

February 2004

Volume 37 No 6



The San Diego
Signature



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Newsletter
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Newsletter Information

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2003-2004 Chapter
Council

STC Mission Statement

San Diego Members:
To receive chapter e-mail,
contact Patricia Ray at
Pat@TheWriteAttitude.com.

Visit the San Diego Chapter
Web site at www.stc-sd.org

Visit the Society Web site
at www.stc.org

Feature Article

Ever wonder if you're cut out to be a contractor?

By Catherine Robinson

Have you ever wondered what being a contractor is like and if you are up to the task? Or have you wanted to gain some independence through contracting? If so, you need to ask yourself some of the burning questions that follow.



SOCIETY FOR TECHNICAL COMMUNICATION

Each year, STC offers scholarships to full-time graduate and undergraduate students pursuing careers in technical communication.

Four awards of \$1,000 each will be granted for academic year 2004-2005. Application deadline is February 16, 2004.

Application forms and instructions are available from the STC office. For more information, contact the Society office:
703-522-4114 / www.stc.org/scholarshipinfo.asp.

STC's 2004 annual election to be held

The annual STC election will be held in early 2004, and only members who have paid their dues by February 27, 2004, will be eligible to vote. An option on the dues renewal forms and new membership applications for 2004 allows members to receive their election materials via e-mail. In March, members who selected this option will be e-mailed the slate, candidate biographies, and voting instructions. Members who did not select this option will receive these materials by first-class mail. The election closes 9 a.m. on April 15. Be sure to renew by February 27 to have a say in STC's future!



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[STC's 51st Annual Conference](#)

[May 9-12, 2004 at the Baltimore Convention Center.](#)

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703-522-4114 / www.stc.org

[Sponsorship Opportunities](#)
By Michael Cárdenas

[Join STC](#)
By Sue Heim

[LavaCon 2004](#)
[Calling for speakers](#)

[2004 Region 8 Conference](#)
[Plan now](#)

[Ninth Annual Writer's Symposium by the Sea](#)
[announced](#)

Editor's Desk
By Catherine Robinson
Signature opportunities announced

President's Podium
By Walter Hanig
It takes a council

New Members
By Sue Heim
What's new in Membership?

Employment Desired
Members looking for work

Chapter Meetings

- February Meeting
- January Meeting

Helpful Tips articles
Ensure temp-to-perm really does go perm
By Karen Field Carroll

Get started in the contracting business with these tips
By Catherine Robinson

Finding a single-source tool
By Gail Van Landingham

Humor
By Karen Field Carroll
Roll that "temp" job over to "perm"

Member Scoop
By Kitt Medrano
New newsletter column highlights members' scoop

Designing the future of technical communication

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The Professional Certificate in
Technical Communication





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[Return Home](#)

[More about the San Diego Signature](#)

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[Return Home](#)

[Feature](#) | [Editor's Desk](#) | [President's Podium](#)
[Helpful Tips](#) | [Chapter Meetings](#)
[Humor](#) | [Professional Development](#) | [Employment Desired](#)
[Mission](#) | [Author Bios](#) | [Newsletter Staff](#) | [San Diego Chapter Council Members](#)



[Return Home](#)

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About the San Diego **Signature**

Signature is the newsletter of the San Diego Chapter of the Society for Technical Communication, a nonprofit 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:

STC San Diego
PO Box 501261
San Diego, CA 92150-1261

Article Submission

This newsletter invites writers to submit articles to be considered for publication. Send your query and request for writer's guidelines to stcsignature@yahoo.com. Submission deadlines are the 1st of the month prior to the publication month. Publication is dependent on space availability.

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[Return Home](#)

[Feature](#) | [Editor's Desk](#) | [President's Podium](#)
[Helpful Tips](#) | [Chapter Meetings](#)
[Humor](#) | [Professional Development](#) | [Employment Desired](#)
[Mission](#) | [Author Bios](#) | [Newsletter Staff](#) | [San Diego Chapter Council Members](#)



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February 2004

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[Return Home](#)

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Publication Overview

Signature is a Web newsletter published by the San Diego Chapter, Society for Technical Communication (STC). It is issued ten times a year to more than 300 local technical communication professionals, managers, and educators. Other STC chapters, special interest groups, and related organizations also receive e-mail notification when each issue is posted. Because Signature is on the World Wide Web, readership is potentially unlimited.

Signature contains information produced by technical communicators for technical communicators. Advertising in Signature is the most direct way to reach the growing technical communications market in San Diego and the surrounding area.

Publication Schedule

Signature is published every month except July and August. Each issue is posted on the Web within the first three days of the issue month. Closing date for advertising is the 10th of the prior month.

Advertising Rates

Rates are based on type of ad (banner, rectangle, button, or text link), which newsletter page it is on (home page, feature article, or other), and where it is on the page (top, bottom, or side).

The following discounts apply:

- Prepayment for five issues: 10 percent discount
- Prepayment for ten issues: 20 percent discount

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(Space at the top is not available.)

Feature article at right: \$30

All other articles at right: \$20

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Home page at bottom: \$30

Feature article at right: \$20

▼ advertisements

Button 120 x 90



[Save BIG on books!](#)

[XML Revealed at Last!](#)



Vertical Banner 120 x 240

"This is hands-down the best screen capture software I've ever used in my 10 years as a tech writer."

"Bravo! Finally something that truly saved me time AND gave superb results."

[more >>](#)

All other articles at right: \$10

Specifications

File format: gif (non-animated only) or jpeg

Maximum file size: 18K

Horizontal Banner: 468 x 60 pixels

Medium Rectangle: 300 x 250 pixels

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Vertical Banner: 120 x 240 pixels

Button sizes: 120 x 90 or 125 x 125 pixels

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(Sizes based on Internet Advertising Bureau Standards)

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Submit advertisement by e-mail to stcsignature@yahoo.com. Include contact name and phone number.

If the ad is supposed to link to a Web page, provide the complete URL. (Linked pages open in a new browser window.)

Payment Information

Payment must be received before the publication date.

After receiving e-mail confirmation from the editor, make check payable to:
STC

Mail check to:

SD-STC

P.O. Box 501261

San Diego, CA 92150-1261

Advertising Policy

The publisher reserves the right to request revisions or to reject advertising. The advertiser and the advertising agency assume liability for all content of the advertisement published and for any claims arising thereof against the publisher. The publisher is not liable for delays in the scheduled publication dates beyond a refund of prepaid advertising space costs.

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The advertiser shall indemnify and protect the publisher from claims or expenses which may arise from the unauthorized use of any name, photograph, drawing, or work protected by copyright, registration, or label printed as a result of material supplied by the advertiser.

[Feature](#) | [Editor's Desk](#) | [President's Podium](#)
[Helpful Tips](#) | [Chapter Meetings](#)
[Humor](#) | [Professional Development](#) | [Employment Desired](#)
[Mission](#) | [Author Bios](#) | [Newsletter Staff](#) | [San Diego Chapter Council Members](#)



[Return Home](#)

Chapter President, Walter Hanig

wdhanig@alumni.rice.edu

Walter is responsible for a project converting a large suite of internal and end-user documentation to structured FrameMaker 7 at NCR.

He has served the chapter as Finance Vice-President and Administrative Council jester for four years before last year's adventure as chapter president.

VP-Professional Development, Michelle Petersen

mpetersen3@cox.net

Michelle is a senior technical writer at Alaris Medical Systems in Sorrento Mesa.

VP-Employment, Beth Peisic

bethpeisic@san.rr.com

Beth has a varied background in finance, accounting, and technical communications. She is a Senior Technical Writer at Intuit.

Treasurer and Hotel Liaison, Lance-Robert

treasurer@stc-sd.org

Lance is the senior technical information engineer at Tarari in Rancho Bernardo. This is his second term as chapter treasurer, and first term as chapter hotel liaison.

VP-Membership, Sue Heim

sue_heim@msn.com

Sue is a technical writing consultant in San Diego. She previously served in the San Diego Chapter as Vice President-Professional Development and as JobMail coordinator.

VP-Programs, Michael Cárdenas

mcardenas@multitrans.com

Michael is president of Multilingual Translations, Inc., a localization company headquartered in San Diego since 1985.

Newsletter Managing Editor, Catherine Robinson

stcsignature@yahoo.com

Catherine is a senior information engineer in the Teradata division at NCR. She has enjoyed contributing her time and efforts to STC in the capacity of judge of the technical writers' competition and proofreader of the monthly newsletter.

Newsletter Assistant Editor, Jennifer Mallory

jmallory100@hotmail.com

After Jennifer graduated with a degree in literature, she waited for the job offers to flood in. When the surprise and rejection wore off, she began a lengthy career in marketing and editing. Currently, Jennifer works as a Health Information Specialist II with the County of San Diego.

Chapter Web Site Manager, Kelley Wilson Mesterharm

kellew@cox.net

Kelley has an instructional and curriculum design background with

experience in Web accessibility and usability.

[Return Home](#)

[Feature](#) | [Editor's Desk](#) | [President's Podium](#)
[Helpful Tips](#) | [Chapter Meetings](#)
[Humor](#) | [Professional Development](#) | [Employment Desired](#)
[Mission](#) | [Author Bios](#) | [Newsletter Staff](#) | [San Diego Chapter Council Members](#)



[Return Home](#)

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STC Mission Statement

Our mission statement is: 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: \$125 per year (plus a one-time \$15 enrollment fee)
- Student Member: \$50 per year (enrollment fee not required)

[Return Home](#)

[Feature](#) | [Editor's Desk](#) | [President's Podium](#)
[Helpful Tips](#) | [Chapter Meetings](#)
[Humor](#) | [Professional Development](#) | [Employment Desired](#)
[Mission](#) | [Author Bios](#) | [Newsletter Staff](#) | [San Diego Chapter Council Members](#)

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Sponsorship Opportunities



Sponsorship Opportunities

By [Michael Cárdenas, VP Programs](#)

[Return Home](#)

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[Contact Michael](#)

Would you like to promote your company, get your company name recognition, and, at the same time, help the San Diego STC Chapter? Well, we have an excellent opportunity for you!

Your company can sponsor a monthly meeting. You will have your company logo and name on the San Diego STC Web site; you will get additional recognition at the STC meeting; and you will have a minute or two to present your company's products and services to the meeting attendees.

The cost per presentation is \$150. This includes dinner for one attendee, who must register in advance of the meeting.

Please contact Michael Cárdenas for sponsorship opportunities:
Phone 619.295.2682 or email mcardenas@multitrans.com.

[Return Home](#)

[Feature](#) | [Editor's Desk](#) | [President's Podium](#)
[Helpful Tips](#) | [Chapter Meetings](#)
[Humor](#) | [Professional Development](#) | [Employment Desired](#)
[Mission](#) | [Author Bios](#) | [Newsletter Staff](#) | [San Diego Chapter Council Members](#)

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Membership Drive



[Return Home](#)

Join STC

By [Sue Heim, VP Membership](#)

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

STC is dedicated to advancing the arts and sciences of technical communication. Celebrating its 50th anniversary this year, STC is the largest organization of its type in the world. Its 25,000 members in 150 chapters include technical writers and editors, content developers, documentation specialists, technical illustrators, instructional designers, academics, information architects, usability and human factors professionals, visual designers, Web designers and developers, 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.

Society Goals

Three goals of STC are enhancing the professionalism of the members and the status of the profession; providing information through publications, reports, and conferences; and reporting new communication technologies, methods, and applications.

In addition to the publications you will receive, you will have many opportunities to further your own education by attending dinner presentations, seminars, and conferences. You can submit your work in our annual competitions and receive recognition and awards from your peers. And you will have plenty of opportunity to network to meet fellow STC members.

Benefits of Membership

Among the benefits of Society membership are subscriptions to Intercom, the Society's monthly magazine, published 10 times a year, and to Technical Communication, the Society's quarterly journal. These periodicals contain essential articles on the theory and practice of technical communication.

Other membership benefits include discounts on STC's annual conference, the largest gathering of technical communicators in the world; eligibility for association group-rate insurance; and access to STC's special interest groups. For more information on these and other benefits, visit the STC Web

site at www.stc.org.

How to Join

STC membership dues are paid per calendar year. Members who join after February 1 receive a prorated credit on their next year's dues. Dues are as follows:

- member: \$140 per year (including a one-time \$15 enrollment fee)
- student Member: \$50 per year (no enrollment fee)

To join STC, you can fill out an electronic form or download a membership application at www.stc.org. You can also contact the STC office at the following address and request that a membership application be mailed to you:

Society for Technical Communication
901 North Stuart Street, Suite 904
Arlington, VA 22203-1822
(703) 522-4114
stc@stc.org

For more information on the San Diego Chapter of STC, visit our Web site at www.stc-sd.org or contact Sue Heim, vice president of Membership, at sue_heim@msn.com.

[Return Home](#)

[Feature](#) | [Editor's Desk](#) | [President's Podium](#)
[Helpful Tips](#) | [Chapter Meetings](#)
[Humor](#) | [Professional Development](#) | [Employment Desired](#)
[Mission](#) | [Author Bios](#) | [Newsletter Staff](#) | [San Diego Chapter Council Members](#)

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[Advertising Information](#)



February 2004

LavaCon 2004



LavaCon: Calling for speakers

[Return Home](#)

LavaCon, the International Conference on Technical Project Management, is now accepting proposals for speakers. LavaCon 2004 will be held in New Orleans from September 25 through 30.

Sessions should address how to manage tech comm projects, tech comm teams, and your tech comm company/career. Non-tech-comm-specific sessions are also needed.

The complete call for speakers is available at www.lavacon.org.

[Return Home](#)

[Feature](#) | [Editor's Desk](#) | [President's Podium](#)
[Helpful Tips](#) | [Chapter Meetings](#)
[Humor](#) | [Professional Development](#) | [Employment Desired](#)
[Mission](#) | [Author Bios](#) | [Newsletter Staff](#) | [San Diego Chapter Council Members](#)

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February 2004

2004 Region 8 Conference



Plan now for the 2004 Region 8 Conference

By Eric Butow, Director, 2004 Region 8 Conference

[Return Home](#)

[STC Region 8 Conference information](#)

The 2004 Region 8 Conference will be held from July 25 through 27 on the campus of the University of California, Davis. Early registration starts February 15.

Features

The conference will feature:

- seminars
- regional leadership summit
- trade show
- career expo
- product demonstrations

Enjoy the collegiate atmosphere and more than 300 of your fellow technical communicators as you learn about new technologies and trends in technical communication, hear fascinating keynote speakers, and shop at the Pavilion.

More Information

You can learn more at the conference Web site:

www.stcregion8conference.org

Call for Papers

Dozens of openings for seminars and hands-on tutorials are available. This is a great opportunity for you to share your knowledge with more than 300 friends and colleagues and add a high-profile presentation to your résumé.

Download the "Call for Papers" in PDF format from the conference Web site. Don't delay. The deadline for submission is Saturday, February 28.



[Return Home](#)

[Feature](#) | [Editor's Desk](#) | [President's Podium](#)
[Helpful Tips](#) | [Chapter Meetings](#)
[Humor](#) | [Professional Development](#) | [Employment Desired](#)
[Mission](#) | [Author Bios](#) | [Newsletter Staff](#) | [San Diego Chapter Council Members](#)

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Ninth Annual Writer's Symposium by the Sea



[Return Home](#)

Writer's symposium announced

[For more information on the 9th annual Writer's Symposium by the Sea](#)

The 9th annual Writer's Symposium by the Sea, cosponsored by Point Loma Nazarene University (PLNU) and the Society of Professional Journalists, will be held February 24 through 26.

Events

Following are the separate event listings with specific times and locations.

An Evening With Rick Reilly

Tuesday, February 24, 7 p.m. Crill Performance Hall on PLNU's campus, \$20

Rick Reilly is a senior writer for *Sports Illustrated*. He has been voted National Sportswriter of the Year eight times and is author of the weekly "Life of Reilly" column.

Sports Writing in America: The Impact, Influence and Inspiration

Wednesday, February 25; Lunch Forum, 11:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m.; Breakout Sessions, 1:45 to 3 p.m.; San Diego Hall of Champions Sports Museum, Balboa Park; \$35

Top sports writers from around the country discuss sports journalism how it affects sports and how interest in sports has exploded. Following the forum will be breakout sessions with the participants: Roy Blount Jr.; Jim Bouton; Jack MacMullan, columnist, *The Boston Globe*; Howard Bryant, columnist, *The Boston Herald* and author of *Shut Out*; Tim Sullivan, columnist, *The San Diego Union-Tribune*; and Molly Yanity, sports writer, *The Seattle Post-Intelligencer*.

An Evening With Roy Blount, Jr., and Jim Bouton

Wednesday, February 25, 7 p.m., Crill Performance Hall on PLNU's campus, \$20

Roy Blount, Jr., is a humorist, sports writer and author of 12 books. His writing has appeared in numerous national publications.

Jim Bouton, an all-star pitcher for the New York Yankees in the 1960s, changed the way the world wrote about sports when he published *Ball Four*.

Lauren Winner

Thursday, February 26, 9 a.m., Crill Performance Hall on PLNU's campus, \$10

Lauren Winner burst on the New York literary scene last year with publication

of her memoir, *Girl Meets God: On the Path to a Spiritual Life*.

Dale Fetherling

Thursday, February 26, 10:30 a.m., Crill Performance Hall on PLNU's campus, \$10

Dale Fetherling's presentation will be on writing a winning book proposal. Fetherling, formerly editor of the San Diego County edition of *The Los Angeles Times*, is a full-time author, editor, and "book doctor."

More Information

A ticket package (for all events) is available for \$95. Members of the Society of Professional Journalists receive a \$5 discount on any one event. Students with I.D. from all schools may attend any event at no charge.

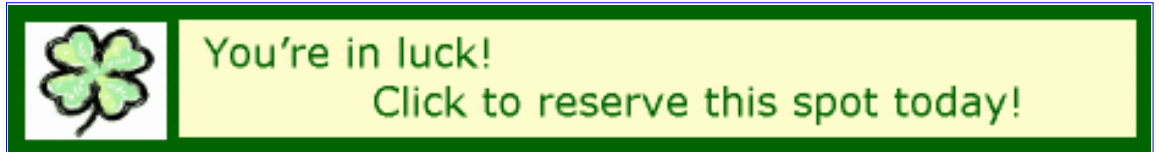
For information and tickets contact PLNU's Journalism Program office at 619.849.2695 or writers@ptloma.edu.

[Return Home](#)

[Feature](#) | [Editor's Desk](#) | [President's Podium](#)
[Helpful Tips](#) | [Chapter Meetings](#)
[Humor](#) | [Professional Development](#) | [Employment Desired](#)
[Mission](#) | [Author Bios](#) | [Newsletter Staff](#) | [San Diego Chapter Council Members](#)

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[Advertising Information](#)



February 2004

Feature Article



[Return Home](#)

[Author Bio](#)

[Contact Catherine](#)

Ever wonder if you're cut out to be a contractor?

By [Catherine Robinson](#)

Have you ever wondered what being a contractor is like and if you are up to the task? Or have you wanted to gain some independence through contracting? If so, you're not alone. In my quest to find out what it takes to be a contractor, I have come across some experienced people who have passed on some helpful information.

I will share with you some of the questions you need to ask yourselves to find out if you are up to the task of contracting and figure out the pros and cons of the business. Karen Field Carroll also has a separate article with [helpful tips](#) you should follow before you accept a temporary-to-permanent assignment.

Questions to ask yourself

The Lone Writers STC SIG has some great information on its site (http://www.stcsig.org/lw/contracting_resource_list.htm). The questions I list here are aimed at helping you to determine whether you are cut out to be a contractor.

- Can I work without knowing how long that work will last?
- Can I survive (financially and emotionally) for three to six months without work?
- Am I prepared to accept that I'll often never know what I'll be doing in a few months/weeks' time?
- Am I good at marketing and promoting myself? (It really helps if you are an extrovert.)
- Do I have an established network of people with whom I have maintained contact?
- Am I prepared to relocate if the opportunity arises?
- Am I prepared and able to run my own business? (Remember, this takes a number of hours per week on top of any paid work you are doing)
- Am I able to become part of a team for a short time, then leave? (If you really enjoy regular social contact with the same work colleagues, then independent contracting may not be for you. On the other hand, if

you are an extrovert who makes friends wherever you go, it is a great way to extend your social and business network.)

- Do I love learning new things?

If your answers are mostly "yes," then consider independent contracting as the next stage in your life.

Pros and cons

The Lone Writers group also discusses the pros and cons of contracting at <http://www.stcsig.org/lw/contractingFAQ.htm>. Some of the pros and cons that could be considered both a pro and a con, depending on your perspective, include the following:

- freedom
- control over what you are doing
- more responsibility

Business and personal aspects

Pamela J. Cole talks on her Web site (<http://www.pamcole.com/DOCS/contract.html>) about the practical business and personal aspects of accepting contract work. She covers issues such as personal insurance, taxes, and social aspects of contracting with the following questions.

Insurance

- Will I be covered under my spouse's company health insurance?
- Have my dependents or I had any major illnesses in the last two years?
- Have I spent more than \$5,000 on health care in the last year?
- Do I have a history of or ever been treated for alcoholism, chemical dependency, or a mental illness/disorder?
- Do I currently have a major illness?

These are just some of the questions the insurance agent will ask you. If you answer any of them unsatisfactorily, you may be denied insurance coverage.

Taxes

- How will I handle my taxes? Through a broker or 1099?
- Do I have enough deductibles?
- Do I own a home?
- Am I going to deduct part of my home mortgage?
- Do I have a tax accountant that I trust, or will I file my own taxes?

Be sure to get the right IRS publications to learn about being a 1099 contract employee and how the IRS distinguishes an independent contractor from an employee.

Financial responsibility

- What is my financial responsibility?
- Am I heavily in debt?
- Do I have child support or alimony payments that stretch my resources?
- Can I take some down time in employment?
- Do I have a nest egg that could support me for up to three months if I can't get work?
- Do I have other sources of income (such as spouse, inheritance, savings, or stocks)?

Security

- Can I handle job and economic insecurity?
- Can I accept that I may not work at one place for very long?

Self-motivation

- Am I self-motivated?
- Do I need supervision and guidance?
- Do I surf the net or play Solitaire when left to my own devices?

All technical writers are expected to be self-starters on some level, but this is an especially important attribute for the contractor. You're expected to do your job quickly, efficiently, and quietly. That's why you're valuable.

Flexibility

- Am I flexible?
- Do I adapt quickly to change?
- Can I take frequent job changes in stride and even enjoy them?
- Can I accept changes in my
 - commute
 - co-workers (and sometimes friends)
 - work schedule
 - tools (software and hardware)
 - work environment
 - software or hardware subject
 - style and editing requirements (sometimes the hardest change)
 - dress code
 - lunch hour
 - corporate involvement

- home (if I relocate)

Marketability

- How marketable am I?
- Do I have good examples to prove my work?
- Am I knowledgeable in current word processing systems?
- Do I have good references I can rely on?
- How much work experience do I have?
- Do I have any special talents (such as photography) or a master's degree?

Adaptability

- Do I learn quickly?
- Do new software and procedures cause anxiety?
- Do I make friends easily?
- Am I pleasant to work with?
- Does fear and shyness overwhelm me and inhibit my work?

Conclusion

After you answer the suggested list of questions from the STC Lone Writers SIG (http://www.stcsig.org/lw/contracting_resource_list.htm) and carefully consider the thoughts presented by Pamela J. Cole (<http://www.pamcole.com/DOCS/contract.html>), you can, without a doubt, decide if you are fit to become a contractor.

[Return Home](#)

[Feature](#) | [Editor's Desk](#) | [President's Podium](#)
[Helpful Tips](#) | [Chapter Meetings](#)
[Humor](#) | [Professional Development](#) | [Employment Desired](#)
[Mission](#) | [Author Bios](#) | [Newsletter Staff](#) | [San Diego Chapter Council Members](#)



[Return Home](#)

If you find value in the Signature newsletter, consider contributing articles. We need feature articles, advice, technical workarounds for problems you have encountered, and some plain old helpful tips.

If you want to improve your writing skills, contribute articles. You will have the opportunity to work with our great copyeditors who can give you pointers and help you improve your skills.

Contact us at:
stcsignature@yahoo.com.

Signature opportunities announced

By [Catherine Robinson](#), Managing Editor

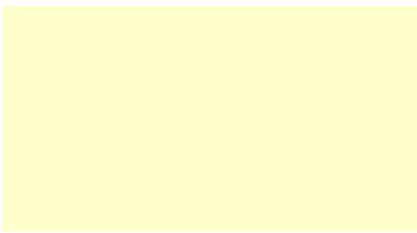
Ever since I started in my role as managing editor of the Signature newsletter, I've sharpened a lot of my skills, some of which I didn't realize I had. I have learned a lot about the newsletter production files, including how to create HTM pages and convert those pages into PDF format. I have also had the wonderful opportunity of working with contributors, copyeditors, and proofreaders and made new contacts with members while I answered inquiries about the newsletter.

As I move into each new month of this year's publication schedule, I feel that I need to give others the opportunity to learn and help with the newsletter in any way they see fit.

This month I would like to announce two openings with the newsletter in the area of creating and maintaining the newsletter pages/files in HTM format. This entails receiving the monthly articles, including the monthly columns, book reviews, general announcements, and advertising, and then creating, reusing, and maintaining the newsletter pages with Macromedia's DreamWeaver Web tool (which, by the way, is provided to you free of charge by the chapter).

While working with DreamWeaver, I have become very familiar with the newsletter files; however, I've not been able to give the newsletter quite the polished look that it needs when it comes to creating great tables (when applicable) or working with alignment, especially the newsletter introductory page (the infamous index HTM page). I sometimes find myself so busy with answering email, updating schedules, and contacting people that I end up neglecting properly maintaining the newsletter files. If I could give this opportunity to at least two people to either share monthly input of articles or swap the duties every other month, I think the newsletter could be maintained more appropriately.

If you think you are interested in working on the newsletter HTM files/pages and creating Web pages with DreamWeaver, please contact me at stcsignature@yahoo.com. Ideally, you could learn the ropes as this season continues to unfold and continue to sharpen your skills in the upcoming publishing year. Please contact me and let me know if you are interested in such an opportunity. This could be your chance to learn while contributing to your chapter newsletter. I hope you will consider this opportunity, and I look forward to hearing from you soon.



[Return Home](#)

[Feature](#) | [Editor's Desk](#) | [President's Podium](#)
[Helpful Tips](#) | [Chapter Meetings](#)
[Humor](#) | [Professional Development](#) | [Employment Desired](#)
[Mission](#) | [Author Bios](#) | [Newsletter Staff](#) | [San Diego Chapter Council Members](#)

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February 2004

President's Podium



It takes a council

By [Walter Hanig](#), President

[Return Home](#)

[Author Bio](#)

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[Administrative Council](#)

As spring approaches, my thoughts turn to next year's chapter administrative council, also known as those visible folks who run the chapter. Of course, there are more volunteers than the council, and they contribute in many visible and invisible ways, all of which are essential.

I chose to use my newsletter space to highlight the responsibilities of each council position. Note that, in some cases, the council members perform the responsibilities; in other cases, activities are performed by committee volunteers. This newsletter is a perfect example of the latter.

I hope you'll use this information to consider volunteering to serve on the council next year. Some council members may wish to continue in their current roles; others may step down and give new volunteers a chance. Even if you don't volunteer, you'll be more informed of the expectations when a current or past council member asks you to serve.

Newsletter

The council member for our chapter newsletter:

- recruits authors, editors, and proofreaders
- determines, communicates, and manages schedules
- assigns articles to writers
- determines layout
- creates linked HTML from articles
- creates PDF of the newsletter
- uploads files to Web site
- accepts advertising copy and adds to pages

Membership

The council member for Membership:

- plans the new-member dinner
- welcomes new chapter members
- responds to requests for information about membership
- resolves chapter membership issues with STC headquarters
- requests from STC headquarters and maintains a chapter membership list
- provides membership-related articles for the chapter newsletter

Professional Development

The council member for Professional Development:

- solicits professional development interests from members
- identifies and signs up education/training resources to meet these interests
- coordinates training offered through STC headquarters, such as telephone seminars
- provides articles related to professional development for the chapter newsletter
- manages chapter's technical library

Employment

The council member for Employment:

- provides Jobmail to members
- maintains the employer database
- provides employment-related articles for the chapter newsletter
- coordinates the résumé-review service
- provides job listings at chapter meetings

Treasurer

The treasurer:

- collects and distributes mail from the chapter post office box
- pays all chapter bills and reimbursements
- prepares the chapter financial report
- checks in attendees at chapter meetings
- deposits chapter income into bank account
- provides finance-related articles for the newsletter

Programs

The council member for Programs:

- solicits members' interests for future topics
- schedules meeting speakers; hosts and introduces them at meetings
- collects meeting reservations and supplies them to the treasurer
- negotiates with catering manager of meeting site for menu, pricing, audio/visual needs, and room arrangements
- provides upcoming meeting information for the chapter newsletter and email distribution list
- solicits and analyzes feedback from meetings attendees

Web Site

The council member in charge of the chapter Web site:

- adds and modifies Web site content, such as job listings, meeting announcements, and newsletter availability, as directed by other council members
- ensures links' validity
- updates Web site with information from other chapters, such as their meeting topics and speakers

President

The chapter president:

- schedules and conducts council meetings
- prepares chapter reports for the regional director-sponsor
- provides monthly newsletter articles
- makes meeting announcements
- keeps the peace

Next year, we're looking to add to the council, consistent with STC bylaws, a secretary. That person's primary responsibility would be creating and publicizing minutes from administrative council meetings.

Additionally, we plan for each council member to have an assistant. These assistants would help with some of the responsibilities listed above and represent the council person at council meetings when the council person is absent. This role would require less of a time commitment and would offload the council person. Also, the role of assistant council person would be the best breeding ground for future council members.

I'm stepping down from the council after this, my sixth year. I've learned a lot. Most importantly, I've gotten to know so many of you much better than I would have otherwise. And I'm a better person for it. Volunteer and you'll know what I mean!

[Return Home](#)

[Feature](#) | [Editor's Desk](#) | [President's Podium](#)
[Helpful Tips](#) | [Chapter Meetings](#)
[Humor](#) | [Professional Development](#) | [Employment Desired](#)
[Mission](#) | [Author Bios](#) | [Newsletter Staff](#) | [San Diego Chapter Council Members](#)

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February 2004

Chapter Membership



What's new in Membership?

By [Sue Heim, VP Membership](#)

[Return Home](#)

Welcome to our new members whether new to STC or to our San Diego Chapter. And congratulations to our new senior members (those who have held the grade of member in STC for five years).

New Members

Melody Grant

Bonnie Nicholls

Victoria Inness-Brown

Cindy Marzolf

Irene Ashkenas

Anya Luke-Killam

Michael Tallman

Reinstated Member

Lauren Swerdlove

Members Who Have Transferred to Our Chapter

James Sands

Alden DeSoto

New Senior Members

Alison J. Butler

Gary R. Clement

Valerie A. Lipow

Gregory P. Michaels

Cheryl J. Nemeth

Mark C. Petrich

Stacey R. Rhatican

David W. Stone

Matt R. Sullivan

Lana M. Walker-Helmuth

Danny J. Young

[Return Home](#)

[Feature](#) | [Editor's Desk](#) | [President's Podium](#)
[Helpful Tips](#) | [Chapter Meetings](#)
[Humor](#) | [Professional Development](#) | [Employment Desired](#)
[Mission](#) | [Author Bios](#) | [Newsletter Staff](#) | [San Diego Chapter Council Members](#)



[Return Home](#)



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Ann M. Throckmorton

How to submit an ad

Ads are limited to STC members and should not exceed 125 words. Send your ad to the editor at stcsignature@yahoo.com.

To ensure publication, we'll need your ad by the 5th of the month prior to publication. Ads received after the 5th will be inserted if possible.

You'll need to renew your ad for each month you want it published.

Members looking for work

Julie Kinyoun
11457 Trailbrook Lane, San Diego, CA 92128
858-513-3811 (home); 619-248-9543 (work)
juliekinyoun@hotmail.com

Excellent writer and author of articles in both local and national science publications. Possess masters degree in chemistry with over a year of relevant pharmaceutical experience. Most recently, I wrote phase I/III clinical research reports for Dermtech International in San Diego. Desire contract or permanent work in technical writing. Experienced with MS Office, Adobe Acrobat, ChemDraw, and MatLab.

M.A. Chemistry San Diego State University
Taught for general, organic and introductory chemistry laboratories; and performed multi-step synthetic reactions and analyzed product by NMR.

Work Experience

Dermtech International, 2003, Report Specialist
Wrote clinical reports for phase I/III trials, and compiled data for reports with MS Excel.

KPBS Television, 2003, Intern for "Full Focus"
Transcribed interviews using Executive Producer Program, and performed background research with MS Word.

Idec Pharmaceuticals, Inc., 2000, Chemist for Quality Control
Performed routine testing on water samples for lead, and wrote standard operating procedures and testing protocols.

Cell Therapeutics, Inc., 1999, Documentation Assistant
Organized and filed all cGMP/GLP documents for clinical trials, and learned cGMP/GLP protocols and trial format- tracked on Excel.

Richard Garner
619-425-5279
rgarner_1998@hotmail.com

I am a recent graduate, (03/03), of the Certificate Program in Technical and Scientific Writing at San Diego State University. I did an internship with Consistent Image of San Diego, California, a small consulting company that produces the manuals for Sprint Wireless Communications. At Consistent Image I was responsible for transferring two large documents from Quark Express 5.0 to Framemaker 6.0 in precise template form. I also assisted the company with several other print and online documents.

I also did much of the formatting and visual design work on a volunteer student team that produced a revision of the Substitute Teacher Handbook for the La Mesa-Spring Valley School District.

Seeking: A permanent or temporary position as a technical writer

Education: Certificate in Technical and Scientific Writing,
San Diego State University; B.A. in history, University of California,
San Diego

Tools: FrameMaker 6.0, Acrobat 5.0, Word, Excel, HTML 4.0

Samples: I have writing samples available in FrameMaker 6.0 and
Word.

[Return Home](#)

[Feature](#) | [Editor's Desk](#) | [President's Podium](#)
[Helpful Tips](#) | [Chapter Meetings](#)
[Humor](#) | [Professional Development](#) | [Employment Desired](#)
[Mission](#) | [Author Bios](#) | [Newsletter Staff](#) | [San Diego Chapter Council Members](#)



[Return Home](#)

[Click here for February 11 meeting details.](#)

If you make a reservation but find you cannot attend, please cancel your reservation by sending an e-mail to Lance-Robert at treasurer@stc-sd.org. The chapter has to pay the hotel for all no-shows, which takes money away from various programs that could otherwise benefit the chapter members.

There is no financial penalty for cancelling your reservation. If you used PayPal to pay for your reservation in advance and need to cancel, the full amount will be refunded to your account within three working days.

January meeting attendance numbers:

44 attendees
8 cancellations
2 no-shows
18 used PayPal (a record high!)

February Chapter Meeting Preview: Gash to describe navigation strategies to reduce click count

By [Michael Cárdenas, VP Programs](#)

Imagine a help system where the information you want is actually there, but you just can't find it. Oh wait, you don't have to imagine that; you see it every day!

When users can't find what they want, they usually give up after a few clicks. That's not their fault; it's ours. And the problem isn't that we fail to provide information; it's that we fail to provide access to that information.

Dave Gash, owner of HyperTrain dot Com, will speak to this dilemma at our February 11 meeting. Dave is a veteran software professional with more than 20 years of development, documentation, and training experience and is well known in the tech pubs community as an interesting and animated technical instructor. HyperTrain dot Com is a San Diego-based firm specializing in hypertext training and consulting for help system developers.

At our next meeting, Dave will suggest organizational and navigational strategies you can apply to your data and access devices, TOC, index, related topics, and so on to get your readers where they want to go faster with fewer clicks and a lot less frustration.

Remember, a user who's busy reading the help is a user who isn't calling tech support!

January Chapter Meeting Review

Deirdre Murrbega presented: **Using metrics to tell your story**

By [Eric Hurd](#)

San Diego Chapter Meeting - Wednesday, January 14

President Walter Hanig opened our meeting by welcoming the first-time attendees and asked them to stand and tell us about themselves and discuss their reasons for coming. He then invited those looking for work to describe their skills and desired positions. Then, members with job announcements were asked to stand and describe the positions that were available.



Walter Hanig, President & Sue Heim, VP Membership



Michael Cárdenas, VP Programs



Featured speaker, Deirdre (De) Murrbegan



Walter making sure all had a good time

Presentation

Featured Speaker Deirdre (De) Murrbegan began her presentation by describing a metric as a basic unit of measurement and explained the importance of using metrics in your job as a technical writer.

The following are some of the major points from her presentation.

- Metrics are good for sales. Knowing the time and cost of creating your manuals helps you make a case for getting the project.
- Keeping metrics allows you to mature as a company or department. As you make changes to your production process, metrics allow you to measure the success of those changes.
- When you are making changes to your progress, keep the company mission statement in mind and aim toward achieving that.
- Know your company's corporate goals. Are they into return on investment, customer relationship management, six Sigma, balanced scorecard, lean thinking, or all of the above? De suggested visiting www.searchCIO.com to look up business terms.
- Know your audience. Keep in mind that what managers say they want and what they actually need might be two different things.
- Don't get overwhelmed by collecting data. Collect only the data that is essential to the story you would like to tell. General types of data measure for schedule and budget, quality and accuracy, and product improvement. Limit yourself to nine to six metrics.
- When you are measuring writer productivity in terms of word output, keep in mind that some types of information take a lot longer to describe. For example, tasks are generally easier to document than conceptual information.
- Include intangibles such as perceptions of quality.
- When possible, get metrics from the competition.
- In general:
 - Select corporate goals that you can support.
 - Determine the outcomes you want from the goals.
 - Choose metrics that tell you are successful.

- Capture data regularly.
- Analyze the data for trends.
- Make changes when needed.

Announcements

The following were announced at the meeting.

- All members are invited to drop off or pick up used books at the adopt-a-book table before and after meetings.
- Volunteers are still needed for the upcoming Region 8 conference in Davis. Many of the positions involve design. The conference fee, which is normally \$250, is \$60 for volunteers. For more information, visit www.stcregion8conference.org.
- A special meeting is scheduled for Thursday, March 25, to discuss AuthorIt single-source content management software (<http://www.authorit.com/>). (This meeting will be in addition to the regular chapter meeting on March 10.) Dinner will not be served, but appetizers and coffee will be provided. The cost is \$10 per person, regardless of membership or employment status, and PayPal will be accepted. A free copy of the software (a value of \$459) will be raffled off at the end of the meeting.
- Lance-Robert wants us to know that the desserts at the meeting were fat free.
- The telephone conferences have been discontinued because of the wide distribution of our members.
- Members will soon be receiving invitations to take an anonymous online salary survey. We all benefit when as many writers participate as possible. In addition to discovering where you stand in the market, the data helps those of us seeking work who need to negotiate an appropriate salary.
- Members are encouraged to attend STC's international conference in Baltimore this May. A huge amount of information will be available from the stars of the technical writing community.
- Kelly Wilson asked if the North County members would care to meet occasionally for a coffee klatch.

Meeting Wrap-Up

This month's Wally Buck winner was Claudia Kellersch. A Wally Buck is redeemable for a free San Diego STC dinner and presentation.

Thank you for coming. We'll see you next month!



Claudia Kellersch receives her "Wally Buck"

[Return Home](#)

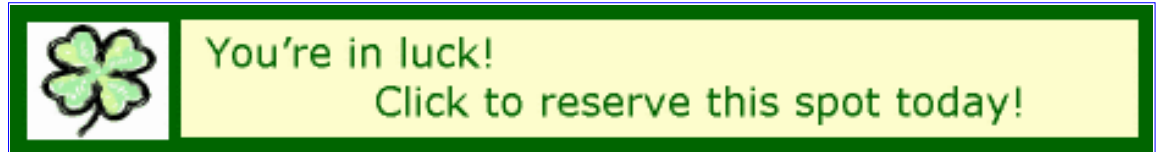
[Feature](#) | [Editor's Desk](#) | [President's Podium](#)
[Helpful Tips](#) | [Chapter Meetings](#)
[Humor](#) | [Professional Development](#) | [Employment Desired](#)
[Mission](#) | [Author Bios](#) | [Newsletter Staff](#) | [San Diego Chapter Council Members](#)

[Return Home](#)

[Feature](#) | [Editor's Desk](#) | [President's Podium](#)
[Technical Issues](#) | [Chapter Meetings](#)
[Humor](#) | [Advice](#) | [Employment Desired](#)
[Mission](#) | [Author Bios](#) | [Newsletter Staff](#) | [San Diego Chapter Council Members](#)

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February 2004

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[Return Home](#)

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[Ensure temp-to-perm really does go perm](#)

[Get started in the contracting business with these tips](#)

[Finding a single-source tool](#)

Ensure temp-to-perm really does go perm

By [Karen Field Carroll](#)

The temp-to-perm job offer is a hybrid between a contract and a salaried position. Typically, you work as a contractor for three to six months. If all goes well, you then become a salaried employee.

Although many companies like the temp-to-perm arrangement because it gives them (and the candidate) a chance to see if the relationship works before they make a commitment, others give it lip service simply to lure attractive candidates who would otherwise not accept a contract assignment.

If you're considering a temp-to-hire contract, make sure the company is sincere. Do your homework before you take the job and follow these tips.

- Ask the company to put the offer in writing, specifying the time frame in which your contract will be converted to salaried and what your salary will be once you are hired.

Even if the company says no some may consider it a liability risk the request lets them know that you expect them to follow through.

- Ask specific questions about the company's temp-to-hire conversion rate, such as, how many contractors have they converted to salaried in the last year? (The Human Resource contact person should be able to give you this figure.)

If it's low (less than 50 percent), ask why. If the answer lays all the blame on the contractors, run.

- Ask whether there is a hiring freeze on right now. Companies often use contractors in a hiring freeze as a way to get the work done without putting salaries on the books.

If the answer is yes, consider it a huge red flag.

- Try to find a contractor who works there or has worked there. See what she says about the conversion rate. If she became salaried, ask her whether it was a smooth transition or something she had to fight for.
- If you're satisfied with your research, make sure the contract phase benefits you, too. Will you learn new skills? Is the hourly pay enough to cover your out-of-pocket healthcare costs, unpaid holidays, and sick time while you're contract?

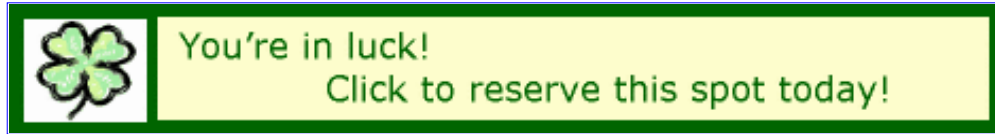
Temp-to-perm arrangements can benefit both you and your employer. But a temp-to-perm offer that leaves you toiling in the temp phase will sour the working relationship. Make sure everyone knows what you expect before you take the assignment.

[Return Home](#)

[Feature](#) | [Editor's Desk](#) | [President's Podium](#)
[Helpful Tips](#) | [Chapter Meetings](#)
[Humor](#) | [Professional Development](#) | [Employment Desired](#)
[Mission](#) | [Author Bios](#) | [Newsletter Staff](#) | [San Diego Chapter Council Members](#)

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February 2004

Helpful Tips



[Return Home](#)

[Author Bio](#)

[Contact Catherine](#)

Helpful Tips Articles

[Ensure temp-to-perm really does go perm](#)

[Get started in the contracting business with these tips](#)

[Finding a single-source tool](#)

Get started in the contracting business with these tips

By [Catherine Robinson](#)

Once you determine that you are a good fit for contract work, you will need to consider a lot of things to get yourself set up for the business.

I've located a couple of Web sites that include some practical information:

- One created by Larry Prado (http://stcrmch.org/documents/2002_2003_docs/STC%20Minding%20your%20BS.pdf).
- The other from a recruiting agency (Tiger Technology at <http://www.tigertechnology.com/>). You can contact Lisa Graznak at lisa@tigertechnology.com.

Create a business plan

The first thing Larry mentions is, "Get a business plan."

Also, I came across the following list of books that you might find helpful:

- Making Money in Technical Writing by Peter Kent
- Write Your Way to Riches - How to Make a Fortune as a Technical Writer by Joseph Gregg
- The Business Side of Creativity by Cameron S. Foote

Purchase the right hardware

"Right hardware" includes

- fastest and most powerful computer you can afford
- backup system (such as Zip disks or a CD burner) for your work and your email address book and a daily reminder to back up early and back up often
- laser printer, 300 dpi minimum
- comfortable mouse that fits your hand

It's also great to have

- scanner
- color printer
- copier or fax machine that can make copies
- separate phone line for ISP connection/fax
- backup computer

Develop a training plan and get compatible software

"Compatible software" may include

- Microsoft® Office
- antivirus program

- "real" publishing software (such as FrameMaker®, Quark(TM), or PageMaker®) so you can show your client a better way if she thinks Excel or PowerPoint are publishing programs
- image manipulation software (such as Paint Shop Pro(TM), PhotoShop®, or Illustrator®)
- help software (such as RoboHelp®)
- HTML software (such as Dreamweaver(TM) or WebWorks® Publisher)
- WinZip® or StuffIt®
- QuickBooks
- Adobe® Acrobat® (not just Reader)
- screen capture software (such as SnagIt, Paint Shop Pro(TM), and PhotoShop®)

Get Connected

For an Internet connection, you will need

- reliable and service-oriented ISP
- fastest modem you can get and a separate phone line (although a faster Internet connection, such as DSL, is better)

It would also be great to have caller ID and call waiting for your telephone.

Set up an office

For your office, you'll need

- phone and answering machine/voice mail
- steno book or diary to record names, phone numbers, dates, and so forth
- adequate desk and lighting
- comfortable chair
- place for filing (not the floor)
- bookcases (not the floor) for reference material
- Day-Timer or Palm(TM)-type PDA
- pens, pencils, erasers, paper clips, etc.

Your office should not be next to the TV or in the kitchen make it like a real office even if it's in the living room. Think of your office as a place where magnificent creation occurs and dreams come true.

Have a schedule

Remember to have a work schedule, e.g., start at 8 a.m., take a break at 10 a.m., skip lunch :-), etc.

Market yourself

To market yourself properly, you'll need

- nice-looking business card listing your certifications
- letterhead and fax covers that look like your business card

Helpful Tips: Get started in the contracting business with these tips

- list of clients and accomplishments
- samples of previous work
- recorded phone message (without kids, TV, or barking dogs in the background)

It's also great to have

- Web site (which many ISPs offer for free)
- brochure

Mentally prepare

Mentally prepare for your role as a contractor with these tips.

- Be of service.
- Practice smiling when you talk on the phone.
- Be joyous; you get to work at home!
- Be positive.
- Remember, we're like dry cleaners--it's about trust.
- Imagine the clients you want to work for.
- Take a walk.
- Remember, your toughest client is your greatest teacher.
- Talk to at least one person a day (but not all day).

Find necessary contacts

Necessary contacts are

- tax accountant or adviser
- lawyer
- copy center
- other consultants

Include necessary information on your résumé

If you are contracting through a recruiting agency, include on your resume

- contact information
- chronological employment list with specific dates and specific companies
- project descriptions
- easy format (preferably in Word)
- specialties
- degree, education, and training

No pictures and no mistakes are appropriate on a résumé.

Ask for necessary information

If you are contracting through a recruiting agency, ask them

Helpful Tips: Get started in the contracting business with these tips

- number of years they have been in business
- their philosophy/focus
- their client base
- employment options (permanent employment, contract-to-hire, or contract)
- their markup
- their process for submittals to clients

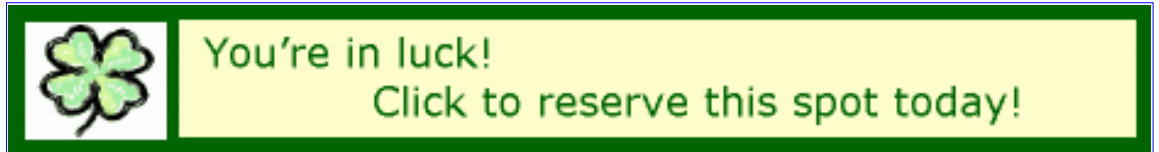
I hope these shared experiences and tips will get you off to a good start. I wish you all the best in your contracting endeavors.

[Return Home](#)

[Feature](#) | [Editor's Desk](#) | [President's Podium](#)
[Helpful Tips](#) | [Chapter Meetings](#)
[Humor](#) | [Professional Development](#) | [Employment Desired](#)
[Mission](#) | [Author Bios](#) | [Newsletter Staff](#) | [San Diego Chapter Council Members](#)

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February 2004

Helpful Tips



[Return Home](#)

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Helpful Tips Articles

[Ensure temp-to-perm really does go perm](#)

[Get started in the contracting business with these tips](#)

[Finding a single-source tool](#)

Finding a single-source tool

By Gail Van Landingham

Before I talk about single sourcing, let me digress for a moment and tell you my bike story. I recently went bike shopping and discovered that bikes come in a lot of flavors. Things have changed since the old days when I had a 10-speed. Now, I can choose from a street bike, mountain bike, hybrid bike (combining features of a street bike and mountain bike), comfort bike, or cruiser. The saleslady sold me on the hybrid when she told me it was like a sports car and the comfort bike was like a minivan. Bike prices ranged from expensive to more than my first car.

Single sourcing is like that. You can use a simple technique or a very sophisticated and expensive tool. You can find a variety of definitions for single sourcing, but I like: "write once, publish many."

Multiple outputs and multiple versions

At our company, we have a small staff and big demands for the following types of documentation.

- Print and online help. We produce a comprehensive online help file (CHM extension) and multiple printed user guides.
- Guides targeted to specific audiences. Our printed guides include a comprehensive user guide and several smaller guides targeted to a specific audience. For example, one guide is for referring physicians and one is for radiologists.
- Versions for multiple releases. For example, we have a help file for the current production release and another one for the new beta release.

Some tools that I've used in the past

In the past, I've used other tools for single sourcing, including Doc-To-Help® and FrameMaker® plus WebWorks® Publisher. In both cases, the source was a long document that was converted to online help.

Why I like using RoboHelp®

At my current company, we use RoboHelp®. I like this tool because the source is in individual HTML pages. This tool:

- Helps me to "think modular." My canvas for each topic is a single HTML page, not a long document.
- Provides an extensive set of tools to do a quality check of online help, including broken hyperlinks.

The basics of using RoboHelp® as a single-source tool

The basic steps include:

1. Create modular topics.
2. Create and apply "conditional build tags" (markers that tell the system to include or exclude content from an output) to text or an entire topic. (You can use conditional text to identify what to include in print or in online help, in specific guides, and in specific versions.)
3. Create a simple set of styles with meaningful names. Keep the styles simple because later you need to map each style name to a style in a Word template.
4. Set up a specific table of contents for each printed guide. (In addition to using conditional build tags, you can create a separate table of contents for each book and restructure the topics as needed.)

For more information

For more information on single sourcing, check out the Single-Sourcing SIG at <http://www.stcsig.org/ss/index.htm>.

The mission of this SIG is to help "STC members develop knowledge and practical skills for researching, developing, and implementing single-sourcing solutions." You don't need to join the SIG to read the newsletter articles or to see the "useful links" section.

See next month's newsletter for details on how we use RoboHelp® for single sourcing.

[Return Home](#)

[Feature](#) | [Editor's Desk](#) | [President's Podium](#)
[Helpful Tips](#) | [Chapter Meetings](#)
[Humor](#) | [Professional Development](#) | [Employment Desired](#)
[Mission](#) | [Author Bios](#) | [Newsletter Staff](#) | [San Diego Chapter Council Members](#)



[Return Home](#)

[Author Bio](#)

[Contact Karen](#)

Roll that "temp" job over to "perm"

By [Karen Field Carroll](#)

In the flagging economy, many tech writers I know stumbled into what I call "employment limbo," otherwise known as the temp-to-perm "arrangement." These talented, hard-working folks didn't realize how transitory a temp-to-perm offer can be.

As one friend puts it, "When I took the contract, I actually thought the recruiter and my manager were serious when they said, 'Salaried in six months, at the outside.'" A year later, she says, the recruiter is long gone, and her manager seems to have developed a strange case of amnesia.

Now that the economy glimmers with signs of life, however, my friend thinks it's time to roll that "temp" job over to "perm."

If you're in the same situation, here are some tips that might jog your boss's memory and seal the deal.

- Work hard (as if you don't already) .
- Send weekly, detailed status reports to your boss, even if she hasn't asked for them.
- Look for ways to help everyone work efficiently. (In my temp-to-perm contract, I discovered that most business analysts had trouble using PowerPoint, so I developed a two-hour presentation to tutor them.)
- Do not act like a salaried employee. If you work overtime, bill it. The time-and-a-half out of your boss's budget might dislodge the clot in his brain that's blocked his recollection.
- Keep reasonable hours. "Contract" does not mean "in at 10 and out about 4."

Still no results? Then perhaps some direct reminders of your "temp" status are in order.

1. At least once a week, stand outside in a public area, planner open, talking on your cell phone.
2. The next day, show up dressed to the nines (on time!) and take a two-hour lunch.
3. Don't explain the two-hour lunch.
4. When the phone rings, answer it, say "Oh yes, how are YOU?" Mutter things like "yes," "good," and "can I get those numbers

to you this evening?" Hang up and mutter, "Those silly recruiters."

5. In your next staff meeting, lean in toward the group, make your eyes very large, and whisper loudly, "Did you guys know that QUALCOMM is hiring?"

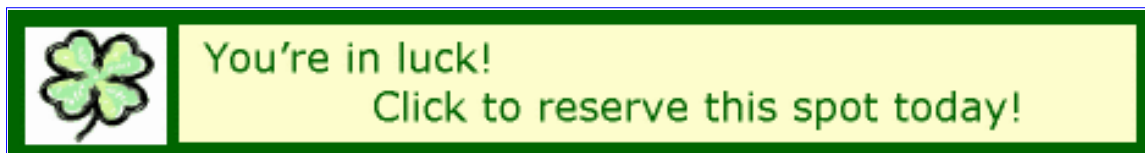
If you follow these steps, I can almost assure you your boss will recover his memory. At the least, he'll try to recall why he hired you at all.

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February 2004

Member Scoop



New newsletter column highlights members' scoop

By Kitt Medrano

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A new column, you say? One that highlights the goings on of our members? Oh, okay. I will be the STC San Diego snoop.

Now give me your scoop!

This month's scoop is particularly noteworthy because it's about my boss, Suzy Hosie. As many of you already know, Suzy is the president and CEO of Write on the Edge (WOTE), a contract technical writing firm located in Vista. WOTE was spotlighted in the "Small Business" section of the November 10 issue of the San Diego Business Journal. We've hit the big time we are published (again) and certifiable! Check it out online (<http://www.wote.org/News/news.htm>), or look for any remaining issues that may be on the newsstands (although I'm pretty sure Suzy found them all).

Another tidbit: our own Sue Heim has accepted a new position as a senior technical writer and help/javascript author at Akonix Systems, Inc. Akonix, located in downtown San Diego, is an award-winning provider of enterprise software that enables corporations to secure and manage public Instant Messaging while protecting the network against new security threats. Congratulations, Sue, and good luck in your new venture.

So this is the kind of stuff we're looking for: new jobs, new accomplishments, even new spouses or pending births. Let us know your news. Don't make me come over there. Just email me at kitt.medrano@wote.com or kittm@cox.net. I'll make sure your news is our news!

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