

May 2004

Volume 37 No 9



The San Diego Signature



Award of Excellence 2003 Newsletter Competition

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What Every Writer for the Web Should Know

By Lana Walker-Helmuth

Copywriting for online commerce is different than writing for print or radio. Before jumping in, learn what sets it apart and how to write for the Web effectively.

Have You Renewed Your STC Membership?

Maybe you've just forgotten? If you did not pay your dues by March, you were classified as a nonrenewal and are no longer a member of STC. This means that you'll no longer receive benefits: JobMail, STC publications, discounts at meetings/conferences, and so on. If you have questions or need assistance with renewing, please contact Sue Heim at sue_heim@msn.com.

STC's 51st Annual Conference

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

For more information, contact the society office: 703-522-4114 / www.stc.org



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Ambitious Region 8 Conference set for July

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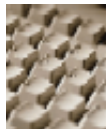
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Sponsorship Opportunities

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Designing the future of technical communication

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The Professional Certificate in Technical Communication





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About the San Diego *Signature*

Signature is the newsletter of the San Diego Chapter of the Society for Technical Communication, a nonprofit professional organization dedicated to educating and advancing the careers of technical communicators. Newsletters are published monthly during the chapter year (September through June).

STC has more than 25,000 members and 150 chapters nationwide. For more information about the San Diego Chapter visit our Web site at www.stc-sd.org or call our hotline at (619) 525-7716. Write to us at:

STC San Diego
PO Box 501261
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Article Submission

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

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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

wghanig@alumni.rice.edu

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

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

VP-Professional Development, Michelle Petersen

mpetersen3@cox.net

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

VP-Employment, Beth Peisic

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

Treasurer and Hotel Liaison, Lance-Robert

treasurer@stc-sd.org

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

VP-Membership, Sue Heim

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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

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

Newsletter Managing Editor, Catherine Robinson

stcsignature@yahoo.com

Catherine is a 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

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

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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.

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2004 Region 8 Conference



Ambitious Region 8 Conference set for July

By Patrick Lufkin

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Contact Patrick Lufkin,
Region 8 Conference
Publicity Manager,
with any questions at
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 through 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 before 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 financial barriers to attending, the conference is offering deep discounts to volunteers. Those interested should contact Anne Mehaffey at 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

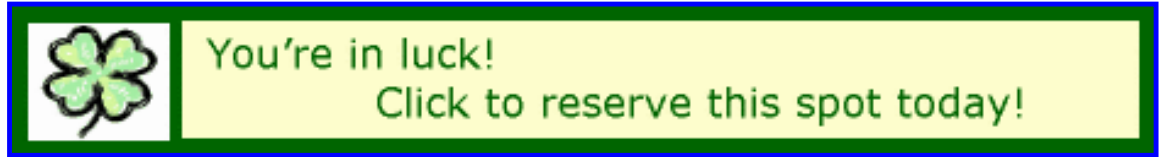
For more information, and for updates as they occur, visit the conference Web site: <http://www.stcregion8conference.org>.

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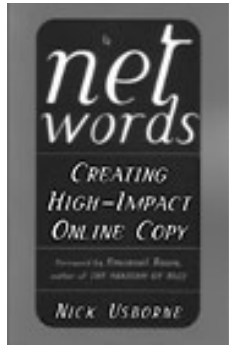
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Visit Nick Usborne's website at www.nickusborne.com

"Initially, I got teased around the office a lot because it's obvious how much my copywriting style has changed since I read Net Words. Yet, the teasing didn't last too long because we started seeing dramatic results. Now everyone wants to borrow my copy of the book." --Jared Spool,

What Every Writer for the Web Should Know

By [Lana Walker-Helmuth](#)

Copywriting for online commerce is different than writing for print or radio. Before jumping in, learn what sets it apart and how to write for the Web effectively.

The first thing every writer for the Web should know is that copywriting for this medium is a different beast. Just as you can't convert a training manual to PDF and call it e-learning, you can't tweak your company's marketing materials for online usability and call it Web copy. Well, you can, but it won't be effective.

According to marketing and online writing expert Nick Usborne, the Web and its history demand a different approach, a different attitude, and a different voice than print or radio. With the inception of the Net, thousands of people were able to freely communicate with others who shared common interests. They talked, as friend to friend, colleague to colleague, basically uncensored and unedited. No one owned this new communication arena, and the language and tone certainly wasn't dictated by Madison Avenue or Strunk and White.

Get real

So, here we have all this open, vibrant, raw communicating going on and in comes the typical business Web site using corporate-speak and copy lifted straight from the glossy brochures. It's like a guy showing up at a beach party in a suit and tie. He doesn't fit; there's a cultural disconnect. Usborne says when companies show an ignorance of and indifference to the culture in which they operate, the natives become irritated and restless.

When writing for the Web, you need to use the correct tone and language for this culture. Does that mean you need to use slang or netspeak, with emoticons and all? No, just take your audience's cues and adjust your message. Taking off the jacket and tie at the beach would be a good start.

Get unique

As a technical communicator, you probably know a lot about information design and usability issues. Through the relentless efforts of people such as Jacob Nielsen, Web sites are getting easier to use. However, as we push for hardware, software and usability standards, more and more business sites look and behave the same, making it hard to differentiate products and services. This presents a challenge.

Usborne asks in his book *Net Words: Creating High-Impact Online Copy*, "If a business online cannot reasonably differentiate itself with its technology, its design, or its prices, what can it do to separate itself from the competition?" His answer: Words.

He cites examples of the welcome message someone receives after signing up at a Web site (I've removed the company names to protect the guilty):

Welcome to Ourcompany.com! Thank you for becoming a registered user of our Web site. We appreciate your business and want to make your online shopping experience fast, easy and fun.

WELCOME to XYZ'S EMAIL SERVICES. We're delighted that you've decided to take advantage of the speed and convenience of XYZ e-mail communications.

Welcome to Can You Keep a Secret's E-mail—exclusive e-mail news! Now that you have signed up to receive our special mailings, you'll be the first to hear about exciting new fashion and media events, special online promotions and more.

Each of these companies has a completely different brand, character and style. But their welcome messages sound alike. They're plain vanilla. The opportunity to differentiate was wasted.

Here's a welcome message Usborne likes. It reflects the company's character, style and unique position in the marketplace.

Well, you've done it now. By opening a Customatrix account, you've just changed the way you're going to buy athletic shoes forever. The surgeon general reports that designing your own cool athletic shoes can be highly addictive.

Why is it important to give your site a unique character? It helps insulate your business from competitors. Technology won't do it. Your competitors most likely can meet or beat any whizbang thing that's put up there. Remember, the pen is mightier than the sword.

Get strong

In addition, work with a voice that has strong character, Usborne advises. "The Internet was built on and thrives on the strong voices of its participants. Online you need to have a strong character in order to stand out from the crowd. The Net is a vast community of voices articulate, witty, ridiculous, and loud. So character counts for something. Being blah guarantees that you'll never be heard."

Businesses in general tend to play it safe in their advertising. They don't want to appear silly, frivolous or foolish. When they carry that same caution to the Web, they appear to be completely characterless.

As a great example of projecting a strong company character, Usborne holds up financial advisors The Motley Fool at fool.com. People love them. Interestingly, the company started this unique character online and then branched to print and radio. Had they started offline, their character and style might not have flown. But it worked wonderfully on the Web, where it fit the culture.

Be warm, friendly and present

Not too many people want to do business with companies they perceive as cold or distant. Yet it seems as though Mr. Spock is doing the copywriting for most business sites.

People will trust and connect more readily with a company that is warm and friendly. The key is to communicate like a real person does. Use simpler language and simpler concepts.

Another powerful approach is to convey to your visitors that someone is actually there and paying attention. Use photos of people in your company, if appropriate. Keep content current. Nothing is worse than going to a site in May and hearing all about the great Valentine's Day deals in progress. Or being urged to "Sign Up Now!" for the long-past seminar.

Keep learning and practicing

Copywriting for the Web is still in its infancy. Even the copywriters who shine in the print world need to learn the unique art and science of writing for Web commerce, if they're given the chance, that is. With chagrin, Usborne relates in *Net Words* that copywriters often are not invited to the table for Web site development and content creation. They aren't considered because of their lack of technological sophistication. That's a shame, because even with the greatest technology behind a Web site, it will be the effective words that rule the day.

In an interesting twist, because technical writers usually do possess technological sophistication, it is they who are more likely to be invited to the table for content creation whether or not they can write effective online marketing copy. Any of us who fall into the category of having no experience in this arena would do well to study copywriting and practice, practice, practice. We'll be in good company as this relatively new type of copywriting unfolds.

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Softy-ware

By [Karen Field Carroll](#)

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The other day I bounced an e-mail message. The bouncing part wasn't surprising--I can be sloppy when typing addresses. But what did catch my eye was the "Message Failure" notice I received. Instead of the requisite "User name not valid" text, the message oozed loving kindness. "I'm terribly sorry. There was a fatal error. I couldn't get your message across, and I've stopped trying. Sorry things didn't work out." In other words, the e-mail server not only bounced my message, it tried to break it to me gently, too. I'm surprised the message didn't say, "You deserve better than this," and "It's not you--It's me."

This isn't the first time I've stumbled across the "soft" in "software," though.

Take, for example, the personal information management (PIM) software demo I recently downloaded. This product caught my eye because, although most PIM packages offer the standard organization features--calendar, document storage, even indexing and search functions--the All in One Personal Organizer (APO) offers something more.

The Help file, which is longer than a Victorian-era love letter, states that not only does the product offer an organizer (calendar, contacts database, and notes) and an image viewer, it also includes "a mind stimulator and integrator useful for reflection, self-analysis, and self-improvement."

Oh, really?

The Help file continues: "APO offers an ideal environment to... help you know yourself better, remind [you of] the essential facts on your life, examine your situation...define objectives and pursue them in a rational way." Further, says Help, you can "develop the capability to choose and make decisions in a rational way...overcome lack of motivation, inhibitions, fears, timidity, unjustified negative feelings"--as opposed to justified negative feelings--"and other psychological difficulties." All in a

rational way!

Now, it may not surprise you to learn that I've spent a number of years in therapy trying to accomplish all of the above. Am I to believe a software package could've done this for me?

I had to do it. I called my shrink, a man whose house payment I've made many times over.

He greeted me with a cheery "Karen!"

I got right to the point. "I found a new software package," I said. "I'm thinking of buying it. But first I need to know something: Can you help me 'know myself better, overcome lack of motivation, timidity, unjustified negative feelings and other psychological difficulties?' And can you," I continued, "help me 'analyze and adjust my aspirations and expectations'? And can you do all this 'in a rational way'?"

There was a long pause. Perhaps the good doctor wondered if his 12 years of medical training were for naught in the face of a \$29 piece of shareware.

"I wouldn't even know where to begin," he said. "See you Tuesday?"

"I'll get back to you."

Frankly, I'm not sure I welcome this kid-glove trend in software. After all, I left my career in exercise physiology for computer work because I ran out of polite ways to tell people they were overweight, not because they had a rare, undocumented metabolic disorder, but because they ate two donuts for breakfast every morning and used their treadmill for a clothes hanger. Simply put, I lacked the people skills to work with human beings. But if being a tech writer means I have to let my computer explore the deeper recesses of my brain, I'd rather go back to telling folks about the realities of weight management.

That decided, I removed the APO demo from my computer. Then I sent my psychiatrist an e-mail to tell him his job was safe. As a test, I mistyped his address. The Message Failure notice I received contained no hint of loving kindness whatsoever. Whew.

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Editor's Desk


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Get ready to spring forward

By [Catherine Robinson](#), Managing Editor

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.

As spring arrives, it's time to set the clocks forward, pay taxes, and clean house. This also is a good time to dig out that list of goals you set for yourself earlier in the year to see how far you've come toward completing that list. It's a good time for a reality check.

After all, if you took the time to set goals at the beginning of the year, then it's worth making sure you're progressing through your list, at least part way. If you're not making progress accomplishing some of your goals, then reevaluate why you added those things to your list in the first place and whether you want to continue in the same direction. Be realistic. Ask yourself whether you were too ambitious, you were just slacking off, or whether your priorities have changed. Ponder what you can now do to make advancement toward the most valued goals.

After digging out my list of goals, I see that I have completed a few major goals on my list. For example, I learned more about managing people and projects by taking the project management course from UC Berkeley extension and managing the *Signature* newsletter. I have stayed on track and am making progress.

If you haven't taken the time to check your list of goals, you might surprise yourself with how much you have accomplished. And remember, there is still half a year left to meet those goals!

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A Manager's Approach to the International Conference

By [Walter Hanig](#), President

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As I write this, the annual international STC conference is only a few weeks away. I budgeted the expense and provided the justification based on sessions I'm likely to attend and how they can benefit my employer. (Of course, you could argue that getting me out of the office is, per se, benefit enough!)

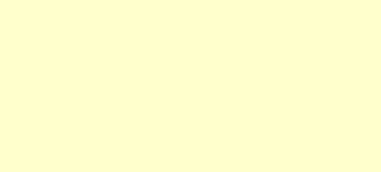
I plan to spend my time in three categories of sessions: strategic planning, management topics, and tools. This approach offers something for each half of my brain. The sessions relating to strategic planning will help me analyze business trends from the perspective of a centralized technical publications group. The management sessions will help me learn from others' experiences and provide new methods for understanding different personalities and working more effectively with them. The tools sessions help me make software decisions now while considering the future. They also help me stay current with tools used elsewhere in the technical communication market, just in case. Besides, they're fun!

So, what are some sessions I plan to attend?

- **Lessons Learned from Offshore Outsourcing.** I need to understand the costs, benefits, issues, and experiences of others to be prepared when this topic arises, as I think it inevitably will.
- **Resolving Team Conflict.** All teams have conflicts, and the techniques I've used previously don't always work. There's much to be learned from other managers.
- **Developing a Documentation Quality Tracking System.** As much as we in technical communications believe in quality and recognize it when we see it, we must find ways to demonstrate

quality in terms meaningful to our sponsors.

- **Challenges in Information Modeling.** Information modeling is one of the key concepts that precede content management, one of the accelerating trends in our profession.
- **Choosing a Help Authoring Tool.** I want to get beyond the advertising and hype to learn what tools are appropriate for what problems.
- **Low-cost Content Management.** Even if content management is inevitable, I want to know how we can evaluate the costs and benefits without a huge investment.
- **Getting Excited about Change.** We're in the middle of multiple changes in our document development processes. Learning how to persuade overworked teams to embrace change is a challenge to be overcome.
- **Planning for Tomorrow: Trends, Technologies, and Skill Sets**
- **Strategies for Building Relationships.** We need to learn how to expand the good SME relationships to marketing, product management, and others on whom we depend and serve. (Besides, it's good to support local speakers from Write on the Edge.)
- **Introducing Windows "Longhorn" Help Technology.** What's next after WinHLP, HTMLHelp, WebWorks Help?
- **Implementing Content Management.** My sense is that Content Management is where XML was a few years ago: lots of talk and a growing amount of implementation.
- **XML Single Sourcing in Nokia Networks.** I'm interested in whether authoring directly in XML provides the flexibility for creating print documents as well as the various online formats at any saving or additional benefits over FrameMaker or Word-based approaches.
- **Information Architecture: What's in It for Me?** I want to know what information architecture means to others and how its concepts can be implemented without bringing the document development cycle to a halt.



At the June chapter meeting, ask me whether I got what I wanted from these sessions.

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May 2004

Chapter Membership



What's new in membership?

By [Sue Heim, VP Membership](#)

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Welcome to our new and reinstated members!

New Members

Lauren L. Alden

Christoper O. Carmichael

Scott J. Coleman

Claire Condra

Valiena Dickerson

Marie Flacassier

James N. Guarino

John Harrington

Joe Hineman

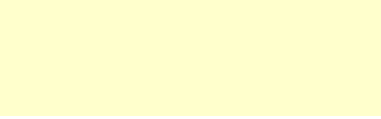
Christine King

C.A. Mejdrich

Nancy Ogihara

Joel D. Pinlac

Reinstated Members



Donald M. Rasky

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May 2004

Professional Development



RoboHelp Workshop: RoboHelp out of the Box

By [Michelle Petersen, VP Professional Development](#)

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So you've bought RoboHelp, and you've installed it on your computer. Now what? Do you want to convert a Word or WinHelp project into a new HTML Help project? Do you have a new Help project that you'd like to create from scratch? If you aren't sure what to do next, this 4-hour course is just what you need to jump-start your Help project. We'll discuss conversion strategies, design issues, capabilities, and other decisions that will help you work most effectively with RoboHelp. We'll discuss tricks to making your work in RoboHTML easier, and we'll also talk about when to use a particular Help output format. Lin Laurie will demonstrate RoboHelp and answer questions about your projects in an open forum afterwards. If you are having a problem in your current RoboHTML project, you're encouraged to bring it in on a laptop to discuss either in class or afterwards.

Who Should Take This Class?

If you are new to RoboHTML Help, this class is for you. If you have worked with RoboHelp but not RoboHTML, you'll find this class very helpful.

About Lin Laurie

Lin Laurie has over nineteen years of technical writing experience. A former certified RoboHelp trainer and community college teacher, Lin is a veteran computer professional. Her online Help clients include Microsoft, the FBI, Blue Cross, Memec, Intuit, and many other small and large companies. Lin also spent a number of years with Joe Welinske doing online Help, a chapter in one of his books, the WinWriters Conferences, and the Online Help Journal. She currently runs Lin Laurie and Associates in San Diego, where she specializes in technical writing and online Help development.

Seminar Cost

- \$29 for STC members
- \$39 for non-members

Date, Time, and Reservations

Saturday, May 29, 2004

9 a.m.--1 p.m.

To reserve your space, e-mail Michelle Petersen (mpetersen3@cox.net). Space is limited!

Send payment (made out to STC San Diego) to:

RoboHelp Workshop
c/o STC San Diego
PO Box 501261
San Diego, CA 92150-1261

Location

Multilingual Translations, Inc.
1510 Front Street, Suite 200
San Diego, CA 92101

www.multitrans.com

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May 2004

Press Release



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Technical Standards Names Worst Manual

Annual contest taps into universal frustration caused by poor documentation and underscores the importance of clear technical writing.

Technical Standards, Southern California's source for specialized documentation staffing and technical writing, announces the winning entry in its fourth annual Worst Manual Contest. This year's \$100 prize goes to Rhonda Bracey of South Perth, Western Australia for her submission of a two-page segment of a user's guide.

"The frustration that's caused by a poorly written manual is almost a universal experience. Poor documentation can cause more confusion than comprehension and can lead to liability issues and hidden costs for companies," said Michelle Wier of Technical Standards. "On the other hand, good product documentation results in satisfied repeat customers, reduced costs, and limited liability exposure for companies."

With entries solicited from the 25,000+ membership of the Society for Technical Communication, Technical Standards' Worst Manual Contest is designed to underscore the importance of clear technical writing for everything from consumer products, computer hardware and software, to employee handbooks.

This Year's Winner: the "Safety Section" of a Commercial Air Conditioner's User's Guide

This year's worst manual is a section of a user's guide for a commercial product marketed to the general public. Rhonda Bracey's entry consisted of only the two-page Safety Section, but that was enough! As Rhonda puts it, "Translator beware!" If the phrase, "to have the observance without fail to prevent the damage to harm and the property beforehand to the person who use this product and other persons" doesn't scare you, then some of the other text will!

The symbol key alone provided much material for the staff at Technical Standards to question. For example, the symbol key twice listed a

symbol that wasn't referenced in the text, and failed to list a symbol that was referenced. In another instance, the same symbol was used for both Warning and Caution, each representing very different consequences. The difference between possible death compared to minor injury or material damage seems worth having its own distinction. There were also some amusing symbol descriptions such as, "Attention rousing," "Prohibition" and "Compulsion."

A few excerpts:

"Please do not put the one embarrassed because it gets wet under the air conditioner."

"To apply the cold wind to the body for a longtime and so as to not exist about cooling too much."

"Do not blow the wind to animals and plants directly. It occasionally causes a bad influence for animals and plants to be exerted."

As in this case, poorly written manuals for consumer products can often be attributed to translation problems. Clear, accurate translations are extremely important when communicating health and safety warnings associated with operating or assembling a product.

"For many end users, bad documentation amounts to nothing more than an inconvenience and possibly a poor impression of the company," said Wier. "But for companies, the results can affect the bottom line in terms of overloaded help lines, reduced revenues from dissatisfied customers who won't come back, and increased liability."

To view the top entries and more information about Technical Standards' fourth annual Worst Manual Contest, go to www.tecstandards.com.

About Technical Standards

Technical Standards provides documentation writing and staffing services to Southern California companies in a wide range of industries. Carefully assessing the specific needs of its clients, Technical Standards provides a customized fit for each job by handpicking candidates from its pool of writers. When handling outsourced projects, Technical Standards produces clear, accurate, and understandable documentation to help ensure end-user satisfaction and reduced liability.

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May 2004

Chapter Meetings


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[Click here for May 12 meeting details.](#)

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

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

April meeting attendance numbers:

41 attendees
 1 cancellation
 5 no-shows
 12 used PayPal



Walter Hanig, President & Sue Heim, VP Membership

May Chapter Meeting Preview

Indexing: The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly

By [Michael Cárdenas, VP Programs](#)

One of the most important forms of navigation for our users happens to be one of the least favorite things that a technical communicator needs to do. Whether you are a novice or expert at indexing, join us at May's STC meeting.

Sue Heim will provide information on how to create a great index, things to avoid, and how to "think like a user," providing real-world examples.

About Sue

Our speaker, **Sue Heim**, is currently VP of Membership. Sue is a consultant in San Diego, currently employed full-time at Akonix Systems, Inc. She has over 15 years' experience as a technical writer and online Help author. She has indexed online documents for many companies, including Fleet Bank and Hewlett Packard. Sue is currently serving as Assistant Conference Director for the 2004 Region 8 Conference to be held in Davis, July 2004.

April Chapter Meeting Highlights

Featured Topic: "Is the Independent Life Right for You?"

By [Eric Hurd](#)

San Diego chapter meeting - Wednesday, April 14

San Diego President, Walter Hanig, opened the meeting by inviting those looking for work to stand and describe their skills and desired positions. He then asked members with job announcements to describe the positions and desired skills.

Walter then welcomed first-time attendees and asked them their reasons for coming and what they hoped to get from the meeting.

Announcements



Michael Cárdenas, VP Programs



Featured speaker: Deborah Gill-Hesselgrave

Meeting announcements included the following.

- Parking at the Red Lion Hanalei is free for STC members. On your way out, be sure to tell the parking attendant that you attended the STC meeting.
- Don't forget to pay your dues! Members who have yet to renew will be contacted by Sue Heim.
- The program for the Region 8 conference will be approved by May 1. You can get a discount for early registration through the end of May.
- The STC San Diego Chapter's board will be reconstituted soon. We still need volunteers. If you are interested in participating on the board, please contact Walter.
- Sue Heim will present "Indexing: The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly" at our next regular meeting on Wednesday, May 12.

Presentation Highlights

The featured topic for the April meeting was "Is the Independent Life Right for You?" presented by Deborah Gill-Hesselgrave.

Deborah began by saying that the information she would be presenting about becoming an independent consultant is readily applied to all types of job situations, including full-time employees.

- There are different forms of contracting out there: consultants who work with senior-level employees and executives on overarching concerns; contractors who perform piecework in multiple roles; and full-time employees who work for small companies that offer consulting or contracting services.
- Self employment, although difficult at times, can be very rewarding. In a survey conducted by Deborah, colleagues described self-employment as "limitless achievement," "freedom from the corporate maze," "life as it is supposed to be lived," "feast or famine," "freedom/fun/challenging," and others.
- Independents must not only master their products and services, but must also be able to develop their business,

manage financial concerns, and handle human resources, marketing, and operations/administration. If you do not plan to cover any of these areas yourself, be sure to develop a plan to cover them.

- Part of Deborah's research included speaking with CEOs and executives about where folks who might need technical writers meet and when they are most receptive to proposals.
- Shoot for 30% of your time finding new business.
- Hang out with HR people. Ask questions about non-disclosures and tax matters.
- Be sensitive to the company's concerns.
- Most people do not have the bandwidth to absorb the content of your portfolio. Be prepared to hear their problem and start solving their problem right away. Speak in terms that make them feel that you can solve their problem.
- If you want to collect material for your portfolio, be sure to ask ahead of time when you are negotiating for the job.
- Stay on top of getting paid. Try to link the payment schedule to the deliverable schedule.
- Ask the employer to write the contract. The writer is responsible for the meaning.
- For additional resources, you can download Deborah's slides from this site:
<http://stc-sd.org/artifacts/IndependentLife.zip>

Raffle Winners

- Michael Cardénas -- STC business card holder
- Hilary Johnson -- Magic cube (office supplies)
- Matt Kaster -- STC business card holder
- Deborah Gill-Hesselgrave -- Magic cube

- Noreen Norris -- Wally Buck (redeemable for a free San Diego STC dinner and presentation)

We'll see you next month!



Hilary Johnson



Matt Kaster



Deborah Gill-Hesselgrave



Noreen Norris

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May 2004

Membership Drive



Join STC

By [Sue Heim, VP Membership](#)

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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: 1) enhance the professionalism of the members and the status of the profession; 2) provide information through publications, reports, and conferences; and 3) report new communication technologies, methods, and applications.

In addition to the publications you will receive, you will have many opportunities to further your own education by attending dinner presentations, seminars, and conferences. You can submit your work in our annual competitions and receive recognition and awards from your

peers. And you will have plenty of opportunity to network—to meet fellow STC members.

Benefits of Membership

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

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

How to Join

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

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

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

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

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

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May 2004

Sponsorship Opportunities



Sponsorship Opportunities

By [Michael Cárdenas, VP Programs](#)

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[Contact Michael](#)

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

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

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

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

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