

March 2004

Volume 37 No 7



The San Diego Signature



Award of Excellence 2003 Newsletter Competition

## Feature Article

### Note to contractors: Expose your writing tasks

By Mark Hall

Most writing contractors have experienced anything ranging from an indifferent sigh to feigned "sticker shock" when presenting a cost proposal to a prospective client. Learn how to "expose" the tasks and steps you perform.

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### Region 8 Director-Sponsor Candidates

- Beau Cain
- Alison Reynolds

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### STC's 51st Annual Conference

May 9-12, 2004 at the Baltimore Convention Center.

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To receive a complimentary copy of RoboHelp X5 for review, please contact Patrick Wallace at [pwallace@macromedia.com](mailto:pwallace@macromedia.com).



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Visit the San Diego Chapter Web site at [www.stc-sd.org](http://www.stc-sd.org)

Visit the Society Web site at [www.stc.org](http://www.stc.org)

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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](http://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](mailto: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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## Signature Advertising Information

### 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).

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Chapter President, Walter Hanig

[wdhanig@alumni.rice.edu](mailto: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](mailto:mpetersen3@cox.net)

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

VP-Employment, Beth Peisic

[bethpeisic@san.rr.com](mailto: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](mailto: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](mailto: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](mailto: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](mailto:stcsignature@yahoo.com)

Catherine is a technical writer at Websense. 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](mailto: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](mailto:kellew@cox.net)

Kelley has an instructional and curriculum design background with

experience in Web accessibility and usability.

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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)

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LavaCon 2004



## LavaCon: Calling for speakers

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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](http://www.lavacon.org).

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March 2004

March Meeting of ASI Southern California Chapter



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## "Lambs to the Slaughter: Indexing for tech writers"

[Click here for the registration form.](#)

You are invited to join us at the March meeting of the ASI Southern California Chapter for the following program:

"Lambs to the Slaughter: Indexing for Tech Writers"

Presented by Maria Coughlin, president of Coughlin Indexing Services, Inc.

Date: Saturday, March 27, 2004, 11:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.

Place: CSUN University Club, Northridge (Los Angeles) CA

Price: \$20 ASI members, \$25 non-ASI members

The intended audience is the tech writer or any other person not temperamentally inclined or professionally trained to be an indexer, but who is forced to index (particularly technical documents).

The program includes these topics:

- Definition of an index, including what an index is not
- Why indexes are important
- What makes a good index
- What goes into the index
- The indexing process, step by step

Attendees will be given lists of tools and resources and hands-on experience, including opportunities to evaluate published indexes as well as to compile a sample index from a technical document. Attendees are strongly encouraged to bring examples of indexing problems they've faced and/or examples of indexes they found inadequate or exemplary.

About the presenter: Maria Coughlin has been indexing since 1985. She is currently president of Coughlin Indexing Services, Inc., a freelance indexing service employing eight full-time and two part-time indexers. Maria's subject specialty areas are medicine and science, and her employees specialize individually in areas ranging from literature, history, political science, and computers to popular culture. Maria has served as an officer in the (Washington, D.C.) DC Chapter of the American Society of Indexers (ASI) and as a board member and officer of ASI at the national level. Maria is a

Founding Fellow of the Consortium of Indexing Professionals. She has published several articles on indexing and she has given numerous presentations both nationally and internationally.

Registration: To register for this workshop, send your check (payable to ASI-SoCal) for \$25.00/non-members, or \$20.00/members, plus the [Registration Form](#), to the address below by Monday, March 22, 2004.

The University Club provides a buffet lunch with an array of deli meats, salads, and dessert, so there is no need to reserve a particular selection.

Driving instructions will be included in the confirmation you receive by e-mail.

Please join us!

Click [here](#) for the registration form.

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March 2004

March Meeting of ASI Southern California Chapter



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"Lambs to the Slaughter: Indexing for tech writers"

## Registration Form

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ASI-SoCal Luncheon Meeting "Lambs to the Slaughter: Indexing for Tech Writers" March 27, 2004

Please register \_\_\_\_ (number of persons) for the ASI-SoCal luncheon meeting at the University Club at CSUN in Northridge California.

Enclosed is my check for \$\_\_\_\_\_ ( \$25.00 for nonmembers, \$20.00 for members).

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BY MONDAY, MARCH 20, 2004 to:

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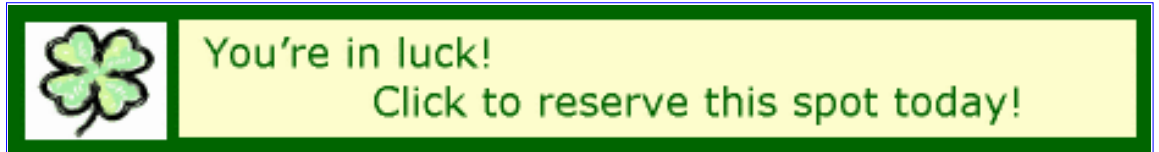
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Feature Article



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## Note to contractors: Expose your writing tasks

By [Mark Hall](#)

The Challenge

Most writing contractors have experienced anything ranging from an indifferent sigh to feigned "sticker shock" when presenting a cost proposal to a prospective client. If you're not highly experienced and have a well-known client list, it's easy to reel back on your heels and say, "OK, I'll give you a special introductory rate," or "I'll see what I can do to keep my estimate within your budget." Unfortunately, capitulating with either of these statements usually means that you have failed to show the value of each stage in your publication process. Failing to do so may adversely affect both your hourly rate and your billable hours.

### Exposing Your Tasks

Through my attendance at a presentation by leading interface designer Clement Mok, coupled with my recent work with a sales consultant, I have come to the following realization: in order to prove the value of your work, it is essential to "expose" all the tasks and steps you perform, and the process within which you perform them. While Mok was directing his comments primarily toward graphic designers, practitioners well known for their "black box" creative work, this suggestion applies just as much to the technical writing profession in general, and contract writing in particular. Only by detailing each task we perform can demonstrate the value each part brings to the deliverable "whole."

Think, for a minute, of all the tasks you perform when writing a user manual. For starters, I can think of the following main tasks:

- Define and scope the project.
- Perform an audience analysis.
- Choose the appropriate authoring tool (e.g., FrameMaker, Word, RoboHelp).
- Review all applicable existing documentation.
- Create an initial table of contents (TOC).
- Review the TOC with the client and target readers.
- Draft initial content per chapter/section.

That's seven steps already, and the writing has barely started! My point is that only by making each of these steps explicit and associating a value with them--either to promote "gain" (help your client increase revenues or cut costs), or to avoid "pain" (help your client reduce customer acceptance risk)--will the client realize just how each piece contributes to the quality of your resulting deliverable.

### The Solution

Start by listing all the steps you take to document "how to" procedures (or other applicable content) for a prospect or client. In this case, however, remember that the procedural steps should be not be written for an audience with publications expertise, but written to be easily understood by a person outside of the writing profession.

Here's an example:

Instead of "perform an audience analysis," say the following:

"Identify and document the intended reader(s) for the publication [15 man-hours]," followed by these (or similar) bullet items:

- Work with client to identify eight or more persons fitting your typical reader profile [1 hour].
  
- Prepare interview questions (used to gather information on each interviewee's level of subject matter knowledge, educational background, and computer/Web proficiency) [2 hours].
  
- Send out e-mail asking for participation in interviews (seeking four interviewees, minimum)[1 hour].
  
- Schedule interviews with each person [1 hour].
  
- Conduct interviews and take notes [4 hours].
  
- Analyze interview notes [2 hours].
  
- Document target reader type(s) (key characteristics) [2 hours].

This breakdown clearly gives the client the time (and implicitly, the cost) breakdown for each step you perform as your render this service. Now I wouldn't suggest plopping this task list in front of your prospective client when you first meet, but rather keep the steps for each of your key services in your memory bank for easy retrieval when your prospect asks why it takes "that long" to do an audience analysis.

### Results

You may suspect that mentioning such task steps will scare off your prospects, especially in these cost-conscious times. On the contrary, I have found that by making explicit the tasks that were previously ignored or misunderstood, I've actually improved my level of prospect- and client-communication. As a side benefit, I also screen out prospective clients who aren't willing to discuss the key publication quality/cost trade-offs, or whose purchase decisions are primarily price-driven. (These are often not the best clients through which to build your business and portfolio anyway.)

In the end, helping your prospect make clearly-informed decisions will not only heighten the value of your services and your professional credibility, but will also help you to substantiate every dollar that appears in your cost

proposals and thereby improve your bottom line.

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## Region 8 Director-Sponsor Candidates

[Beau Cain](#)

[Alison Reynolds](#)

Election time is approaching, and once again Signature is printing campaign articles by the candidates for Region 8 Director-Sponsor.

We welcome submission of articles by other candidates for this position. Signature does not endorse any candidate.

Send your article to the editor at [stcsignature@yahoo.com](mailto:stcsignature@yahoo.com).

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

Beau Cain, Candidate for Region 8 Director-Sponsor by Beau Cain (Silicon Valley)

During the next three years, our Society will attempt radical changes in order to serve members better in our more competitive professional climate. I want to be "the man in the middle" for the next three years, helping Region 8's chapters voice their needs to STC's Board of Directors as we tackle ambitious transformations. I ask that you vote for me for Region 8 Director-Sponsor in the upcoming Society election.

What qualifies me to undertake this challenge is my professional experience in managing clients' communication needs--whether they are planned and organized or unforeseen and chaotic--plus my continuing experience as a volunteer and as an elected chapter official. As a child, I spent my young life moving from school to school, client to client, state to state, and sometimes even country to country; so I can state confidently that I flourish in situations that require quick adaptation to unknown situations.

I've provided information about my other qualifications to STC, and they're posted at [http://www.stc.org/STCElections/election\\_cain.asp](http://www.stc.org/STCElections/election_cain.asp).

What I want to do during the next three years is to visit each chapter's elected council in the far-flung and culturally diverse Region 8, listen to their concerns and their ideas, and work with each chapter to address those concerns as effectively as possible. Additionally, I'm excited about the prospect of working with the Society's Board of Directors, and of having a voice--your voice--in developing Society policy that best addresses the challenges our profession faces.

I've accepted Andrea Ames' offer to serve on the Board's Communication Support Sub-committee, and I have experience serving chapters other than my beloved Silicon Valley chapter. I'm proud of the role I played in producing two leadership events that helped each of the six Northern California chapters address their common challenges. In particular, I'm very pleased that my efforts helped stop membership attrition and, after a two-year struggle, increased Silicon Valley chapter's membership to over 1,000 members.

As a member of the World Future Society, I avidly study the trends and predictions of acknowledged experts and try to apply their foresight to the changing fortunes of our profession. I've presented more than a half-dozen lectures and I've moderated panel discussion about the future of our profession, even before the dot com bust.

As a teacher in the Business and Technical Communication Certificate Program at SJSU-Professional Development Center, I created and taught two new courses that address the changing demands of local companies who hire our colleagues. I've also addressed San Jose State University's Community of Writers twice



Alison Reynolds, Candidate for Region 8 Director-Sponsor

about career management.

I'm prepared to continue serving in all these capacities because I care about our profession and for my colleagues. By nature, I approach all projects with a desire to assist others, and I'm driven to serve my colleagues as they strive to achieve their professional goals. I ask that you vote for me to fulfill the exciting, challenging, changing duties of Region 8 Director-Sponsor for 2004-2007.

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Alison Reynolds, Candidate for Region 8 Director-Sponsor  
by Alison Reynolds (Christchurch, New Zealand)

Greetings to all of you from "down under"! My picture is probably a surprise to those of you who think New Zealand is a land of hobbits, orcas and strange, flightless birds that venture out only in the dark. I am sorry to disappoint you! I don't have large hairy feet and I do make appearances in the daylight (although some of you who have met me at conferences might disagree).

Let me tell you what I can offer if I am elected as your director sponsor.

My greatest "claim to fame" is my experience building virtual and real communities of technical communicators and information designers from all around the world. In recognition of this experience, I have recently been asked to be a member of the STC Board Communities Support Committee.

My "community" experience has grown from my association with STC and from my role as the director of the world's first international online Graduate Diploma of Information Design (formerly Technical Communication) beamed "live" from Christchurch Polytechnic Institute of Technology here in New Zealand. We have a talented student group from New Zealand, Australia, Canada, the US, India and Europe. Our staff and advisory board also span the globe and we have a virtual STC student chapter of over 100 students. I arrange and supervise work placements nationally and internationally and I have worked steadily to raise the profile of technical communication among employers and in organizations.

In my role as an academic, I am a front line leader in the development of technical communication and information design as a profession and as a research-based discipline. I have a master's of business management and a graduate diploma of business administration in communication management from Massey University (New Zealand). My thesis was a comparative study of technical communication and information design trends in New Zealand and North America.

Forget flightless birds! This "bird" is a sought-after international speaker. I have presented papers at STC's 45th, 49th, and 50th Annual Conferences; at the 2002 region 7 conference; and at the 1998 region 8 conference. I taught in China and India as part of an STC initiative to promote technical communication in developing countries, was a guest visitor at the San Francisco chapter meeting 1998, and attended STC's 43rd Annual Conference in Seattle.

In 2003 I trebled the New Zealand chapter membership with the creation of virtual student membership. I also established the first New Zealand STC student scholarship and arranged seminars by international STC speakers such as Carol Barnum, JoAnn Hackos,

and Raymond Urgo.

I believe my experience, innovativeness and skills to represent the international face of the region will ensure its continued growth, strength and diversity.

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## That thing the Monster sold us

By [Karen Field Carroll](#)

The HR manager and the IT director for SoSoSoftware, Inc., stood side by side, studying a lifelike contraption they had just set up in a cubicle.

"What's it for?" asked the IT director.

"I'm not sure. Monster sold it to us."

"Well, what's it called?"

The HR manager consulted the product's data sheet. "It's a technical communications specialist. Monster calls it a TCS. It's supposed to make our products easier to use."

"Oh really? Like we need that?"

"The marketing folks said we did."

"Hmph." The IT director scratched his head. "Well, what does it actually do?"

The HR manager picked up the user manual. "It says here that if you feed it product specifications, functional requirements, and user-case scenarios, and let it work with the application in question once in a while, the TCS will produce, 'clear, accurate user documents and white papers.'"

"Oh."

"Of course it's a garbage in/garbage out principle. It produces good documents only if you feed it accurate information."

"It sounds like it's just going to create more work for the IT group. How much did you pay for it?"

"Not as much as the developer and QA kits we've bought. Of course, since we're replacing many of those with offshore models, the TCS might be more expensive, relatively speaking."

"Couldn't we buy an offshore model for this too?"

"We're looking into it."

"Well, let me know what you---Hey, look." The IT director pointed to the TCS. "It's using Word!"

"Yeah, they said it would do that."

"Wow.... Can it do tables of contents?"

"That's what the manual says."

"And images? Can it import images without making the text go all wacky?"

"Apparently so."

"Can it make those stupid backward P signs go away?"

"Yup."

"What about that dumb numbering thing--you know, where you click the number button and all the lines of the document become numbered? Can it correct that?"

The HR manager read something from the manual. "Yes, here it is. The TCS understands and provides the workarounds for Word's auto-numbering flaws."

"Unbelievable."

"Oh wait--that's the deluxe model. We have the basic model. The basic TCS knows just the basics of Word."

"So the basic TCS can create those-whatever-user documents, right? And it knows how to use Word."

"Right."

"But the deluxe TCS understands Word's auto-numbering problems?"

"Yes. So should I still look into the offshore model?"

"Forget the offshore model," yelled the IT director. "Upgrade! Upgrade!"



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March 2004

Helpful Tips



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## How we use RoboHelp® HTML as a single-source tool for help and printed guides

By Gail Van Landingham

In this article I'll present the details on how we use RoboHelp® HTML for single sourcing at DR systems. See last month's newsletter for my [article](#) about our search for a single-source tool.

(For more in-depth instructions, see Online Help in RoboHelp® HTML.)

Note: Our company is using RoboHelp® X.3, and the screenshots and examples in this article are from this version. Currently, Macromedia is selling RoboHelp® X.5, and the dialog boxes are different in this release. But the basic procedures are the same.

Here's what I'll cover in this article:

- [Before starting](#)
- [Creating Conditional Build tags](#)
- [Applying tags to content within a topic](#)
- [Applying tags to entire topics](#)
- [Creating single-source layouts](#)
- [Customizing each printed guide](#)
- [Meeting our goals](#)

### **Before starting**

Before starting, we reviewed the requirements for our documentation products and thought about the products we wanted to create:

- Help. Compiled Microsoft HTML Help
- Printed guides. One user guide and several smaller guides on specific topics
- Release-specific output. The current release plus the Beta release

We also learned a few key concepts in RoboHelp HTML:

- **Conditional Build Tags.** These tags identify content that needs to be excluded from the output. For example, you can create and apply a tag named "Print" for content that goes only into a printed guide, not into Help.
- **Single source layouts.** Each layout is a template that includes output settings and preferences. For our company, our layouts include online Help and several printed guides.

Here's the process we followed.

### **Creating Conditional Build tags**

1. In the Project tab, right-click Conditional Build Tags.
2. Select New Conditional Build Tag.
3. Name the tag. You can select a different color if you don't want to use the default color assigned.
4. Click OK.

This is the set of Conditional Build Tags that we created:

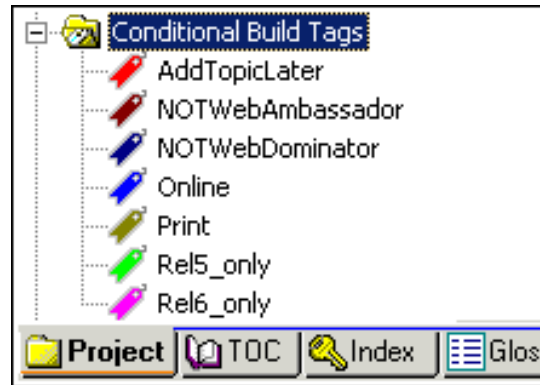


Figure 1: Create Conditional Build Tags

### Applying tags to content within a topic

In this example, we wanted the Related Topics button to appear only in Help, not in the printed guides.

1. Select the text or graphic. In this case, we selected the Related Topics button.
2. Right-click and select Apply Conditional Build Tag.

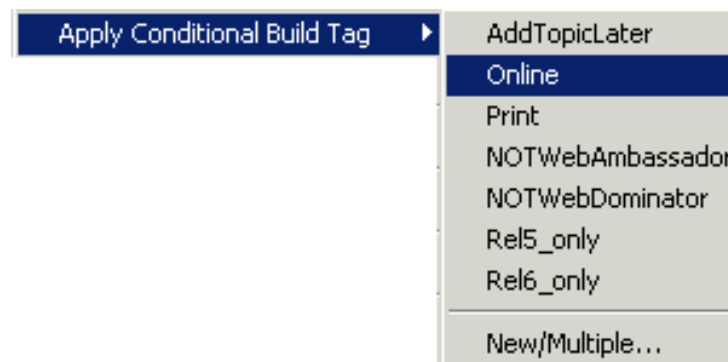


Figure 2: Apply tag

3. Select Online. This is the tag we use for content that goes only into Help (not into printed guides).

After selecting the tag, the Related Topics button is marked with the Online tag. It has blue hatch marks--because we selected blue as the color for the Online tag.



Figure 3: After tag applied

### Applying tags to an entire topic

We also needed to exclude entire topics from an output. For example, we didn't want our Release 6 features (our Beta release) to be included in the Release 5 Online Help and printed guides.

To apply the Release 6 tag to an entire topic:

1. In the Project tab, select the topic.
2. Right-click and select Properties from the shortcut menu.
3. Click the Advanced tab.

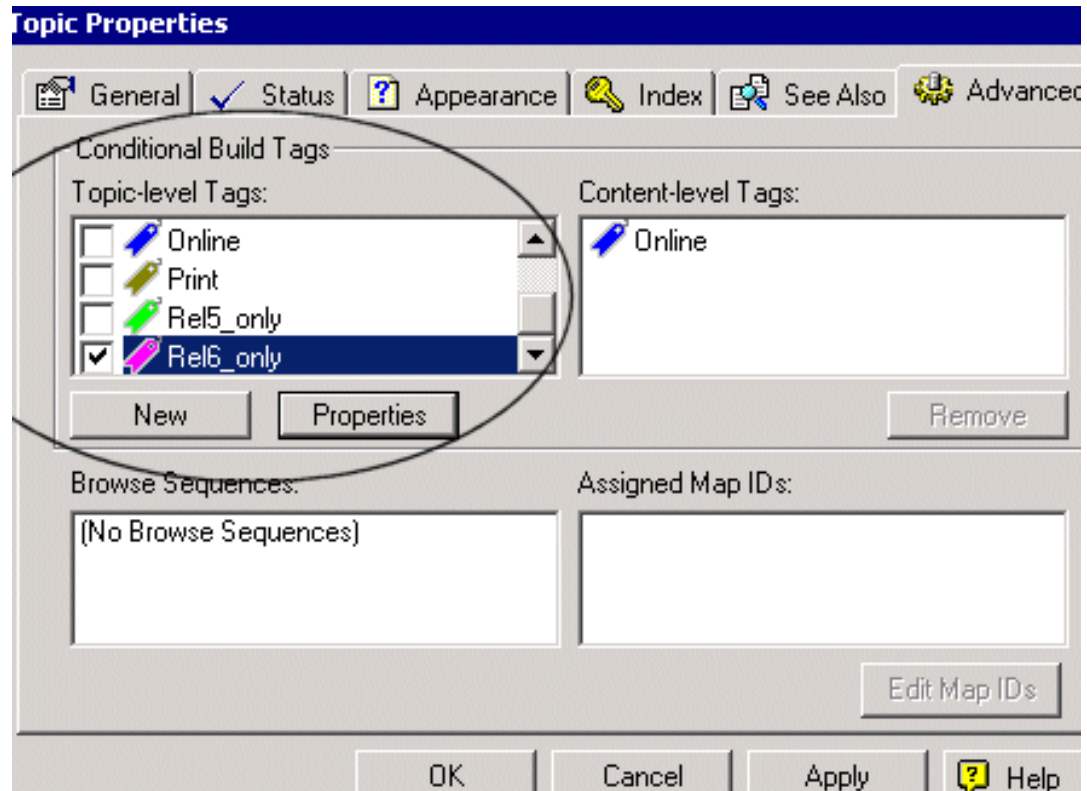


Figure 4: Topic properties

4. Select the Rel6\_only tag.
5. Click OK.

### Creating single-source layouts

For Release 6 Online Help, we started with the HTML Help template that RoboHelp provided.

1. In the Project tab, double-click Single Source Layouts.



Figure 5: Single Source Layout - Help

2. Double-click Microsoft HTML Help. The HTML Help Options dialog box opens.

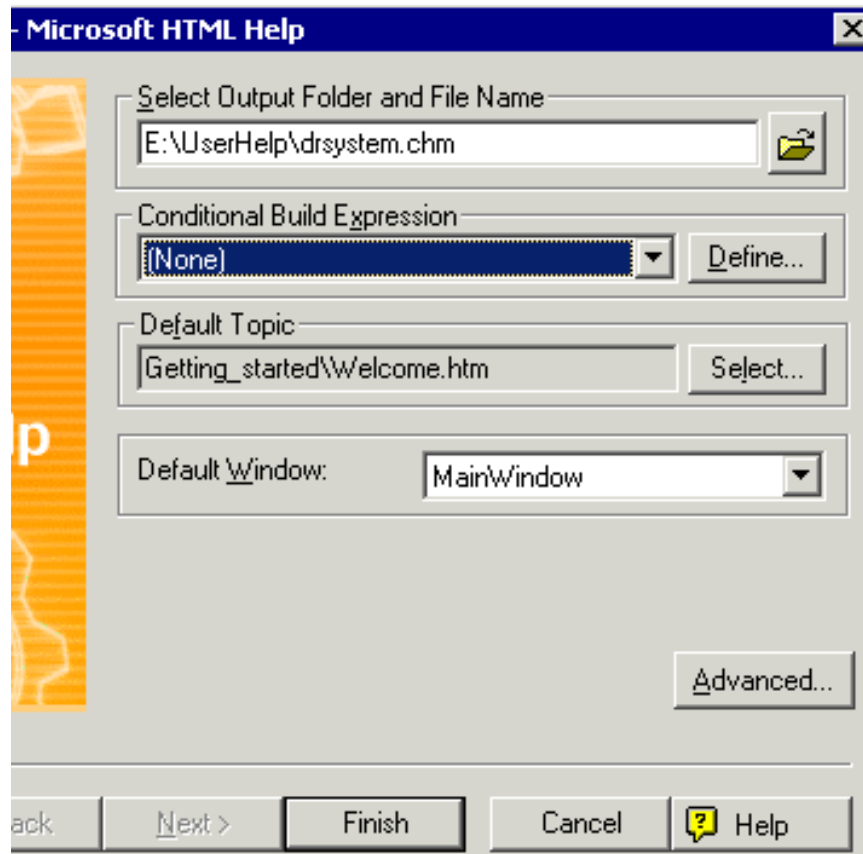


Figure 6: HTML Help options

3. Next to "Conditional Build Expression," click Define. The Define Conditional Build Tag Expression dialog opens.

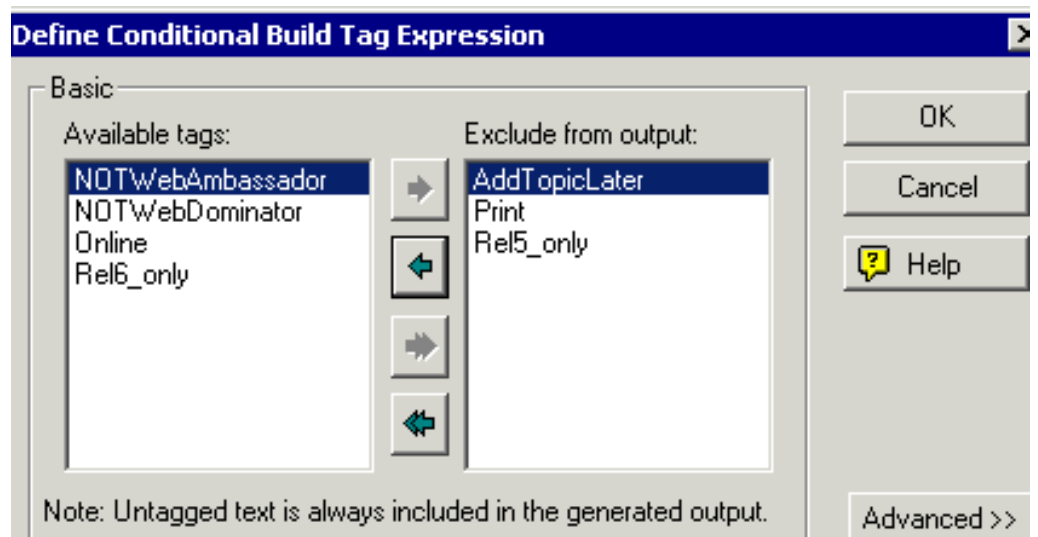


Figure 7: Conditional Build Expression

- Select a tag from the Available tags pane on the left.
- Click the right arrow to move the tag to the "Exclude from output" pane.

Because we're creating a help system for Release 6, we excluded:

- AddTopicLater. The draft topics that are incomplete.

- Rel5\_only. Any text designed for Release 5.
- Print. Any text designed only for printed guides.

4. Click OK.
5. Click Finish to generate Online Help.

### **Customizing each printed guide**

1. In the Project tab, double-click Single Source Layouts.

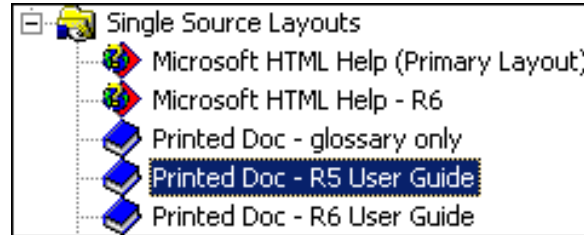


Figure 8: Single Source Layout - print

2. Double-click Printed Doc--R5 User Guide. The Print Document General dialog box opens.
3. Click Next.
4. From the list of available topics, select the chapters and topics for the printed guide.
  - Select a topic or book from the Topics pane on the left.
  - Click the right arrow to move the topic or book to the Chapter layout--into the printed guide.

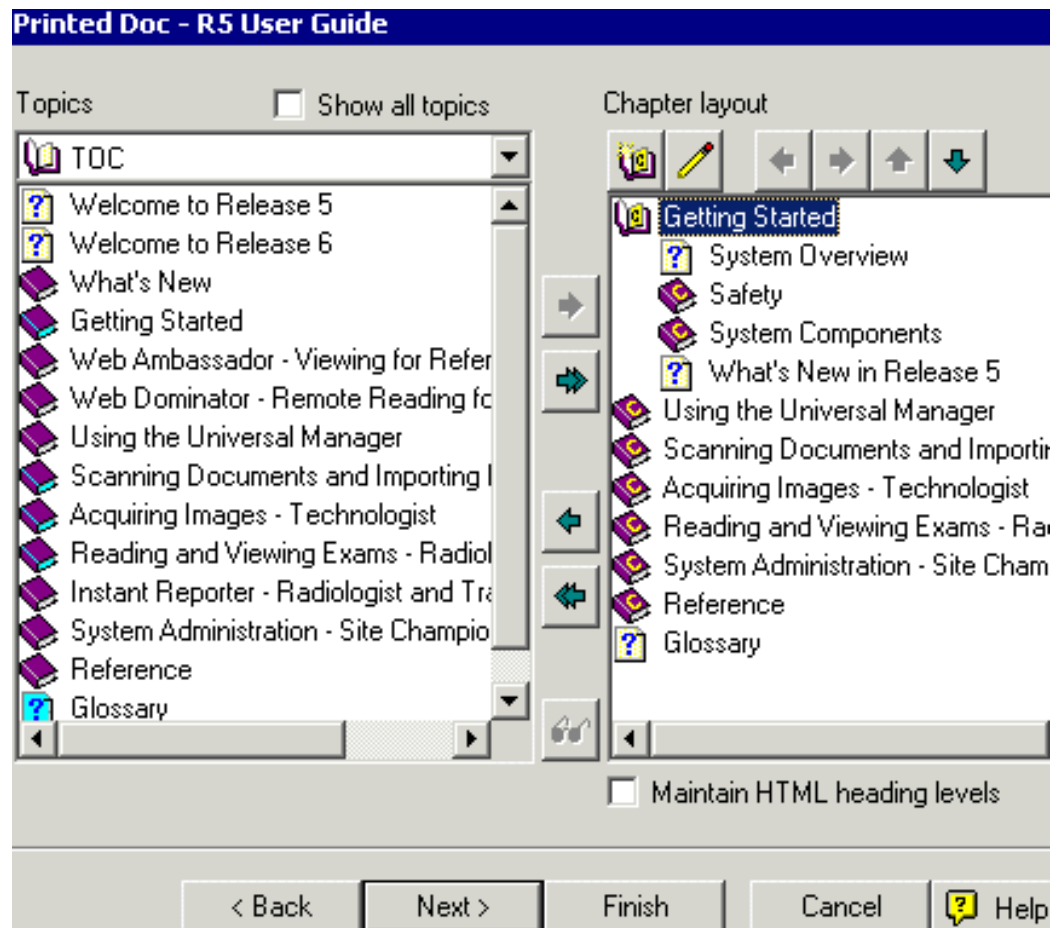


Figure 9: Print content

5. Click Next.
6. Now map the heading styles used for the HTML topics to the styles used in the Word template.

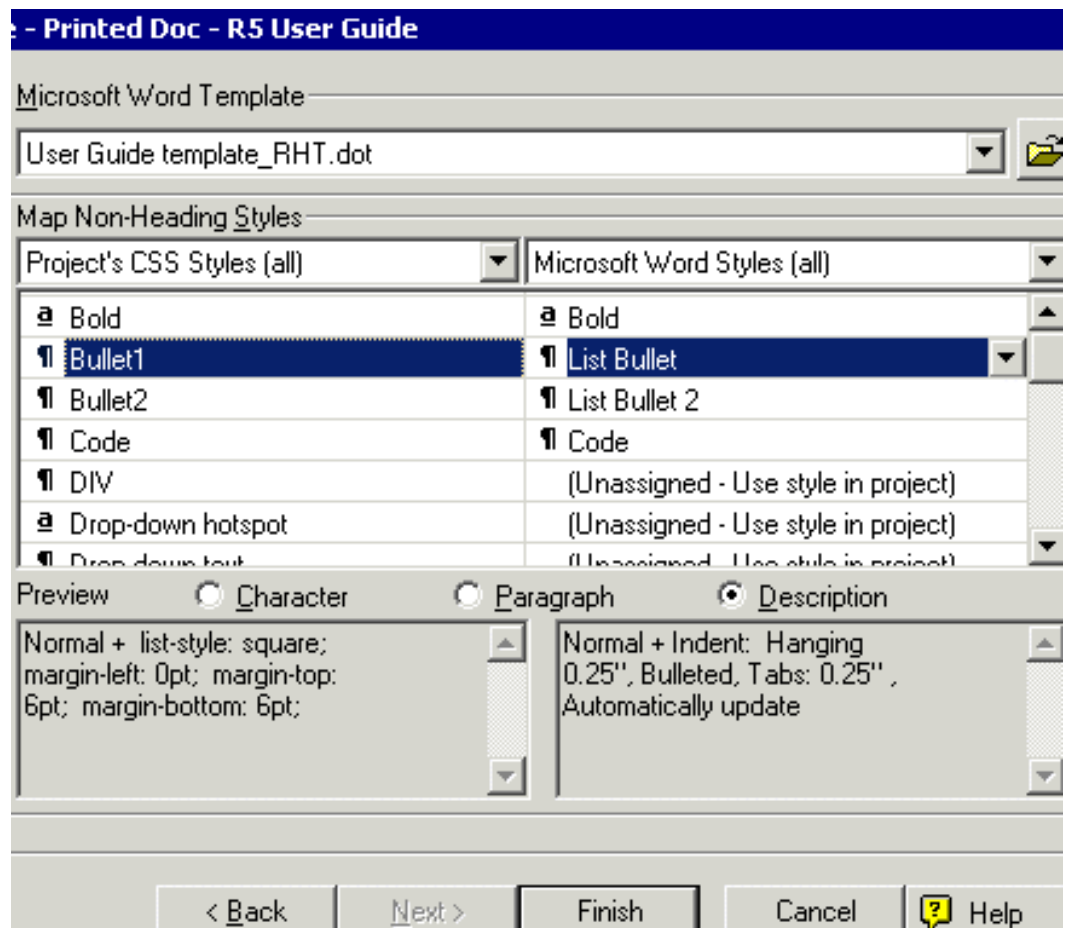


Figure 10: Print styles

7. Click Finish to generate the printed document.

### Meeting our goals

Using a single-source tool, we've been able to meet the requirements for our documentation products. We've been able to produce Online Help and multiple printed guides, and maintain two releases of software--all from a single source.

An unexpected reward was hearing my manager say that using a single-source method has meant substantial savings for our company.

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March 2004

2004 Region 8 Conference



## Ambitious Region 8 Conference set for July

By Patrick Lufkin

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### [STC Region 8 Conference information](#)

Contact Patrick Lufkin, Region 8 Conference Publicity Manager, with any questions at [lufkin@ix.netcom.com](mailto:lufkin@ix.netcom.com).

May 15 is the last day to qualify for your early registration discount to the conference. Don't delay!

Planning is currently underway for the 2004 Region 8 Conference, which will take place near Sacramento, California, in July.

"Charting a Bold Course" is the theme of the conference.

In light of post dot-bomb realities, conference director Eric Butow says, "Difficult times demand bold action and the ability to reinvent ourselves and our profession. We have chosen the conference theme in hopes of giving attendees the information and the tools they will need."

#### Ambitious Offerings

Conference planners say this will be one of the most ambitious conferences to date. In addition to several dozen presentations and seminars, the three-day conference will include a leadership retreat, a pavilion trade show, a job fair, a bookstore, computer terminals where attendees can check their e-mail and surf the web, hands-on computer tutorials, and a keynote speaker for each day.

Incoming STC President, Andrea Ames, will be one of the keynote speakers. A full list of keynote speakers will be posted on the conference Web site as soon as it becomes available.

The conference hopes to draw approximately 300 attendees from Region 8 and adjoining regions. Region 8 includes California, Nevada, Hawaii, Australia, and New Zealand.

#### Location and Price

The conference will take place July 25-27 (Sunday through Tuesday) on the campus of the University of California, Davis, which is located about 10 miles southwest of Sacramento. Housing will be available on campus and at nearby hotels.

Conference attendees are being offered several price packages, depending on how they wish to participate. Early registration discounts are available to those who register prior to May 15.

#### Volunteers Needed

To make it all happen, additional volunteers are needed. "We have a great team in place, made up of STC leaders from throughout the region," Eric says, "but they will need help to make this the best conference it can possibly be."

To encourage volunteers and lower any financial barriers to attending, the

conference is offering deep discounts to volunteers. Those interested should contact Anne Mehaffey at [mehaf2@comcast.net](mailto:mehaf2@comcast.net).

Eric notes that while discounts are important, the biggest benefits of volunteering are in the opportunities to make new friends and work behind the scenes with some of the best people in the field.

#### More Information

For more information, and for updates as they occur, visit the conference Web site: <http://www.stcregion8conference.org>.

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Are you looking for a professional development opportunity? You might want to consider becoming the next newsletter editor.

We're looking for a new editor for the 2004-2005 publishing season of Signature. If you are interested contact us at: [stcsignature@yahoo.com](mailto:stcsignature@yahoo.com).

## Professional development opportunity!

By [Catherine Robinson](#), Managing Editor

Putting together the newsletter this year has been a team project. We--the newsletter staff and contributors (you!)--along with much help from the Council, have continued to publish an excellent newsletter and add value to our chapter's membership.

As editor, I gained professionally as I learned new skills, worked with a varied group of individuals, and became part of a decision-making process serving a superb membership. All this has given me considerable personal satisfaction. However, there are other areas of personal and professional growth I must now pursue.

Therefore, the position of Editor of Signature for 2004-2005 is open.

Here's a list of activities the next editor will perform:

- Recruit authors, editors, and proofreaders
- Determine, communicate, and manage schedules
- Assign articles to writers
- Determine layout
- Create linked HTML from articles
- Create PDF of the newsletter
- Upload files to the Web site
- Accept advertising copy and add to pages

Additionally, the following skills will be in demand:

- Organizational skills
- Time management skills
- People skills
- Problem-solving skills
- Ability to judge appropriateness of content
- Design and layout skills (unless you team up with someone with those skills)

Do you see yourself?

If you would like to be the next editor of **Signature** and enjoy considerable professional growth, contact me at [stcsignature@yahoo.com](mailto:stcsignature@yahoo.com) or [crobi0902@cox.net](mailto:crobi0902@cox.net). I look forward to hearing from you.

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March 2004

President's Podium

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## Get thee to a conference!

By [Walter Hanig](#), President[Author Bio](#)[Contact Walter](#)[Administrative Council](#)

Yes, conference season is here. First up is the WritersUA conference, March 28-31, in Hollywood, CA. For details, see: <http://www.winwriters.com/ohc04/index.html>. Though I've never been to this conference, previously known as WinWriters, everyone I know who has been to it gives it high marks. The driving force behind the conference, Joe Welinske, spoke at a San Diego STC chapter meeting about two years ago and I certainly learned a lot. Historically, this conference has focused on tools, design, and information architecture for online help authors. According to the Web site, there will also be sessions on one of the hotter topics in technical communications, content management.

Next on the conference schedule is the annual international STC conference, May 9-12, in Baltimore. This is the largest of the conferences most technical communicators will ever attend. There will be sessions on a great variety of topics, such as technical presentations on tools to project management to indexing to web design. And, you'll get to meet with most of the tool vendors and see the latest versions of their products. I've been lucky or persuasive enough to attend six of the last seven conferences and every one has been worthwhile. You just can't beat the opportunity to learn a little about so many different topics, from object-oriented programming (which I believe contributed to my getting a job at Qualcomm) to structured FrameMaker7 and XML (ditto for NCR job). You can see a list of sessions and who's presenting them at the conference Web site at: <http://www.stc.org/51stConf/>.

Can't make it to Baltimore? Attend the STC Region 8 conference, July 25-27, in Davis, CA, about 30 miles west of Sacramento. For considerably less than the cost of the international conference, you'll get to see and participate in many of the same presentations that are given at the international conference. Though the number of presentations is less, the quality is every bit as good. Besides, you can still volunteer and get a discount on the cost of the conference. Share a room and a ride and reduce the cost even more! For more information, go to the conference Web site at: <http://www.stcregion8conference.org>

Now, I probably don't to try hard to convince you that all of these conferences are great opportunities to learn. The challenge that all prospective attendees faces is how to justify the cost to the holder of the purse strings, typically one's boss. The natural tendency is to focus on how you'll benefit. I think that's a mistake. Instead, focus on what you'll learn and how that will benefit the company. Identify each session you plan to attend and document (yes, write a memo!) how the information being presented contributes to solving a problem in your office.

Good luck and I hope to see you in Hollywood, Baltimore, or Davis!

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March 2004

Chapter Membership



## What's new in membership?

By [Sue Heim, VP Membership](#)

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Welcome to our new members and our reinstated members!

### **New Members**

Jodi B. Bonenfant

David M. Lemkuil

Brad A. Powers

Eben Rosenberger

Jean-Jacques Surbeck

Michele C. Wallace

Richard J. Walsh

Diane Wilczak

Richard D. Wilson

### **Reinstated Members**

Greg B. Koppman-Gue

Kandee K. Parsons

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[Click here for March 10 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](mailto: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.

## March Chapter Meeting Preview: "Dine with managers"

By [Michael Cárdenas, VP Programs](#)

Back by popular demand!

If you want to know how to get management's attention (bad or good), how to get your resume to stand out, how management distributes raises...

If you want to know what a typical day in the world of a manager looks like...

If you have ever considered being a manager...

Then don't miss this March meeting where you will be able to get your questions answered from our panelists:

- Walter Hanig

Most of you know him well. He is the president of our San Diego chapter. When he is not serving the STC, he works as the group manager in the Information Engineering Department at the Teradata Division of NCR. Walter has managed technical communications for the last ten years in industries ranging from retail software to consumer software. In his previous life, Walter was a software designer. He has a B.A. in mathematical sciences from Rice University in Houston, Texas, and also earned his Master of Applied Mathematical Sciences from Rice.

- Suzanne Hosie

Suzanne has a bachelor's degree in math/computer science and a master's degree in business management. Before founding Write on the Edge, she had several years of experience in the computer software field, including working in software support, quality assurance, training, marketing, documentation, and software system design. She teaches technical writing at the University of California San Diego Extension, and is a regular speaker at regional and international conferences of the STC. She is a past president of the San Diego chapter of STC.

- Kris Oden

Kris is a former San Diego chapter president. She is currently a Senior Manager at Invitrogen Corporation and manages the Technical Communications Group and Product Administration. After receiving her Ph.D. in chemistry and a postgraduate degree, she re-invented herself as a technical writer. She started working at Invitrogen in 1993. Not knowing anything about information design, she took an Information Mapping® class and used those principles to develop the look and feel of Invitrogen product manuals. After being the sole technical writer for five years, she got to hire an additional writer and was well on her way to becoming the dreaded pointy-haired

boss. Today she manages four technical communicators and is currently developing a second group to implement and maintain a global product database to manage products.

This session will be thought-provoking and will generate differences of opinion. After all, we're talking about management! So I'd encourage you to make sure you get a seat.

---

February meeting attendance numbers:

32 attendees  
3 cancellations  
6 no-shows  
8 used PayPal



Walter Hanig, President & Sue Heim, VP Membership



Michael Cárdenas, VP Programs



Featured speaker, Dave Gash

## February Chapter Meeting Review

David Gash presented: **Navigation Strategies for Reducing Click Count**

By [Eric Hurd](#)

San Diego chapter meeting - Wednesday, February 11

### Announcements

The following were announced at the meeting.

- Congratulations to the San Diego chapter! The San Diego chapter came in third nationally in gaining new members since July.
- AuthorIt expert Char James-Tanny will be here on Thursday, March 25, along with special guests Paul Trotter, AuthorIt Software Corporation's CEO, and Ray Duncan, Director of Marketing, to discuss AuthorIt single-source content management software.

This is a special meeting in addition to our regular March 10 meeting and will only cost \$10 (dinner included), regardless of membership or employment status. PayPal will be accepted. Be sure not to miss this very special event. A free copy of the software (a value of \$459) will be raffled off at the end of the meeting.

For more information about AuthorIt, visit:

<http://www.authorit.com/>.

- The telephone conferences have been discontinued due to 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.

### Presentation

Beginning with the premise that a user who is looking at help is already frustrated and wants to get back to work as quickly as possible, Dave's presentation centered on tips for creating a help system that is optimized to reduce the amount of time needed to retrieve information.

Since Dave covered a huge amount of information in the hour and a half that he was given, I will only cover the main points here. For more in-depth information and reference material, you can download his PowerPoint presentation <http://stc-sd.org/meetings/artifacts/NavStratSlides.ppt>.

### Information Structure

- Try to include only the information that the user needs to know and is less likely to already know.
- Organize help into a logical structure that incorporates hierarchical (general to specific), linear (ordered), and web-related topics, in order to increase information accessibility. Use hierarchical structure as an all-purpose entry for users of all levels.
- Group information by type: procedural, command, conceptual, background, troubleshooting, errors, overview, etc. Use a distinct look and feel.
- Don't force information on users who simply need to know how to perform a task.
- Make the information highly available with a variety of access devices (TOC, Index, internal links, See also lists, expanding hotspots, etc.).
- Mirror the application's menu structure if possible.

### Access Devices

- Make link text unambiguous.
- Consider using expanding hotspots.
- When designing a TOC, group information by object instead of class.
- The index is the most heavily used access device. Although professional indexers maintain that selecting the "right" keywords is better than too many keywords, Dave recommends that if you are not a professional indexer, it is better to have too many keywords than not enough.
- An easy way to create keywords is to use "term inversion"--changing the order of the object (noun) and action (verb). For example, invoices, printing could be flipped to invoices with sub-entries for printing along with all the other actions associate with the object.
- Use actual topic titles and avoid See also keywords.

- Use synonyms for actions (edit, change, modify), but not objects (invoice, report, receipt).
- Use associated terms. An associated term might be something that is not mentioned in the user interface, but a user would be familiar with. For example, even if the interface doesn't mention baud rate, you can enter that in the index as a reference for the fax section.
- Never substitute an index with full text search. Full text search creates too many or too few hits, and only allows the user to find words that are actually used in the text.
- Related topics are a great way to allow a user who has clicked into the "ballpark" to find the information they need without backtracking.
- Browse sequences allow you to guide a user through information in a specified order.
- Site maps and graphics with image maps (clickable areas that link elsewhere) are good tools for making information even more accessible.

Dave Gash, who has over twenty years of experience developing software, manuals, and training programs, owns HyperTrain dot Com, a company that specializes in training technical writers who create Windows and online help. Dave invited everyone to call him at (888) 722-0700 or send email to [dgash@hypertrain.com](mailto:dgash@hypertrain.com).

### **Meeting Wrap-Up**

This month's raffle winners were:

- Melody Grant won a Wally Buck (redeemable for a free San Diego STC dinner and presentation).
- Lin Laurie and Gail Van Landingham won a business card holder.
- J.J. Subeck and Lynn Sorensen won some office supplies.

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



**Melody Grant**



**Lin Laurie**



**Gail Van Landingham**



**J.J. Subeck**

**Lynn Sorensen--no photo available**



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March 2004

Membership Drive



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## 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](http://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](http://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](mailto:stc@stc.org)

For more information on the San Diego Chapter of STC, visit our Web site at [www.stc-sd.org](http://www.stc-sd.org) or contact Sue Heim, vice president of Membership, at [sue\\_heim@msn.com](mailto:sue_heim@msn.com).

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March 2004

Sponsorship Opportunities



## Sponsorship Opportunities

By [Michael Cárdenas, VP Programs](#)

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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](mailto:mcardenas@multitrans.com).

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