who has the power to hire you is the trickiest part of the job search, but not impossible. Use your contacts and network to identify these people. Make friends with the receptionist. Once you have a name, send your résumé with a cover letter. Tell them you are going to call them in two weeks to discuss your prospects with their company. Then do it. Even if the conversation doesn't lead to an interview, it may lead to another opportunity.

Finally, adjust your expectations: It's an employer's market right now, so you may not get the salary that you had prior to becoming unemployed. You should always try to position yourself to obtain the best possible salary, but be willing to negotiate. If the job offers a great opportunity, TAKE THE JOB. Tighten your own belt.

I hope this helps you with your job search. I strongly recommend the book *What Color is Your Parachute?* by Richard Nelson Bolles, for other job-hunting strategies (\$13.56 from Amazon.com). Good luck! ☼

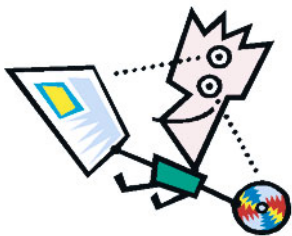
References and Web Sites

Check out the following Websites:

- www.desktoppub.about.com
- internetbrothers.com
- www.start4all.com
- Webgrammar – www.webgrammar.com/writing.html
- "Desktop Publishing (DTP)." Jones Telecommunications and Multimedia Encyclopedia – www.digital-century.com/encyclo/update/desktop.html.
- "Desktop Publishing," Microsoft® Encarta® Online Encyclopedia 2000. encarta.msn.com ☼

DTP continued from page 6

Desktop Publisher: Desktop publishers combine the various document elements (text, tables, and graphics) into the document design. A good page layout creates easily understood information. Good use of animation, flowcharts, listed steps, and a user-friendly layout results in an effective means of communication.



Conclusion

In essence, DTP programs enable the user to lay out materials on the

screen and can incorporate word processing, graphics, and other capabilities to refine and edit parts of the document. The software prepares the document for printing on typesetting equipment, printers, or electronic online publication.

Today, DTP has carried over design and creative elements into home and personal products, including iron-on transfers for tee shirts and other clothing as well as coffee cups, personal publishing of favorite recipes and mementos to save as family history. At the other end of the scale, DTP has streamlined publishing large scale products—multi-volume manuals, reports, proposals, etc.

Do you need a desktop publishing professional for your projects? ☼

Introductions

Member Proves It's All a Game

By Lana Walker-Helmuth

Dean Urban was born and raised in Austin, Texas, and lived there until he moved to San Diego 10 years ago. We can be happy that San Diego beat out Santa Barbara and Seattle. Yet had he chosen Seattle, perhaps a certain company's products would be easier to use. Dean's strong suit is usability and he participates in several usability SIGs.

A high-school science fair winner and builder of model rockets, Dean briefly studied physics at the University of Texas before switching to computer programming. Eventually he moved out of programming, which he thought was boring and repetitious, but stayed in the computer field doing consulting work.

One of his early experiences was writing programs for conducting energy audits of homes. When he realized that people had trouble using the equipment, he wrote a training manual and discovered he really enjoyed both writing and training. He continued to work for several years in the training field.

After moving to San Diego, he landed a short, "two-week" FrameMaker job at Jostens Learning. During his two years there, he was promoted from desktop publishing to creating QuickStart guides to writing complex technical manuals. This paved the way for other technical writing contract jobs at companies like Intuit and SAIC.

Later he worked at Nellcor Puritan-Bennett in Carlsbad. He started out as a technical writer, then moved to supervisor for the technical writing department, then was promoted to site manager. While there, he and his team won the coveted STC Best of Show award for the 740 Ventilator Users Guide.



Not long after that accomplishment, Mallinckrodt, a Midwest fertilizer company that wanted to enter the medical technology field, bought Nellcor. But it didn't work out. Dean and his whole department were laid off. Not to worry—he found a contract position at CAIS Software Solutions. Because good work does not go unrewarded, when the manager of the technical writing department left, Dean stepped into her place.

You didn't think things would stay status quo for long, did you? Last year Cisco Systems bought CAIS Software. And when business challenges hit their industry,

Dean lost most of his writing staff. He is rebuilding his department now as Cisco restructures and expands into other communications areas, such as wireless technology.

Dean says he's at a crossroads in his career. His job at Cisco is quickly morphing and he plans to wait to see what will happen. His years of playing banzai chess in high school, where they got in two to three games in half an hour, must have prepared him well for this game. Now, it's his move. ♣

[Editor continued from page 2](#)

be a text you will want to add to your bookshelf.

All these articles and more await you within the pages of *Signature* this month. If there is something special you'd like to see in an upcoming issue, let me know. I'm as close as your email client. Oh yes, before time totally gets away from me, let me be among the first to wish you all a very Merry Christmas and a happy, hugely profitable New Year. ♣

Deduct Your STC Dues

By Kris Oden

If you pay taxes in the United States, your STC dues are tax-deductible. You can claim dues as a deduction in several ways:

1. **Charitable Expense:** You can deduct a portion of your dues as a charitable donation. You can only deduct the amount that is more than the value of the benefits you receive. These benefits are estimated at \$30 (\$15 for the journal, *Technical Communication*, and \$15 for the magazine, *Intercom*). You may claim the difference as a charitable contribution.
2. **Business Expense:** Employees and self-employed consultants may claim the full amount of dues as a business expense as long as you are not reimbursed for this from your company.
3. **Miscellaneous Expense:** If you don't fall into one of the categories above, you can claim your STC dues as a miscellaneous deduction. Note that for miscellaneous deductions to affect your taxes, the total amount of miscellaneous deductions must exceed 2 percent of your adjusted gross income.

Lastly, you cannot deduct personal services donated to STC. Sorry!

[Editor's note: Please contact your tax preparer or tax regulations for specific applicability to your own circumstances.] ♣

I hate books; they only teach us to talk about things we know nothing about.

—Jean-Jacques Rousseau

Book Review

Envisioning Information, by Edward R. Tufte

Graphics Press...126 pages

By Erica Ueland

This is the season when bookstores show off a large percentage of “coffee table” books. One beautiful book, first published in 1990, provides much more than your usual coffee table book. It offers compelling explanatory text as well as stunning graphics. Whether you are just beginning as a technical communicator or are among the ranks of the more advanced, Edward R. Tufte’s *Envisioning Information* makes a nice gift to yourself.

Although it has been around for years, this thought-provoking book continues to offer useful insights to professional communicators. *Envisioning Information* provides valuable knowledge about the science of charting, 3D depictions on paper, and design strategies.

As technical writers or illustrators, we may be asked to produce charts, bar graphs, tables, diagrams, statistical maps, instructions, and guides. A visual display of numbers or quantities that reflect engineering or scientific research is often the best way for us to communicate a vast amount of information.

Creating a graph or a chart conveys an economy of thought and provides your readers with a host of knowledge at one glance. Rather than having to read huge amounts of material, your readers will be thankful for properly executed graphic representations of data. Tufte calls this “data compression” and advises us that when we use visual principles to express our data, standards of quality evolve.

Tufte presents another concept when he describes our normal print and screen media as “Flatland.” He would like to see us slip the surly bonds of Flatland and enhance our information with added dimensionality. He shows us how complex data is rendered into graphs, charts, maps, and tables that are dynamic and multi-dimensional.

One example he provides is a chart prepared by mobster John Gotti’s defense lawyers for his conspiracy case. The example shows how members of the jury were likely persuaded by information in the chart to acquit Gotti. The chart reveals the prosecution’s witnesses to be guilty of a multitude of crimes ranging from murder to forgery. Mr. Gotti’s lawyer reported that the jury in this case was not impressed by testimony of “paid government informants who lie, who use drugs, who kill people.”

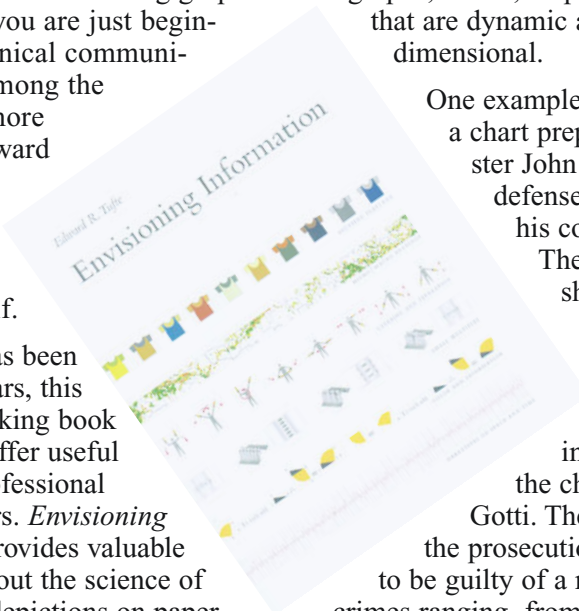
The chart itself lures the observer in and invites close inspection. The chart can be read both horizontally and vertically. Patterns of heavy black Xs jump from the page and emphasize each informant’s bad reputation. A graphic such as this allows a jury to assess and compare data more completely than remembering a long string of spoken testimony.

Another idea Tufte skillfully incorporates in displays of complexity is the marriage of both “macro” elements and “micro” details in a single graphic. Expert graphics should have a macro or universal appeal so that information is readily digested in a

glance. They should also have a micro aspect in which detailed information is readable with closer scrutiny.

Tufte includes many examples of graphic data compression. His examples of Japanese weather charts and train schedules are beautifully designed and packed with information. The photograph and analysis of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial superbly explain the union of macro and micro elements.

Envisioning Information has both a macro and micro appeal to it. When you first thumb through this book, you’ll notice the intriguing illustrations. However, after you read the fine print, you’ll discover a book worth studying for its ideas on data compression and expression. ❁



New Members

By Bonnie Blackfield,
VP-Membership

Please welcome these new,
reinstated, and transfer members :

New Members

Laura Barrett
Rachel Cummings
Eric Detamore
Scott Gilding
Kate Godfrey
Heather Hawley
Peter Manley
Lee Miller
Marcia Phelan
Jennifer Prickett

Reinstated Members:

Tara Burnhouse
Cheryl Nemeth
Mark Petrich

Transfers In:

Laura Kijak

Director-Sponsor's Report

Do You Know Where You Are Going, and How You Will Get There?

By J. Suzanna Laurent, Director-Sponsor Region 5

Yogi Berra, the Yankee who told us “It ain’t over till it’s over,” also cautioned, “You’ve got to be very careful if you don’t know where you’re going, because you might not get there.”

When people ask me how I have achieved so much, I tell them that you can do anything you want to do—as long as you know where you are going and how you’re going to get there! But, you need an effective road map or plan to guide you, because it’s very easy to get off the right track. Personal goals can provide the road map you need to achieve it all. If you’ve done a good job of setting your goals, you not only know where you’re going, but also how you are going to get there.

The power to achieve outstanding success comes from within people themselves; it’s what we call self-motivation. Each of us is the end result of what we think we are. When we mentally develop things like personal courage, enthusiasm, skill, confidence, and a belief in our own abilities, we sharpen our desire to achieve more.

Did you know that scientific research has proven that on the average, adults use only 25% of their total mental capacity? That means another 75% remains idle and unproductive! A study by the Stanford Research Institute indicates that 88% of success is attitude, and only 12% is attributed to knowledge and skill. Since all growth and progress come from within, there is practically no limit to what a personally motivated person can accomplish. But how do you motivate yourself? Where do you begin?

Well, first you must make a frank and honest appraisal of where you stand now. Evaluate your strengths and weaknesses, your assets and liabilities. Put your answers down in black and white—because writing them down is very important. Face

yourself squarely, honestly, and realistically. What are your goals in every area of life? Ask yourself, “How can I become successful through personal motivation?”

Paul J. Meyer, owner of the Success Motivation Institute, is a world-renowned motivational speaker who owns over 40 successful companies. Millions of copies of his works have been distributed around the world. He developed a Million Dollar Personal Success Plan that I would like to share with you. I have used these five steps for many years to help me become all I can be, and I’d like to share them with you so you can be more successful if you choose.

- **First, crystallize your thinking.** Determine what specific goal you want to achieve. Then dedicate yourself to its attainment with unswerving singleness of purpose.
- **Second, develop a written plan for achieving your goal and a deadline for its achievement.** Plan your progress carefully. Do you know that we spend more time planning our vacations than planning our lives? Organized activity and enthusiasm are the well-springs of your power.
- **Third, develop a sincere desire for the things you want in life.** A burning desire is the greatest motivator of every human action. The desire for success implants “success consciousness,” which, in turn, creates a vigorous and ever-increasing “habit of success.”
- **Fourth, develop supreme confidence in yourself and your own abilities.** Enter every activity without giving mental recognition to the possibility of defeat.

Concentrate on your strengths instead of your weaknesses... on your powers, instead of your problems.

- **Fifth, develop a dogged determination to follow through on your plan, regardless of obstacles, criticism, circumstances, or what other people say, think, or do.** Construct your determination with sustained effort, controlled attention, and concentrated energy.

If you use these five steps to develop your goals, you will be more successful at whatever you do. I taught goal setting workshops for years that expanded on all of these steps, but today the leader within me just wanted to share a few tips that you can use for your own success.

One of my favorite poets is Amanda Bradley because she has some wonderfully motivating works. I have this poem posted on the wall of my office because it is helping me become all I can be. I hope it motivates you as well as it does me!

Within our reach lies every path we ever dream of taking.

Within our power lies every step we ever dream of making.

Within our range lies every joy we ever dream of seeing... and,

Within ourselves lies everything we ever dream of being. ❁

Wanted Cartoonist/Illustrator

Signature needs a cartoonist and/or Illustrator! Contribute to an award winning newsletter. Student or pro welcome. You will have a by-line and masthead listing. Great portfolio opportunity. For details contact the editor at (rbradsh2@san.rr.com).

Tech Issues



FrameMaker and Color Diagrams and Photos

By Matt Sullivan, GRAFIX Training & Consulting

This month's question concerns FrameMaker and color illustrations. When creating documents that require color diagrams and photos, I often get questions about how to set up the color components of a page (headings, titles, and graphic elements) so that they will reproduce accurately. Since there are a few tricks which can help, this month I'll discuss the ways that Frame handles custom colors and color tints.

By default Frame sets our choices to the base colors red, green, and blue (RGB), as well as cyan, magenta, yellow, and black (CMYK). Frame also allows the choice of White. Since we often need combinations of those base colors, Frame has the ability to specify Custom Colors through the View/Color Definitions menu item. There we can specify color using the RGB or CMYK color models, as well as choosing from industry standard libraries such as Focaltone or Pantone.

If your project will be printed in color, then you need to understand the difference between Process Colors and Spot Colors. In a nutshell, if you plan on printing with process (CMYK) inks only, use process colors for your color definitions. If the accuracy of your special color is extremely important, then you should print it with another ink (more expensive) and your color should be defined as a spot color. Double checking with your printer to find out which is appropriate for your job will likely save a lot of time, money, and headache.

Frame also allows for tints of a color to display a shade of gray, for example, rather than pure black. Frame's built-in support of tints is fairly bad. When choosing to display only a percentage of a color, Frame attempts this by applying a rough screen, or polka dot pattern of solid dots to the area, rather than a lighter tint of color to the area. If you'd like an example of this, zoom in on a box filled with 30% of red, green, or blue and you'll understand!

For important colors in our document, we can get around these limitations on tints by defining custom colors which will display at 100% strength, but which are defined to be a lighter color. (In other words, we define a custom color called 50% Black, rather than displaying the system color black at 50% strength.) The result of this is a color which displays as a solid block of color in HTML and PDF, as well as printing with

[Tech continued on page 12](#)

Technical Standards, Inc. Documentation Solutions

What are you missing?

EXPERIENCE

- Eight years in Southern California
- Large selection of skilled candidates
- Proven screening processes

PROFESSIONALISM

- Knowledgeable and attentive staff
- History of lasting partnerships
- Current with industry trends

DEDICATION

- Complete documentation services
- Committed to finding the best solutions for you
- Timely and cost-efficient services

PROJECTS - STAFFING - TRAINING

www.tecstandards.com - 800.889.7116

Contract
or
Direct-hire
Staffing

Mission Statement

Designing the future of technical communication.

The Society for Technical Communication (STC) is an individual membership organization dedicated to advancing the arts and sciences of technical communication. STC is the largest organization of its type in the world. Its 25,000 members include technical writers, editors, graphic designers, videographers, multimedia artists, Web and Intranet page information designers, translators, and others whose work involves making technical information available to those who need it.

Society membership provides opportunities for ongoing learning and professional networking. Through the efforts of a small, full-time staff and a large network of volunteers, STC promotes the public welfare by educating its members and industry about issues concerning technical communication.

- Member:\$110 per year (plus a one-time \$15 enrollment fee)
- Student Member:\$45 per year (enrollment fee not required)

Society for Technical Communication
901 N. Stuart Street, Suite 904
Arlington, Virginia 22203-1822

703.522.4114 (voice) 703.522.2075 (fax)

Email: stc@stc.org Web site: www.stc.org

Web Site/Employment

Find a Job on the STC-SD Employment Web Page

By Jeff Freeman

Are you looking for a new job? Are you one of many technical writers who have been laid off during these difficult economic times? If so, the employment section of the San Diego STC Web site can assist you in finding an ideal job in the local area.

Although the current job market is rough, a recent article in the *San Diego Union-Tribune* stated, "Technical writers fulfill a function that will be in demand regardless of the state of the economy." The local STC chapter and the employment Web page provide you with resources and job listings that might not be available in the newspapers or on most Web job sites.

A visit to the STC San Diego Employment area enables you to access the following information:

- New contract and permanent job listings in the San Diego area
- Employer database
- List of contractors and agencies
- Salary surveys

New contract and permanent job listings are updated twice a month. If you want to obtain job listings without having to access the Web site, you can subscribe to the Job Mail list. After you subscribe to the list, you receive email whenever new job announcements are available.

The employer database provides a listing of over 350 local companies that are likely to hire technical writers, editors, and graphic artists. A list of firms that hire independent contractors is provided as well as agencies that place technical communicators of all levels, all job types, and various time durations.

You can also access national salary surveys for technical writers and edi-

tors that were obtained by polling STC members across the U.S. and Canada.

Finally, if you are looking for jobs in other parts of the country, the San Diego STC Web site has a link to the national site where you can access job information from a nationwide STC database.

Upcoming Enhancements to the Employment Site

Since enhancing job search skills is more important than ever to finding an ideal job, look for the following information links to be added to the site in the near future:

- Career and personality tests
- Creating an effective résumé
- Writing cover letters
- Posting your résumé
- Interview tips
- Salary and benefits negotiations

Attend an STC Meeting and Find a Job

In addition to the employment section of the Web site, monthly STC meetings will go a long way in helping you to find a job. At each meeting, there is a job board that lists current openings, and employers who are hiring make announcements. The meeting organizers allow plenty of time for you to network prior to the start of the meeting.

For members who are in the job market, time is given for them to announce their skills and state the type of position that they want to find.

The San Diego STC is always a good networking and skills-improving resource, but when you need a job, be sure to visit the employment section of the Web site (www.stc-sd.org). ❁

STC Telephone Seminars

Two STC telephone seminars will be held in January 2002.

- Wednesday, January 16: "Building a Product, Manual, and Web Site Using Customer-Focused Design," hosted by Basil White.
- Wednesday, January 30: "Developing a Strategic Framework for Technical Marketing Communication," presented by Sandra Harner and Tom Zimmerman.

Members can register online and view announcements for both seminars at www.stc.org/seminars.html.

Chapters or companies can sponsor a telephone seminar. Because you pay only for the connection, not the number of people participating, telephone seminars are a cost-effective way to train groups of technical communicators.

For US sites, the cost is \$125.00. There is an additional \$10 charge for registrations received less than five days before the seminar. For more information, see the December issue of *Intercom* magazine. ❁

Tech continued from page 11

appropriately sized dots in our print (1-color and 4-color) work as well.

When your Frame templates are built following these two tips, you can dramatically improve the quality of your print and electronic deliverables without increasing your cost of production!

Next month I plan on having a list of New Year's resolutions for desktop publishers and tech writers. Let me know if you have any suggestions at matt@grafixtraining.com, or call 619 275-3963. ❁

Humor continued from page 5

mood. My employer has expectations, and so does the bank who loaned me the money to buy my car. So I shrugged off the malaise that morning and began sorting through my email.

As I scanned the subject lines of these waiting messages, however, I noticed a commonality. At least half of the messages contained the familiar "RE:" in the subject line. Which means one thing: the senders were replying to me. I wrote to them first. In a sense, I ASKED them to give me work. I formulated a new rule: Send no email. It only invites work.

I continued sifting through the messages. Reading one message, I began to type a reply. But wait a minute, I thought. If I send a reply, the recipient might write back, and he or she might ask me to do more work. Rule no 2: Do not reply to email. It only invites work.

Having eliminated email as a potential draw for work, I turned to the phone, picked up the receiver, and entered the number to check my voicemail. Mid-button-punch, I found insight: at the end of this number sequence await the messages of people who want to give me work. Rule No. 3: Don't check voicemail. It's like recruiting work.

Cozy in my new world of cyber oblivion, I settled back to read the San Diego Union-Tribune online. Then the phone rang. I reached for it and then stopped myself. Whoever is calling, I realized, wants me to do work. Rule No. 4: Don't answer the phone. Answering the phone is like begging for work. (Hey, it's not like I won't know who's calling. That's the purpose of caller ID. Now when the phone rings I can glance at the display and think, "Oh, how nice. My boss is thinking of me." And go back to reading the obits.)

It has been two weeks since I became virtually invisible. So far it's working out well. Nobody

writes and nobody calls. My boss did stop by my cube today, though. She said something about a virtual unemployment check. ☼

November continued from page 3

- **Staff development.** Teach a class in technical writing to the English teachers!
- **Job shadowing.** Students spend half a day with us in our workplace, learning what their ideal job is all about. Students come back and say, "This has been the most incredible day I've ever had!"
- **Online mentoring.** Provides a clean and safe (and convenient) way for kids to get help with their résumés.

Our participating in this program will benefit our companies as well as the students. COMPACT provides free marketing, advertising the work we do with them. Get more information at www.educationcompact.org.

Announcements

In January 2002, there will be two STC telephone seminars:

- January 16: *Building a Product, Manual, and Web Site Using Customer-Focused Design*. Presenter Basil White.
- January 30: *Developing a Strategic Framework for Technical Marketing Communication*. Presenters Sandra Harner and Tom Zimmerman.

For more information see www.stc.org/seminars.html and the December issue of *Intercom*.

The 49th Annual Conference will be held at Nashville, TN, May 5-8, 2002. More information will be in the February 2002 issue of *Intercom*.

Congratulations to Drawing Winners

Judy Edelblute, of Medigene, won a copy of *The Write Way*, written and

San Diego Chapter Administrative Council

Chapter President: Kris Oden
kris.oden@invitrogen.com

VP-Employment: Judy Keene
judy_sd@pacbell.net

VP-Finance: Walter Hanig
wdhanig@alumni.rice.edu

VP-Programs: Elaine Tsang
elaine@tecstandards.com

VP-Membership: Bonnie Blackfield
bblackfield@gers.com

VP-Professional Development:
Mary Larkin
maryl@castandcrew.com

Newsletter:

Editor: Richard Bradshaw
rbradsh2@san.rr.com

Copy Editors:
Beth Vollbach
bethvollbach@earthlink.net
Pamela Fridie
Fridie_Indexing@msn.com

Cartoonist/Illustrator: Open

Student Liaison: Open

Web Site Manager: Suzy Hosie
suzy@wote.com

Jobmail Coordinator: Tiffany Gerstmar
tiffanydunn831@hotmail.com

autographed by Richard Lederer. Technical Standards sponsored this prize.



Winners Judy Edelblute, Left, and Barbara Dreyer

Barbara Dreyer, a freelance writer, won a Wally Buck. ☼

Solitary continued from page 4

means that you can be more effective and have less stress.

Time-tracking means tracking all... all... all... all... all your time. This includes:

- **Time you spend trying to learn new skills.** Pay particular attention to tracking time spent learning new skills that don't have direct, immediate application to your current job because they have a tendency to impede productivity. Even if it is relevant, learning to work with something like RUP (Rational Unified Process) is going to create a productivity hit before it produces a productivity gain.
- **Time you spend mediating for others.** Our editor, Whitney Potsus, shared the following with me: "I had a period recently where I spent more time than necessary shuffling messages between training and help desk to development and back again. It's easy to get caught in this web when you're a tech writer, because someone can guilt you into thinking it's your responsibility to follow this stuff up because you didn't document it. Deep down, you know it's not included in general-release documentation because it's a custom "thing" (whatever that thing is), and the developers didn't tell you about it anyway, but your colleague or adversary has hit a nerve. I intentionally use the word 'adversary' because anyone who manipulates you in this way is neither a friend nor an ally. This mediation is impossible to quantify in status reports."
- **Time you spend placating the insecurities of your boss.** I know, this always

comes with the job, but if you spend more time making the boss feel safe than you do producing the documents or Web pages you were hired to do, come review time, you're likely to get the message "you are a nice person, but you just don't get the job done," along with a pink slip.

- **Time you spend doing favors for people who have yet to return any of the 101 favors you've already done for them.** Doing favors is like lending money to a sibling...eventually, you have to cut off the supply. If you are really honest about the tasks you track, you may find unintended sinkholes that, once eliminated, would gain you back whole blocks of time.

Once you know where the time goes, then you can start budgeting it, just like with money. And just like with money, it's a pain to get started, and it feels like you are putting in more than you are getting out of the effort. And you know what? That's true—at least at first. But generally, if you stick to it, you find one day that you have more money (or time) than you thought you did, and can go on a vacation!

Originally From Vancouver, BC, Grant is now based in Salt Lake City, UT. A former theatrical designer & technician, he has been doing technical writing for over a decade. A Senior Member of STC, he has been Chapter VP & President for the Intermountain chapter, and was the Region 7 Co-Chair for the very successful 2000 STC Pan-Pacific conference. He has presented multiple times at chapter, regional, and society level conferences on a gamut of topics from XML to project management. He can be heard on the radio and Web every Tuesday morning from 6-9 a.m. Mountain time at www.krcl.org. ❁

HUMOR

Sonnet on a Tech Writer

Shall I compare thee to an SME?
Thou art more lucid and more articulate.
Focus groups do shake the mind of a VP,
And project's schedule hath all too short a date.
Sometimes too fast the interface may change,
And often are improvements made, all unannounced;
And every project from schedule sometimes may range,
By chance or marketing's changing research bounced;
But thy eternal writings shall not fade
Nor lose possession of that file thou ow'st;
Nor shall die the index thou hast made,
When in eternal lines to time thou grow'st:
So long as users read books to fix what's wrong,
So long live manuals, and these make thy life long.
(with apologies to WS)
—Dan Hall

Dan Hall is a Sr. Technical writer for SchlumbergerSema's RTEM Group. SchlumbergerSema is a French global technology services company, headquartered in Montrouge, France, with offices throughout Europe, Asia, and the Americas. Dan works in their San Carlos, CA offices. ❁