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Between projects is a good time to make changes in your online help to improve usability.



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May 2002

## Feature Article

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## Time Between Projects

by Suzanne Hardy



A little time between projects is a good opportunity to make changes in your online help that can significantly improve usability. The following three miniprojects use links to make big improvements in your online help. If you don't finish these improvements before your next project begins, they can be ongoing so that you work on them whenever you have a little time.

- Change the appearance of different types of links.
- Avoid repetition in your help system by linking to common topics.
- Use image maps to create links from images.

### Change the appearance of links

In your HTML-based help system, you may have links that perform different functions when clicked, such as dynamic HTML links that drop down or expand to display text, popups that display a topic on top of another topic, and regular text links that jump to another destination such as a Web page. It's helpful to users if they know what to expect when they click a link—are they going to see a different topic or Web page, or will further information be explained on the same page? Users appreciate anything that saves them time, and consistent styles and behavior in your online help can achieve this.

You can use your style sheet to accomplish the look you want. Sometimes tweaking your CSS (cascading style sheet) styles will get just the right effect.

The following code is an example of what you can add to your CSS style definitions. In this example, the popup link color is green and when users hover their mouse over the link, the text becomes underlined and bolded. If you always use this style for popups, it can be a good way to distinguish popups from links that jump to another page.

Add the following code to your style sheet (either in a linked .CSS file or in the embedded-style section of an .HTM file).

This is the basic style for the popup link:

```
a.MyPopupLink{
color: green;
text-decoration:none;
}
```

This is the popup link style when users hover their mouse over it:

```
a.MyPopupLink:Hover{
color: green;
text-decoration:underline;
font-weight:bold;
}
```

This is the popup link style after it is clicked, or visited. Specifying the visited color prevents display of the default visited style and ensures that the link color you want is displayed. Here, the style is defined in the same color as the unvisited link, so the original intent of the style definition (to differentiate it as a popup) is retained.

```
a.MyPopupLink:visited{
color:green;
}
```

After you've modified your style sheet with the link styles, you need to define the class of the <a> tag so that the style is applied. Here's an example of how the popup link would look in an HTML file:

```
<p>This is a <a class=MyPopupLink
href=" javascript:MyPopupFunction('
http://www.yahoo.com');">test link</a>.</p>
```

Depending on the HTML editor you're using, you may need to manually enter the class attribute of the <a> tag (or use a search-and-replace function to do so).

### **Avoid repetition by linking to a common topic**

Do you find yourself repeating information in your help system? If your host application has several dialogs that share the same options or a particular feature is available from multiple locations in the application, it can be difficult to keep up with changes in your topics. Linking enables you to keep all the information in one place. Not only does this help you maintain your help system more efficiently, it helps your users by providing them with access to additional information you may not want to include in every topic.

For example, your application includes a new Connect button that can be found on six different dialogs. Since clicking the Connect button can result in a long list of possible results, the description for this button is also very long. Instead of repeating the description in six different context-sensitive help topics, create a separate topic that describes the button, and then link to the topic from the other six topics.

Another good time to use this linking strategy is when you have background or conceptual information that is mentioned in multiple topics. Since you never know how users access topics or where they've been in your help system, you don't have any idea whether they understand concepts unless you

describe them in each topic. Save time and maintenance by linking to a single topic, and then you don't have to 1) assume your users already know it already, or 2) include the information in multiple locations.

One of the biggest benefits of online help is its dynamic navigation and linking capabilities. Use it to your fullest advantage to avoid maintaining duplicate content.

### **Use image maps to create links from images**

Image maps are graphics with hotspots. When users click the hotspot, the target displays. Images in your help system can further explain your topic content or dialogs in the host application. With image maps, you can explain individual controls on a dialog without resorting to creating time-consuming callouts in a graphics editor. You can also link to more extensive information than the image provides, if necessary.

Popup links work especially well with image maps. Create topics that describe different parts of the image, and link the image map hotspots to those topics. For example, a screen shot of a dialog can link to a different topic for each option on the dialog.

When you are designing topics with image maps, make sure to let users know the areas on the image are clickable. For example, give instructions to "click the image below," or use a graphics editor to add visual clues for clicking.

Implementing linking strategies is worth the time involved to improve the usability of your help system. These ideas can also be done over time as an ongoing project. It's never too late to improve how your help system delivers information, and links can help you do it.

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## Editor's Desk

May 2002



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### San Diego STC Newsletter Undergoes Changes

by [Rick Bradshaw](#), Editor

Can you believe it is really May already? Where did winter go? Where did the rain go? Perhaps we'll find it again this coming winter when the El Niño that seems to be brewing in the Pacific might arrive.

Along with the season change, your friendly neighborhood STC newsletter is also about to undergo more changes. There will be a new editor next year. Actually, there will be two new editors next year. Lana Walker-Helmuth (of "Introductions" column fame) will be teaming up with Sharon Bradshaw (of "Meeting Report" column fame) to edit the publication. Along the way, they will be trying something different. The newsletter, as Kris announced at the last meeting, will be transitioning to HTML.

Why is this happening? Apart from continually striving to reach the next level professionally, we are trying to serve the membership better. This will, hopefully, make it a bit easier to read since there won't be page jumps to accommodate size of articles to the size of the paper; each article will have its own page. Also, for those who produce the newsletter, it will save time by streamlining the layout effort; no more last-minute copy fitting!

For those of you who want to print and save a particular article instead of the entire newsletter, you will find the HTML format easier. For those who wish to download their newsletter and read or print it to read later, there will also be a PDF version. It won't be the same PDF that you have gotten used to this year. It will be a PDF of the HTML newsletter. It will be secondary to the HTML version and look like the browser version but will open in Adobe Acrobat Reader. Of course, you will still have access to the electronic archives as they now exist, and the new HTML version will be added.

We'll be testing this within the next couple of months and will be asking for your feedback. Please be sure to take the time to tell us how you feel about the changes. We exist to get information to you. Your needs and thoughts are important to us.

Also in this issue is the article [Who Wrote This?](#) Sharon Bradshaw and Barbara Dreyer have asked small companies, "Who writes your docs?" Some of the answers are in their article. An interesting aspect was that most of the companies interviewed asked to remain anonymous while two took the opportunity to use this report as a marketing tool. There may be future articles from these writers, continuing this "Who Wrote That?" thread. If you have comments, please contact them.

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Thinking about upgrading your graphics software? Check out our [May Meeting Preview](#) and our [Tech Issues](#) columns. Matt Sullivan speaks about the newest version of Photoshop; version 7.0. Also, for those of you that may not have heard yet, FrameMaker 7.0 is around the corner and scheduled for release later this summer. Perhaps when that happens we can entice Matt to preview that for us as well.

If you were not able to attend the last meeting, you missed a very good presentation. If you want to know more about knowledge management, you have another opportunity coming up; there will be a knowledge management workshop in June. Please see the [Professional Development](#) column for more information, and plan now to attend.

On a very sad note, we join with Kris (see [Presidential Podium](#)) and our entire membership in extending our condolences to Coleen Miller on the death of her husband, Gethyn Allen, who unexpectedly passed away March 31. UCSD has established a memorial fund for Coleen and their unborn child. If you would like to contribute, please see [Presidential Podium](#) for details. Our thoughts and prayers are with Coleen and her family.

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## Presidential Podium

[Return Home](#)**Better Times Ahead**by [Kris Oden](#)**STC Annual Conference**

While I'm looking forward to attending the 49th Annual STC Conference next week, my anticipation is tempered by the realization that not as many people will be attending because of the events of last year. Many companies are not doing as well as they were a couple of years ago. I regret the impact of this on STC members. However, I do believe that things will pick up and that next year we will have more people attending for the 50th Annual STC Conference. Hang in there everyone!

**VP Professional Development**

We're still looking for someone to organize and manage workshops for next year. This is an incredibly valuable position and one that provides great satisfaction to members. Not to mention, it's a great way to learn new things and do some project management. If you are interested, please contact Kris Oden at [koden@invitrogen.com](mailto:koden@invitrogen.com) or Mary Larkin at [maryl@castandcrew.com](mailto:maryl@castandcrew.com).

**In Memoriam**

Gethyn Allen, husband of Coleen Miller, unexpectedly passed away March 31. Many of you know Coleen from her participation on the newsletter proofing team and working with Mary Larkin on professional development workshops. The University of California, San Diego has established the Gethyn Allen Memorial Fund for Coleen M. Miller and son in memory of Gethyn Allen. If you wish to contribute, checks may be sent to:

Washington Mutual Bank  
Gethyn Allen Memorial Fund  
ACCT Number 394-0091139  
4111 Governor Drive  
San Diego, CA 92122

Please make checks payable to the **Gethyn Allen Memorial Fund** and include the account number 394-0091139 on your check.

We hold Gethyn's and Coleen's family in our hearts during this sad time.

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## Special

May 2002

### Who Wrote This?

by [Sharon Bradshaw](#) and Barbara Dreyer



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Did you ever wonder who writes the documentation in small companies? Are you curious to know when small companies hire professional writers?

Armed with inquiring minds and investigative skills, we set out to find the answers to these questions. Our goal was to interview a diverse range of companies with fewer than 200 employees and learn how they create information and when they bring professional writers on board.

We devised a series of questions and set out to interview the people who could provide the answers. Questions asked included:

- What kind of documentation do you provide with your products or services?
- Who is in charge of writing and editing this content?
- Who is involved in writing content for Web sites, marketing material, and white papers?
- Who edits for technical accuracy?
- Who edits for grammar and layout?
- Who creates illustrations?
- What tools are used to create content and illustrations?
- Have you used the services of a technical writer? If so, how did you go about it?
- As you grow, do you plan to hire writers?

We networked and talked to various people at small companies. We also interviewed freelance writers about their experiences at small companies.

Here is what we found out. When companies are young the responsibility of writing is shared with other responsibilities such as management, marketing, and product development. When the company grows and decides to hire a technical writer, the first writer is usually a freelancer or contractor. Depending on the success of the project, they may bring the writer on full time or continue on a contractual basis. Even as companies grow in size, contractors are still prevalent — especially if cash flow continues to fluctuate.

**Ken Wilson** is a technical writer with over 10 years of experience. He works primarily with small hardware and software companies that have grown to the point where they need to hire professional writers. When Wilson is brought into the company, he's often hired to write user guides and online help. Sometimes a request for user guides expands into

### Tech Writing Tools

With all of the companies we interviewed, the documentation tools employed depend on the delivery method and on personal preference.

- Nonwriters prefer Word, Excel, Visio, Acrobat, and Dreamweaver.
- Marketing and graphic artists prefer Illustrator, Photoshop, and Quark.
- Programmers prefer the Windows Notepad, Paint Shop Pro, and authoring tools that come with MS Developer's Studio.
- Engineers use specialized drawing and modeling tools such as Pro E, Protel, and Solidworks.
- Nonwriters typically do not use FrameMaker or RoboHELP, although most technical writers use these tools.



### When to Hire a Technical Writer

We all know every company needs to provide information that helps their customers understand how to use their products and services. Young companies frequently write documentation without help from professional writers. As the company grows, finding time to write documentation becomes increasingly difficult.

Four reasons to hire a technical writer:

1. Sales realizes the quality of their product is judged by the quality of their documentation.
2. The CFO realizes they can reduce their technical support dollars with good documentation.
3. Marketing realizes that to increase sales, the customer needs to actually understand how to use the product.
4. Management realizes that developers and subject matter experts are not technical writers and that their time would be better spent doing what they know best — developing products and services.

If you're looking for work, we found that it really pays to network. Most firms intend to hire technical writers when they expand

writing training material and tutorials. Wilson has even been asked to produce sales training.

Wilson finds that marketing, management, programmers, and outside ad agencies write most of the information — and eventually hire a technical writer. He confirms what we suspected: documents written by subject-matter experts might be technically correct, but they leave a lot to be desired. They are often written in passive voice, contain extraneous text, are loaded with convoluted sentences, and lack structure (to name a few problems). Most nonwriters don't use templates or styles, so their documents lack good formatting and consistency.



**ISE Research-ThunderVolt**, founded in 1994, has 27 employees. ISE engineers, manufactures, and services electric and hybrid-electric engines. Each engine is

custom built to meet customer specifications and government regulations. One of the most critical deliverables is a complete maintenance and repair manual. Because government funding is involved, the manual must be published according to government specifications. The lead engineer is responsible for the format and content of the manual. Engineers in charge of the various engine systems are responsible for documenting that system. The sales staff writes most of the marketing material and the president reviews all documentation for content and accuracy.



**Evans Plumbing** is a locally owned and operated plumbing repair company. While most of their jobs are on the smaller scale (e.g., unclogging stopped drains), they occasionally do \$2,000 to \$10,000 jobs. The

larger jobs require a bid and proposal. A contract writer that has been with the company since it was founded writes formal proposals. The plumber gives the writer the essential bid information and the writer takes over from there.

In **pharmaceuticals**, many people with science degrees are employed as clinical writers. Clinical writing includes research where statistics are gathered as drugs are tested on people. The results are published in professional journals, and the goal is to get approval from the FDA.

Other science writers work for ad agencies that specialize in biotech and pharmaceutical clients. These writers often work as copywriters and create information for doctors and patients. One firm that markets over-the-counter drugs employs freelance writers to author content about women's health issues for their Web site.

A **database design firm** employs a professional writer who is also a junior programmer. He writes design specifications, administrator guides, and online help. Other staff members review the content for technical accuracy and grammar. They

products. When they do, they will ask co-workers and friends for referrals.

Kris Oden has some good job hunting advice — consider a startup company. They are popping up all the time. By the time companies receive their third round of funding, they might be ready for a technical writer. It takes some legwork and research, but those companies are out there, and they just might want you!

also rely on client feedback. This writer has a range of talents to offer: an economics degree, programming skills, and technical writing. He even writes articles for the *San Diego Business Journal*.

We interviewed at a **software firm** that develops applications for tracking Internet users and at a hardware firm that produces keyboards for portable devices. Each company has less than 40 employees and neither one has hired a technical writer. Typical of most small companies, almost every employee is involved in writing something — management (including VPs and the president) creates white papers. Marketing and PR staff develop Web content and sales material. They also write the end-user documentation with the help of product managers and engineers/developers. These firms also hire ad agencies that supply copywriters and graphic artists.

Another software firm we interviewed has 30 employees and develops applications used by computational chemists in the pharmaceutical industry. Documentation for this product includes system administrator and user guides, reference information, tutorials, and online help. Even end users get into the act by adding topics to the dynamic help system as they create components in the application.

The software sold by this firm fits in a new category called *bioinformatics*. This growing field combines biotechnology with information technology. When the company released its first product, everyone pitched in and wrote documentation—the product manager, vice president, developers, and technical support personnel. Staff with doctorates in chemistry create the scientific information.

They recently hired a freelance writer (through STC's Jobmail) with software development and writing skills to help them manage their growing need for quality documentation. Since most of the product information is about the software interface, a science degree is not required. In fact, this writer envisions a growing need to become more technical by learning scripting languages that are relevant to the products.

Most of the writers we talked to work **freelance**. We did find a few exceptions. For example, two technical writers work for a software developer, and they write the release notes, installation and user guides, online help, and Web content. The software engineers and writers share responsibility for the technical accuracy. The grammar and layout is the sole responsibility of the technical writers.

In summary, we discovered that almost everyone employed at a small company writes some type of documentation. As companies grow, it becomes apparent to management that running the company is consuming all of their time. When companies reach this stage, they begin to think about hiring professional writers.

May 2002

## Professional Development

**Knowledge Management Workshop**by [Mary Larkin](#)[Return Home](#)**Date**

June 1, 2002

**Location**Invitrogen  
1600 Faraday Avenue  
Carlsbad, CA**Time**

9:30 a.m. to noon

**Cost**

\$20

**Registration**Follow the links at  
<http://www.stc-sd.org>

Our workshop leader, Patrick Morrissey, defines *knowledge management* as "preserving of intellectual capital within the enterprise." The process of capturing knowledge and transforming it into intellectual property will be explained and demonstrated. You will gain insight into how knowledge management can benefit your company and your career. Morrissey will also offer tips on how to sell knowledge engineering to management.

Morrissey's presentation will cover:

- defining knowledge management
- capturing, manipulating, and distributing knowledge
- why technical writing is key to a successful knowledge base deployment
- knowledge bases at work, including help desks, user manuals, and corporate knowledge bases
- creating a knowledge capture and making a simple knowledge entry
- tools in the marketplace
- demonstration in which participants will become a virtual company using a knowledge management database to resolve customer service and internal training issues
- wrap-up and Q&A

Morrissey has been creating knowledge bases for engineering firms for the last two decades. Currently, he is a knowledge manager at IDC-MCS.

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## Chapter Meetings


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## May Meeting Preview: Get Expert Help with Photoshop 7.0

 by Matt Sullivan and [Elaine Tsang](#), VP Programs

Been meaning to update your Photoshop skills? Get some expert help to navigate its new features.

In May, Matt Sullivan will demonstrate the newest version of Adobe's flagship product, Photoshop 7.0, and address some of the common problems technical writers encounter while using it to create graphics. After highlighting exciting new features like the Healing Brush and Auto Color, Sullivan will introduce some techniques that are sure to prevent headaches and save you time.

Sullivan is the training director for GRAFIX Training, Inc., an Adobe-certified training provider with offices in San Diego and Tustin. Among his Adobe certifications are FrameMaker, FrameMaker+SGML, and Photoshop. Sullivan's Photoshop clients have ranged from Marlon Brando to the FBI.

Before training, Sullivan was involved with commercial printing and has worked with every version of Photoshop, including the initial beta prior to Version 1.0.

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## April Meeting Review: Knowledge Engineering, Getting Paid to Be Curious

 by [Sharon Bradshaw](#), SD-STC Roving Reporter

Kris Oden opened the meeting and announced that we have some board positions that still have to be filled by September. This is a good time to become involved.

*Signature* is going HTML. The June newsletter will be available in both PDF and HTML. STC members are encouraged to test both versions and give feedback. Watch for more information in the near future. Please contact Oden for details, [koden@invitrogen.com](mailto:koden@invitrogen.com).

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### SYNOPSIS

#### CONFERENCE SUMMARY

Suzy Hosie, STC-SD Web site manager, reported on the WinWriter's conference. It was held February 10 through 13 in Seattle. The focus of the entire conference was user assistance in areas such as online help systems, policies and procedures, tools to use, where to get information, and much more.

WinWriters, a member of STC and the World Wide Web Consortium, specializes in providing quality training and

publications for online help developers. Over the past decade, thousands of technical writers have attended the annual WinWriters Online Help Conference to hear the latest news, techniques, and technologies in user assistance. It's not just about creating Windows help anymore — user assistance is also required for the rapidly increasing number of Web-based applications, and there is a range of platforms to consider.

For the latest articles, books, tools, training, and other useful information, visit the Online Help Resource Directory at <http://www.winwriters.com>.

### **KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT**

The easiest way to understand knowledge management (KM) is to think of it as the process through which organizations organize and maintain intellectual information. Patrick Morrissey, knowledge manager at IDC-MCS, Inc., in Carlsbad, was our featured speaker. He and Alex Dunne, an IDC-MCS associate, explained what is involved in capturing knowledge and transforming it into intellectual property.



Patrick Morrissey

Morrissey explained how to develop a plan and implement KM using real-world examples. Morrissey emphasized that a good KM plan ties into established databases. This reduces the need to write the information twice.

Benefits include:

- fostering creativity by free exchange of ideas
- improving customer service through more efficient problem solving
- boosting revenues by streamlining production and services
- enhancing employee morale by recognizing individuals and rewarding them for their knowledge
- streamlining processes and reducing costs by eliminating redundant or unnecessary procedures



Alex Dunne

Morrissey's presentation is on our Web site, <http://www.stc-sd.org/>, in the "What's Going On" section.

To find out more about IDC-MCS, go to <http://www.IDC-MCS.com>.

To learn the ABC's of knowledge management, check out <http://www.cio.com/research/knowledge/edit/kmabcs.html>.

### **ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The following announcements were made at this meeting.

#### **Chapter Library**

Now we have our own chapter library! The library contains books on subjects of interest to technical communicators. Books are available for checkout at chapter meetings. This service is free for members, so drop by and check out a book at the next meeting. Suzy Hosie will bring the books to the

STC meeting; however, she would like some volunteers to assist during the meeting. If interested, please e-mail Hosie at [suzy@wote.com](mailto:suzy@wote.com).

#### **Need VP Replacement**

Mary Larkin, VP Professional Development, is stepping down, and she's looking for a replacement. Larkin will remain on the committee in a supportive role.

#### **Need Column Writer**

Sharon Bradshaw, one of the new comanaging editors of *Signature* beginning in September, is looking for someone to write the monthly meeting review column. It's a great position because you have easy access to the speakers for more information. For a new writer, it's a practical experience, and there are professional writers and proofreaders available to guide and answer questions. For more information, email Bradshaw at [sbradsh2@san.rr.com](mailto:sbradsh2@san.rr.com).

#### **Invited to IEEE Meeting**

The next San Diego IEEE meeting is May 29. The title is "Employment and Employment Alternatives in Today's Changing Environment: Finding a Job, Starting a Business, or Consulting." The location has not been decided upon. For more information, contact Noreen Norris at [noreen.norris@ieee.org](mailto:noreen.norris@ieee.org). If you are interested in other IEEE activities, visit their Web site, <http://www.sdieee.org>.

#### **Job Seekers and Job Openings**

During the meeting, job seekers described the job they are looking for, and job openings were announced.

If you are unemployed, consider posting an add in the *Signature* [Employment Desired](#) column.

#### **UPCOMING EVENTS**

The following events are upcoming.

#### **Next STC Meeting**

The next SD-STC meeting is Wednesday, May 8. This month, Matt Sullivan will demonstrate the newest version of Adobe's flagship product, Photoshop 7.0. See Elaine Tsang's [Meeting Preview](#) above for details.

#### **Knowledge Management Workshop**

STC is sponsoring a Knowledge Management Workshop on June 1. See Mary Larkin's [Professional Development](#) column for date, location, time, and cost.

#### **DRAWING WINNERS**

The following were drawing winners.

Deborah Gill-Hesselgrave won *Complete Idiot's Guide to Knowledge Management*, by Melissie Clemmons Rumizen. The book was donated by Technical Standards.

Sharon Bradshaw won two hours of proofreading, donated by



From left, Deborah, Judy,  
and Sharon

Word Association.

Judy Edelblute won a WallyBux. WallyBux can be exchanged for one STC meeting and dinner.

### **ATTENDANCE**

We had 40 members, 9 nonmembers, 1 student, 10 no shows, and 1 speaker for a total of 50 attendees. Thank you, Elaine Tsang, for another great program.

Please remember, STC pays for no shows. If you would like to hear the presentation and want to skip the dinner, the cost is \$10 to members and \$15 for nonmembers.

If you have reserved for the meeting but find that your plans have changed and you cannot attend, please give Christopher Bates ([christopherbates@earthlink.net](mailto:christopherbates@earthlink.net)) your cancellation.

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May 2002

## Next Meeting Details


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Click here to  
sign up for the  
May meeting

**May Meeting: Time, Place, & Menu**

by Nadine Barter Bowlus

**Date:** Wednesday, May 8, 2002**Time:**

5:30--Networking

6:15--Dinner

7:00--Presentation

**Place:** Wyndham Garden Hotel, 5975 Lusk Blvd., Sorrento Mesa

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

**Phone:** 858-558-1818**Menu: Buffet**

- Tossed Caesar Salad
- Fresh Fruit and Berries
- Tuscany Vegetable Pasta
- Chicken Picatta
- Penne and Roasted Seasonal Vegetable Salad
- Sautéed Italian Vegetables
- Warm Dinner Rolls and Butter
- Dessert Table (Tortes, Brownies, and Cookies)
- Coffee, Tea, and Iced Tea

**Cost (Dinner and Presentation):**

Members \$20\*

Nonmembers \$25\*

Students \$15\*

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

**Cost (Presentation Only-no reservation required):**

Members: \$10

Nonmembers: \$15

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

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## Tech Writers and Their Cats, or How Can We Miss You If You Don't Go Away?

by Karen Field

Quick: how many tech writers do you know who have cats?

Now, how many of those tech writers have chosen to have cats instead of children?

Meet my children: Clementine and Mila (rhymes with Sheila), two black-and-white shorthaired females who have shared my domicile for eight years now. Clementine is spry, opinionated, and sensitive. Mila is indolent, overweight, and somewhat obsessive about mealtime.

These cat-children have taken over my home. Specifically, they have taken over my home-office space.

For some time now I've wanted to start my own tech writing business and work from home, partly because I thought my cats — like children — needed more quality time with their mother. Clementine inspired the idea: Each morning, as I gather my gym bag, planner, purse, and car keys to leave for work, she meows in sweet, gentle cries as if to say, "Please don't go, Mommy." She's done this for years. I began to suffer from separation anxiety.

To explore the idea of working from home, I took a week off from my job, sort of a working vacation. During that week, my cats taught me a lot about self-employment.

The first day of my working vacation, Clementine wandered out after her mid-morning nap, jumped up on the computer desk, tilted her head, and flattened her ears as if to say, "Don't you have to be somewhere?"

I scratched her ears and continued searching the Internet. That's when Mila appeared. She climbed to the back of my chair. Then she turned sideways and leaned into me. "Get out," she was saying, "That's where I sit at this time of day." When I did get up, she leapt into the chair and laid down, refusing to leave.

Each working day that week presented new battles: as I wrote a marketing letter, Clementine sat on the monitor with her back to me and swung her tail across the screen like a pendulum; as I did my taxes, Mila sprawled across my paperwork; both cats warmed themselves under the desk lamp and protested when I turned it off at the end of the day.

On Friday, it dawned on me: my cats don't miss me when I'm gone. For some part of the day, they prefer that I just go away. Not that they don't love me. They just don't love me

enough to want me around all the time. I've decided to keep my day job for now. It's what the cats want. And remember that sweet little plea Clementine gives me every morning? Now I know what she's really saying: "Have a good day, Mom. And don't let the door hit you in the fanny on your way out."

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## Introductions

[Return Home](#)**Technical Writer Travels Extensively**by [Lana Walker-Helmuth](#)

Dick Millslagle has been around the block a few times. He's been around the world a few times, too. But right now he's planted in Temecula, having moved from San Diego a couple of years ago. Putting in his yard and hooking up eight televisions to his satellite dish keep him busy when he's not consulting for an aerospace company in Anaheim.

Dick, with an extensive background in technical writing, instructional design, training, teaching, and management (whew!), is trying to ride out the recession, like many other talented technical writers who've been sidelined. He has an accounting degree, a business and management degree, and a master's in human resources.

He's also seen the world. He was in the Air Force for 22 years — 8 years of his tour he lived in England and Germany. He started out working in electronics, progressed to teaching electronics, and then to teaching management. He also helped develop a training program for the cruise missile. He was hired out of the military by General Dynamics, who brought him to San Diego. He worked there for eight years until the defense industry in San Diego went belly up.

Next stop, Saudi Arabia, where he worked for oil giant Aramco, writing and developing training for refinery operations. He worked in four different locations there, including Riyadh (the capital) and venues on the Gulf and Red Sea. After seven long years, living in shared rental houses, two-person trailers, and tiny apartments, it was time to come home.

Back on home soil in San Diego, Dick worked for Conexant, a semiconductor company, for 18 months. Then he joined a startup, LightPointe, writing about free-space optics (technology that uses laser beams to transmit data through the airwaves). It was a great job; but, like many new businesses, they had problems getting sales to support the staff and had to downsize.

Since then he's been drumming up business on his own and is eager for the recovering economy to generate more work opportunities. His goal is to deliver the *write* solutions.

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## Tech Issues

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Matt Sullivan is the training director for GRAFIX Training, Inc.,

an Adobe-certified training provider with offices in San Diego and Tustin.

Direct questions on technical issues to [matt@grafixtraining.com](mailto:matt@grafixtraining.com)

Find previous "Tech Issues" columns at [www.grafixtraining.com/stc/stc.html](http://www.grafixtraining.com/stc/stc.html).

## Photoshop 7.0 is Here!

by Matt Sullivan

I was fortunate enough to attend an Adobe Digital Video (DV) seminar a few weeks ago. Although the DV information was quite interesting, for me, the real nugget in the conference was a demo of Photoshop 7.0. As certified instructors, we typically get a sneak peek at new Adobe software, but nothing beats an Adobe-authorized demo from someone who's been using all the new features.

This latest release is not nearly the overhaul that came with Version 6. My impression is that the features are related more to usability and automation than to image manipulation. Many of the new features are also part of Photoshop Elements, a pared-down version of Photoshop. If Photoshop is a little daunting, you may want to take a look at Photoshop Elements, which is a free 30-day download at [www.adobe.com](http://www.adobe.com).

In any case, here is a breakdown of some of the significant aspects of this latest release.

### Palette Well

Photoshop 7.0 now has an area near the menu bar for all those pesky palettes. Instead of cluttering up your workspace, these tabs keep everything tucked away when not in use and even collapse automatically when a new palette tab is activated. Power users will be happy to know that the Tab and Shift-Tab keys still work as they always have, clearing up workspace by temporarily hiding palettes and toolbars.

### Healing Brush

An extension of the Rubber Stamp tool, the Healing Brush analyzes the area surrounding a blemish or scratch in your image. On the basis of that info, Photoshop blends the new pixels into the image, preserving texture and color.

### Web Photo Gallery

A new feature under the File/Automate menu item, Web Photo Gallery allows you to turn a directory of files into a home page with thumbnails linked to higher resolution images. Great for adding event pages to your Web site or for burning photo albums onto CDs.

### File Browser

File Browser allows browsing of your hard drive from within the application. Although this seems to be a minor improvement, I really expect to lean on this feature. With it, I can use the preview to pick through similar images as well as view file information, including meta data (if I put in information such as photographer or a copyright notice).

To sum up, this latest upgrade is a must for those who work with images on a daily basis or for those who are looking for improved automation. For others, their current version of Photoshop will do nearly all of the image work that Version 7.0 can, so this may not qualify as a must-have upgrade.

Sullivan will present a demonstration of Photoshop 7.0 at our May 8 meeting. For details, please see [May Meeting Preview](#).

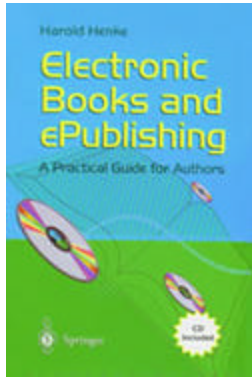
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## Book/Software Review


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Harold Henke

 Springer-Verlag, 2001  
 221 pages

## "Electronic Books and ePublishing: A Practical Guide for Authors"

Review by Erica Euland

Perhaps the great global novel you wrote back in the nineties has been asleep on the shelf, and you are ready to dust it off and publish it online. Or your latest work assignment is to publish your company's knowledge materials on the Web.

Whatever your situation, transitioning from the world of print media to a published ebook can be a daunting task. *Electronic Books and ePublishing*, by Harold Henke, grinds down the mystique surrounding publishing books and manuals online and helps you get a jumpstart in this burgeoning field.

As one reader wrote Henke about her dilemma: "By now, even if you are convinced that ebooks represent the future of publishing, you may well be wondering how you can catch up. The dizzying profusion of e-publishing sites only confuses the issue. Meanwhile, the merry-go-round is gaining speed. How does one get aboard?"

Henke explains the role that various support organizations play as resources for a budding publisher. To name a few:

**Association of American Publishers (AAP).** This organization for the online publishing trade has produced work on digital rights management, metadata, and developing standards for the industry. [www.bookpublishers.org](http://www.bookpublishers.org)

**EDiTEUR.** The main activity of the "EDiTEUR" is to provide a dictionary of metadata and international standards for publishing. This organization has published the standard for ecommerce book products. [www.editeur.org](http://www.editeur.org)

**Library of Congress.** A key player in the conversion of print media to electronic format, the Library of Congress addresses copyright issues for documents and books. [www.locweb.loc.gov](http://www.locweb.loc.gov)

The vast majority of ebooks are created with Adobe Acrobat and Microsoft Word. Henke clearly presents the advantages of these applications. Acrobat, when used with Adobe FrameMaker or Microsoft Word, makes it possible for ewriters to publish ebooks with hypertext links. Whether Acrobat is used with FrameMaker or with the plugin called "PDFMaker" for documents composed in Word, a number of positive features prevail.

If you have published or seen ebooks with Acrobat Reader, you may have noticed how headings are bookmarked and can be used as a table of contents. Index entries or illustration, figure, or table titles in lists become hot links. An especially useful feature is the conversion of page numbers into

hyperlinks within tables of contents or indices. The capability of the ebook to resize so that the page fits the screen is another plus from Adobe.

If you opt to use the Microsoft Reader plugin for Word, you will see how easy it is to install it with Word for Windows 2000 on the Windows 98, NT, and 2000 operating systems. After you install it, the free Reader plugin shows its icon on the Word toolbar. Presto! Select the icon, and you can create an ebook without much trouble at all in Microsoft's format.

No matter which application you choose, studies have shown that you are better off following a classic structure. In the transition from print media to epublishing, the design of ebooks should resemble normal features from print publications as much as possible. In usability tests, readers have preferred a similarity to print books when they read ebooks. Using age-old devices (e.g., tables of contents, appendices, and indices) in a familiar way enables smooth navigation and, of course, less work.

Depending on the needs of the people who navigate your document, you may need to publish both a print and electronic version. Because of the growing demand for each, both print media and ebooks are going to exist side by side for a long, long time.

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**Region 8 Director-Sponsor's Report**[Return Home](#)**What Can You Give Back?**

by Bonni Graham, Region 8 Director-Sponsor

"Gee," I said to my friend with a new job, "Being a technical writer sounds interesting. I don't suppose you need any interns?" He did, and I landed my first technical writing job. Within six months, they had *rightsized* my friend and handed me the department. Two months after that, I was ready to quit.

None of my SMEs returned drafts on time. My management didn't understand what I did or take it seriously. The software kept changing, and I found out only by accident. There were three development teams and one of me. Deadlines didn't move, although feature sets increased and internal releases didn't work. My software tools were inadequate and my computer underpowered. I spent most of my time in meetings where nothing was decided.

Remember, this was pre-Dilbert, so I had no idea these issues were status quo across all areas of a tech corporation. Then I found out about STC and went to my first meeting. I sat at a table with some of the most senior members of the San Diego Chapter. Collectively, there was something like 250 years of technical writing experience at the table (counting my eight months). What did everyone talk about?

None of their SMEs returned drafts on time. Their management didn't understand what they did or take it seriously. The software kept changing, and they found out only by accident. There were three development teams and one of them. Deadlines didn't move, although feature sets increased and internal releases didn't work. Their software tools were inadequate, and their computers underpowered (OK, except Peggy Cathcart's since the aerospace industry hadn't quite bottomed out yet). They spent most of their time in meetings where nothing was decided.

I felt a great weight lifted from my shoulders — it wasn't me! It wasn't hard because I was bad at it; it was hard because it was hard! I've been a big supporter of STC since then. My staff are all members; they and I go to meetings; we serve as judges and managers in the competitions; and I've served conferences, meetings, and leadership summits. I've volunteered time and office space for STC activities because I always get something back and because I feel I need to pay something back for all the good I've gotten.

Surely you remember that feeling: the meeting you went to where a tablemate had solved a problem you were wrestling with and gave you that solution. The seminar that taught you how to use a crucial tool-at a far lower cost than you could have found it elsewhere. The meeting topic that showed you a

new or better way to perform a task. The job lead you wouldn't have found out about any other way.

STC is a volunteer-run organization. Events like chapter meetings, regional conferences, competitions, leadership summits, and much more happen because people just like you give of their time and energy to make it happen for you and for other members and the community.

You may be thinking that you don't have a lot of time to give; that's understandable. Believe me, with three kids in the house and a fledgling business in a challenging economy, I understand the crunch of time. But there's plenty to do that doesn't require that much time:

- If you have an area of expertise, volunteer to speak at your local chapter. (Also, send me a line. One of the biggest challenges chapter leaders are facing right now is getting enough speakers for chapter meetings. I'd love to start a regional speaker's list.)
- Write an article for your newsletter.
- Ask the chapter Webmaster if you can help with updates to the Web site.
- Serve as a competition judge. (It's less work and more rewarding than you might think.)
- Help the regional conference committee. (My next column will provide more info on that.)

If you volunteer with a specific task and time commitment in mind, you'll find that it's manageable and even fun. STC volunteers are a great group of people. Think about what you can do, do it, and watch the benefits come back to you. I did, and it's been worth every minute.

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## New Members



### Welcome to the San Diego Chapter!

by Bonnie Blackfield, VP-Membership

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Please welcome these new members:

Interested in joining the STC? [Click here](#) for Society information.

Valerie Due

Sean Griffin

Alecia Hunter

Aubrey King

Robert Mutch

Alyse Simon

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## Employment Desired


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## Members Looking for Work

## How to submit an ad

Notices are submitted each month and are limited to STC members.

Submissions must be approximately 100 words or less.

Please send your mini-ad/bio to the editor at [rbradsh2@san.rr.com](mailto:rbradsh2@san.rr.com).

Ads should reach the editor no later than the 20th of the month. Earlier submission is encouraged. Ads received after the 20th will be inserted if possible. If not, they will be inserted in the following month's newsletter.

**Nadine C. Barter Bowlus**
[chezbowlus@earthlink.net](mailto:chezbowlus@earthlink.net)

Experienced developer of tutorials for computer training modules for common office productivity programs. I have practical knowledge of course development, document design, production, and editing. I am interested in contract positions where I can apply my skills and continue learning.

**SKILLS:** Instructions and procedures, document templates, document design and editing, graphic design and layout, basic web design and HTML, developer documentation (databases, Java, C++).

**TOOLS:** Word, Excel, Access, PowerPoint, FrameMaker 6.0, Systat 10, Windows 2000, MacOS 7 through 9.

**Ken Wilson**

Looking for full-time or contract work as technical writer, training course developer, or Web site developer.

These general categories describe the diverse experience I can provide a company from 7 people to Fortune 100. During thirteen years of contract work I was involved in all aspects of documentation development. My last three years with a dot.com gave me the opportunity to become involved in all aspects of a company's operation; tech pubs, marketing, usability design and analysis, Web site development, project management, quality assurance, engineering, and inventory scheduling.

Contact Ken Wilson at 760-431-2429 or view complete experience details at [www.lgtechnology.com/ta](http://www.lgtechnology.com/ta).

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**L. Sharon Bradshaw**
[sbradsh2@san.rr.com](mailto:sbradsh2@san.rr.com)

(858) 586-9496

Seeking technical writer/editor permanent or contact position.

Versatile thinking, quality oriented technical writer and editor specializing in highly technical and complex documentation.

Award winning documentation contributed to over \$100 million in company revenue. Nine years of experience includes researching, interviewing, writing, editing, illustrating, and desktop publishing. Background includes Web content development, script writing, audio and video production. Proven ability to successfully balance multiple projects with competing deadlines.

**TOOLS:** FrameMaker, Word, Acrobat, Power Point, Illustrator, Visio, MIF2GO, HTML, Windows 2000, and Macintosh 9.x.

---

**Faye Rivkin**

[frivkin@aol.com](mailto:frivkin@aol.com)

**Desired:** contract or full-time marketing or technical writer position.

Creative writer, editor and proofreader with experience in different industries, including telecom, pharmaceutical, chemical and medical diagnostics. Coupled with a degree in Chemistry, this detail orientated, project management background allows me to get up to speed quickly in new environments.

My diverse writing portfolio includes user manuals, case studies, Requests for Information, journal articles, training materials and white papers. The project of which I am proudest is the complete rework of a website, including design, user interface and content.

**SOFTWARE EXPERIENCE:** MS Office, Visio, Adobe Acrobat. Currently learning PageMaker.

---

**Erica Ueland**

[eeewe@earthlink.net](mailto:eeewe@earthlink.net)

Writer with background in computer-based training, instructional design, editing, QA, and team management is available for contract or permanent assignment. Eight years experience researching and writing interactive courseware, lesson specifications, objectives, job aids, tests, scripts, storyboards, management plans, manuals, reviews, test plans, QA plans, checklists, government reports, brochures, news releases, proposals, booklets, recommendation reports, and aviation materials.

Recent work is on IMI (Interactive Multimedia Instruction) DoD contract. Active security clearance.

**TOOLS:** Proficient/familiar with Microsoft Office Suite, WordPerfect, PhotoShop, Access, Dreamweaver, Visio, Quark, SnagIt, HTML.

---

**Barbara Dryer**  
[badreyer@hotmail.com](mailto:badreyer@hotmail.com)

Writer/editor with over 10 years of experience developing information for software, hardware, and integrated systems. Specialize in application help, end-user and system administrator guides, tutorials, training manuals, design documents, and functional specifications. Experienced at single-sourcing for multiple output formats, content management, usability, project management, interviewing subject matter experts, gathering requirements, performing task analysis, and working on cross-functional teams.

**TOOLS:** Proficient with Word, RoboHELP/HTML, FrameMaker, WebWorks Publisher, Dreamweaver, hand-coding HTML, and a little JavaScript. Currently learning information architecture, Web programming, XML, and API documentation.

Available part-time as a freelancer or contractor.

---

**Judy Edelblute**  
[judyedel@san.rr.com](mailto:judyedel@san.rr.com)  
(858) 278-0255

Looking for permanent or contract work as a technical writer. My recent experience is in biotech. I have experience preparing software user manuals for technically trained users, biotech Standard Operating Procedures, Quality Control and Material Specifications, Certificates of Analysis, and Performance Qualification validation reports. The project I enjoyed most was writing summaries of Quality Control testing procedures and how they were validated for a Biological License Application submitted to the FDA.

**TOOLS:** Proficient in Word 97, WordPerfect 9.0, Excel 97, Visio, digital cameras, and PowerPoint. Classes in FrameMaker 5.5, Access 97, CorelDraw, Acrobat, Illustrator, and Photoshop.

---

**Sean Griffin**  
[sgriffiner@juno.com](mailto:sgriffiner@juno.com)  
(760) 500-1367

I am an experienced writer/educator/manager seeking a position in the technical communications field. I have eight years experience teaching writing skills, business skills, and computer skills; seven years experience in retail management; a Bachelor of Science degree in Business and Management; and a California Teaching Credential.

**SKILLS:** Research, writing, editing; document design;

development/adaptation of training courses and materials;  
implementation of training in classroom and seminar settings

**TOOLS:** Word, Excel, PowerPoint, Access, Publisher,  
FrontPage, PageMaker; Windows and Macintosh operating  
systems

---

**Lana Walker-Helmuth**

[lane@pe.net](mailto:lane@pe.net)

(909) 302-1794

Chief cook and bottle washer in the communication field available. Extremely versatile, I have broad experience in writing, editing, and publishing across several industries. Recently I've specialized in software user support, including writing user guides, developing Help systems, and designing and producing training materials.

I'm enthusiastic and proactive, show initiative, and always go above and beyond what's expected. For example, while at San Diego City Schools, I initiated, designed, and developed a Web-based performance support system for users of a new student information system.

**TOOLS:** RoboHelp Office, Microsoft Office, Dreamweaver, FrontPage, NetStudio, Image Composer, QuarkXpress, and many more.

---

**Howard Bush**

[howardbush@yahoo.com](mailto:howardbush@yahoo.com)

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## Newsletter Staff



### Signature Staff

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#### Editor

Richard Bradshaw  
[rbradsh2@san.rr.com](mailto:rbradsh2@san.rr.com)

#### Copy Editors

Beth Vollbach  
[bethvollbach@earthlink.net](mailto:bethvollbach@earthlink.net)

Pamela Fridie  
[Fridie\\_Indexing@msn.com](mailto:Fridie_Indexing@msn.com)

#### Illustrator

Ann M. Throckmorton  
[ann.throckmorton@cox.net](mailto:ann.throckmorton@cox.net)

#### Proofreaders

Maureen Edmond  
[medmond@tycoint.com](mailto:medmond@tycoint.com)

Mark Hall  
[mark@hallmarkinterfaces.com](mailto:mark@hallmarkinterfaces.com)

Colene Miller  
[coleen\\_miller@stratagene.com](mailto:coleen_miller@stratagene.com)

Stephanie Strout  
[stephanie.strout@cox.net](mailto:stephanie.strout@cox.net)

Catherine Robinson  
[crobby2@yahoo.com](mailto:crobby2@yahoo.com)

#### HTML Newsletter Designer

Lana Walker-Helmuth  
[lane@pe.net](mailto:lane@pe.net)

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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:

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

or

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

### Article submission

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

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Submissions and letters to the editor are welcomed and should be e-mailed to [rbradsh2@san.rr.com](mailto:rbradsh2@san.rr.com) or sent to the STC address shown above, Attn: Signature Editor. Submissions may be edited to meet space requirements. Submission deadlines are the 1st of the month prior to the publication month. Publication is dependent on space availability.

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## San Diego Administrative Council



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### **Chapter President**

Kris Oden  
[kris.oden@invitrogen.com](mailto:kris.oden@invitrogen.com)

### **VP-Employment**

Ken Wilson  
[kwilson@lgtechnology.com](mailto:kwilson@lgtechnology.com)

### **VP-Finance**

Walter Hanig  
[wdhanig@alumni.rice.edu](mailto:wdhanig@alumni.rice.edu)

### **VP-Programs**

Elaine Tsang  
[elaine@tecstandards.com](mailto:elaine@tecstandards.com)

### **VP-Membership**

Bonnie Blackfield  
[bblackfield@gers.com](mailto:bblackfield@gers.com)

### **VP-Professional Development**

Mary Larkin  
[maryl@castandcrew.com](mailto:maryl@castandcrew.com)

**Student Liaison:** Open

### **Chapter Web Site Manager**

Suzie Hosie  
[suzy@wote.com](mailto:suzy@wote.com)

### **Jobmail Coordinator**

Glenn Voyles  
[gvoyles@san.rr.com](mailto:gvoyles@san.rr.com)

### **Newsletter Editor**

Richard Bradshaw  
[rbradsh2@san.rr.com](mailto:rbradsh2@san.rr.com)

### **Newsletter Copy Editors**

Beth Vollbach  
[bethvollbach@earthlink.net](mailto:bethvollbach@earthlink.net)

Pamela Fridie  
[Fridie\\_Indexing@msn.com](mailto:Fridie_Indexing@msn.com)

### **Newsletter Illustrator**

Ann M. Throckmorton  
[ann.throckmorton@cox.net](mailto:ann.throckmorton@cox.net)

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## Mission Statement



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### STC Mission Statement

Our mission statement is: **Designing the future of technical communication**

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

703.522.4114 (voice)  
703.522.2075 (fax)

Email: [stc@stc.org](mailto:stc@stc.org)  
Web site: [www.stc.org](http://www.stc.org)

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.

o Member: \$110 per year (plus a one-time \$15 enrollment fee)

o Student Member: \$45 per year (enrollment fee not required)

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