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For information about copyrights, reprinting articles, and submitting arti-

cles, see the article submission policies on page 5.

This printer-friendly version of the ActiveVOICE includes the same content as the online newsletter on the chapter web site (www.stc-sf.org). The text has been reformatted to reduce the number of pages required to print the newsletter.

December 2004 Meeting -- Holiday Party at the London Wine Bar

The holiday party is on Wednesday, December 15, 2004, from 6:00 pm to 8:00 pm at the London Wine Bar in San Francisco's financial district. For details about the location and instructions for purchasing tickets, visit www.stc-sf.org/stc-meetings.htm.

It's Party Time!

The San Francisco STC is bringing the year to a rousing finale with a special holiday party at the London Wine Bar in downtown San Francisco. The price of admission for this special event (\$15 for STC members and students and \$20 for non-members) includes hors d'oeuvres and wine service for two hours. We will also have door prizes.

This will be our last meeting at the London Wine Bar. Come experience the ambiance of the place we love so well one more time before we move to the Elephant & Castle in January.

Celebrate the end of another year. It's a great chance to renew acquaintances with other technical communicators and to meet some new people.

How Do I Sign Up?

Because we have to pre-order from the London Wine Bar, it is important that you register in advance by noon on December 14, 2004. To get your ticket, go to www.stc-sf.org. Click on the link to

Acteva under "reserve now." Tickets are \$15 for STC members and students and \$20 for non-members. We will also have some tickets available at the door. And we've decided to drop the \$5 surcharge for walk-in purchases! So come on by!

The First Timers Coupon is not valid for this special event.

For more information, visit the chapter web site at www.stc-sf.org. If you have any questions about this party, send an email to info@stc-sf.org.

January 2005 Meeting -- An Overview of Trends, Tools, and Technologies in Software User Assistance

Presented by Joe Welinske

The January meeting is on Wednesday, January 19, 2005, from 6:00 pm to 8:30 pm at the Elephant & Castle in San Francisco's financial district. For details about the location and instructions for purchasing tickets, visit www.stc-sf.org/stc-meetings.htm.

The January meeting is at our new location: the Elephant & Castle, 424 Clay Street (near Battery). The E&C is just a couple blocks away from our former location at the London Wine Bar.

About the Presentation

The application of technical communication skills to the development of software user assistance has grown immensely in the past twenty years. This specialization is very fulfilling and challenging and technical communicators are finding their role in the software development process to be increasingly valued.

User assistance is much more than "Help." It encompasses a wide range of skills and technologies that are com-

bined to improve the software user's experience.

We contribute through wizards, tutorials, and web-based training. We develop and populate knowledge bases and content management systems. Printed manuals and their PDF equivalents are still an important element of our documentation sets. Many of us are now embedding helpful content directly into the user interface. We are involved with usability testing, localization, testing, quality assurance, and branding.

This presentation provides a cutting-edge overview of the latest trends in software user assistance, defines the key terminology, highlights the most important technologies, and offers predictions on future directions of our field. The session should be of interest to technical communicators of all backgrounds and experience levels.

About the Speaker

Joe Welinske is the president of WritersUA, formerly known as WinWriters. WritersUA is a company devoted to providing training and



information for user assistance professionals. The WritersUA/WinWriters Conference draws hundreds of attendees each year from around the world to share the latest in user assistance design and implementation. The free content on the WritersUA web site attracts over 20,000 visitors each month. Joe has been involved with software documentation development since 1984. Together with Scott Boggan and David Farkas, Joe authored two editions of the popular and pioneering book *Developing Online Help for Windows*. He has also taught online Help courses at the University of Washington and UC Santa Cruz. Joe received a B.S. in Industrial Engineering from the University of Illinois in 1981, and a M.S. in Adult Instructional Management from Loyola University in 1987.

September 2004 Meeting -- Single Sourcing, Structured Authoring, and XML

Presented by David Knopf

Reviewed by Alison S. Gemmell

David Knopf, President and founder of Knopf Online, introduced several complex topics at our September 15th chapter meeting, and he did it in a way that helped all the pieces fall into place. Comments from members ranged from: "Now I understand where I fit in the single source process," to "I liked learning how FrameMaker's variables and conditional text relate to entities and attributes in XML." David Knopf successfully took us from a 30,000-foot overview to the 3-foot details in under two hours.

Knopf provided evidence of two trends in technical writing: Document-based single sourcing is now robust and stable, even in small- and medium-sized publications groups; and the XML revolution has begun in earnest for medium- and large-sized publications groups.

Single Sourcing -- Flexible, Automated Output

"Single sourcing is not the thing to start on Tuesday and have it up and running on Friday," says Knopf. "Just say no to quick and dirty solutions such as repurposing content and tweaking the output." To succeed and save money, single sourcing requires a disciplined, template-driven approach to content authoring. What is single sourcing? It is a way of organizing information in documents or in information objects so that different outputs can be generated automatically from the same information without having to tweak it. Outputs may include different formats, such as print, PDF, Help, or web pages. Or outputs may target different audiences, such as programmers, end users, or system administrators. Finally, single sourcing may be used for different versions of products, such as Lite versus Pro. "It's a myth to say that writing is different for print versus online help," says Knopf. "It's also a myth to say that single sourcing is too expensive."

Document-Based Single Sourcing.

Implementing document-based single sourcing is reasonably inexpensive and relatively easy. Authors write in standard editing tools such as Word or FrameMaker and use conversion tools to generate online output. Conversion tools include Mif2Go, WebWorks® Publisher, and Doc-to-Help®. For approximate numbers for costs and schedules, Knopf estimated the an expense of \$5,000 to \$50,000 and two to six months time to implement a document-based single source solution.

Database-Driven Single Sourcing.

In contrast, database-driven single sourcing involves significant implement costs and is time-consuming to implement. It requires a rigid, structured approach to authoring and special skills and tools. But, information objects stored in a database provide virtually unlimited flexibility for producing different outputs. "Don't write documents anymore," says Knopf. "Write information objects." AuthorIT and Veredus by Rascal Software are two tools used for database-driven single sourcing.

Summary. Single sourcing is now firmly established as a recommended method for writing and publishing small, medium, and large publication projects. One-time setup costs plus recurring costs result in significant savings by the second and third revision cycles of projects written in one language. And for projects involving more than one language, cost savings are immediate, affecting the first cycle's bottom line.

Single sourcing means writing once, reviewing once, then re-using information objects in multiple output formats. Single sourcing requires templates, strict adherence to style guides, and up-front planning that pays off in the end.

Structured Authoring and XML

Structured authoring can be done without XML, but XML cannot be done without structured authoring. Structured authoring is a concept, whereas XML is

a technology that enables structured authoring.

Structured Authoring. Structured authoring is a method of writing and arranging content that relies on rules and automatic validation to enforce the rules. Structured authoring separates content from presentation; information is labeled according to its purpose. For example, a word and its definition may be labeled a glossary term and a glossary definition in structured authoring.

This type of writing may restrict or constrain you at first, but it saves time in the end by forcing documentation to be complete, consistent, and designed for re-purposing. Editors no longer have to worry about missing parts and can spend more time on awkwardly written sentences or misinformation. Writers spend time on content and are no longer permitted to apply formatting.

Benefits of structured authoring include improved document quality, improved author productivity, and enhanced content sharing and re-use.

XML. XML is a platform-neutral, vendor-neutral, open standard metalanguage that stores structured content in text files. XML separates content from format. Formatting is determined by an information architect or template designer, and authors cannot override the automatically applied formatting. There are no exceptions. In XML, information is divided and subdivided into logical parts that follow structure and hierarchy. XML makes us think about and identify the rules of structure and hierarchy ahead of time, then adhere to the rules for a big payoff in the end. XML documents are written to follow rules, and you can't break the rules if you are an author or editor.

Knopf showed us an example of an unstructured document, a formatted recipe, versus a structured document, a recipe written in XML. In the XML recipe, types of information such as the number of people served and individual ingredients were tagged according to content. Knopf used the recipe example to explain technical details related to XML

such as definition documents, elements, attributes, entities, and syntax.

XML Tools. XML software for authors includes the expensive Epic Editor as well as the less expensive FrameMaker 7.x, XMetaL Author, xmlspy Enterprise / Pro, XMLmind, and Serna. For information architects who develop definition documents such as DTDs (Document Type Definitions), tools include FrameMaker 7.x, XMetaL Developer, xmlspy Pro / Home, and Epic.

Summary. In structured authoring, there is more planning up front, but you save money right away when you start on your revision cycles. Structured authoring and XML are not right for every organization or project, particularly not lone writers. They cannot be implemented in a week or even a month, but despite their complexity they are doable. For medium- and large-sized publication groups, they provide significant measure benefits such as improved content quality, improved author productivity, content re-use, and cost savings. You can set up the system using an information architect, a template designer, and authors, and information architect and the template designer can be the same person. After the initial system is defined, authors and editors take it from there until a major change in content or formatting is required.

Take-Home Messages

My take-home message as an author was: I can write and review my information once, then request print, online help, and web output without tweaking, formatting, or exceptions.

My take-home message as an information architect or template designer was: I can help companies organize their information, then separate content from format for maximum flexibility.

Alison S. Gemmell is a senior technical writer with a chemical engineering degree. As an engineer, Alison writes technical reports for site cleanups, permit applications for air, water, and hazardous waste treatment, and pollution prevention plans for manufacturing

processes. As a technical communicator, Alison took courses in XML and XSL and would like to work on an XML structured authoring project someday.

October 2004 Meeting -- Fitting WebWorks Publisher into a Publications Workflow

*Presented by Steve Homer
Reviewed by Flo Sparks*

Steve Homer, a consultant who specializes in setting up FrameMaker and Webworks processes in addition to developing documentation, provided an engaging overview of WebWorks Publisher at the October 20th STC meeting.

In a nutshell, WebWorks Publisher converts FrameMaker or Word files to HTML, MS, HTML Help, WinHelp, WebWorks Help, and more. It is basically a mapping tool that lets you translate the structure in your FrameMaker files (paragraphs, characters, tables, cross references, etc.) into corresponding structure in the output format that you want. The bottom line? -- WebWorks Publisher is a good alternative to RoboHelp and can be purchased for about \$850-\$950.

The major benefit of WebWorks Publisher is that it allows single sourcing: you can get multiple outputs without changing your source.

Now for the downside, Steve admitted it's a rather complex program and you will probably need to spend some time to get the templates to look the way you want them to. Lone writers who don't enjoy setting up tools may want to consider the following:

- Use RoboHelp for Word
- Avoid customizing the output
- Use a consultant

Steve offered the following wisdom to the STC participants: "Deliver clean source files to ensure smooth conversions." When asked "How do we know when a source file is clean enough?" Steve offered the following advice:

- Use the mapping dialog box to find styles that don't have formatting defined
- Look at the output
- Have a production specialist conduct a review

If you would like to download a copy of Steve's presentation, visit his web site at www.homertechpubs.com.

Flo Sparks is a member of the San Francisco Chapter STC.

President's Notes and News

By Susan Becker

Good-by London Wine Bar! Hello Elephant & Castle!

On December 15th we will hold our fifth Holiday Party and our final gathering at the London Wine Bar, where we have been meeting since at least early 1996. We plan to go out with a pleasant evening of enjoying the open beverage service (yes, that includes wine), talking with old friends, and making a few new contacts. I hope you can make it. Perhaps you'll even win a door prize, thanks once again to the hard work of volunteer Keith Albert.

On January 19, we will hold our first meeting at the Elephant & Castle. The topic should be a good one, with Joe Welenski on "Trends, Tools, and Technologies in Software User Assistance." Joe knows what he's talking about. He's the head of WritersUA (formerly known as WinWriters), which is holding its thirteenth annual conference in Las Vegas March 20-23.

But I think the star of the evening (sorry, Joe) will be our new venue:

The Elephant and Castle
424 Clay Street
San Francisco

People keep asking me: "What's it like?" Well, the E&C is a bar. When a group of chapter leaders took a field trip to check it out before our August meeting, we were greeted at the front door by a couple of young women who offered us free

T-shirts and coupons to sample vodka at the bar (though this is apparently not a normal occurrence).

Being all business, of course, we declined (well, I admit, I took a T-shirt) and went on downstairs (accessible by elevator) to see the meeting room. Unlike our current meeting location, it is not a wine cellar. It is much like any other meeting room you may have seen at a conference in a hotel. (It is actually part of the Club Headquarters Hotel.) So, the romantic atmosphere will be lacking, but we will be able to hear and see the presentations more easily, we will still have hors d'oeuvres (though it will be pub grub rather than LWB eclectic), and you will still be able to buy a drink at the bar upstairs. I hope to see you there (and downstairs at the meeting, too).

Scholarship Alert!

Here's an announcement for you students out there. Through its National Scholarship, the STC awards \$1,000 scholarships to undergraduate and graduate students who are pursuing established degree programs in some area of technical communication. The deadline is February 15. For more information, see www.stc.org/scholarshipInfo_national.asp.

New Leaders on the Way

This is the time of year when we form a committee to nominate officers to run our chapter from July 2005 through June of 2006. If you would like to join our leadership group as an officer, a manager, or a team member or if you would like to nominate someone else, please let me know.

Our leadership team keeps our chapter's programs and services active. We volunteer because we enjoy it and because it's good for our professional development: we learn new skills, improve our resumes, eat pizza, network, and so on. But we're always looking for new helpers, and we can't all keep doing this forever.

Right now, we are looking for people to join our web team. If you are interested

in volunteering, send me an email at info@stc-sf.org.

Susan Becker is a technical communicator and online help developer. She has 16 years of experience working primarily as a contractor in software development for the financial services and human resources industries.

New and Transferred Members

We welcome the following new members to the chapter.

New members:

- Jeffrey Erickson
- Beverly Wagstaff

Transferred from other chapters:

- Cindy C. Bailey
- Michael Mauzy

When Saying NO Is Best

By Howard Miller

I don't mean saying NO to drugs or dangerous situations! I mean saying NO to commitments, people you care about, or deadlines that would stress you out.



Over the last month, I've had several clients who were stressed because they were over committed. They had too much to do, but still took on more for fear of not looking good, of "getting in trouble," or just because they were trying to be a "nice" person.

What they didn't realize is that not only were they hurting themselves, but they were also setting themselves up for looking bad, which could lead to the trouble they were trying to avoid or to being perceived as not a nice person!

By saying NO to something, you are giving an opportunity for YES somewhere else. It means there are more opportune things for you to be doing at that time, and it gives someone else the opportunity or challenge to handle whatever it is you declined.

When you say NO instead of YES when you are over committed:

- You are taking care of yourself and solidifying more success for what you are currently doing
- You are giving a gift to someone. What you said NO to can be an opportunity for someone else
- You are opening the possibilities for yourself for a more appropriate and timely YES!

Howard Miller has been training, consulting and coaching for over 15 years. In his extensive work with corporate and individual clients, he brings about in people the ability to supply capability for action. Howard firmly believes that if people were more accountable to themselves, they would have more self-respect, which ultimately leads to a better world. Howard Miller is founder of Howard Miller Consulting at www.hsmillerconsulting.com.

ActiveVOICE Article Submission Policies

The ActiveVOICE welcomes articles from technical communicators. Having a published article is a good addition to your portfolio. This document describes the guidelines for submitting an article to this newsletter. If you have any questions, you can email the editor at newsletter@stc-sf.org.

Publication Information

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Submission Guidelines

Submit all articles via email to the newsletter editor (newsletter@stc-sf.org) in either of the following ways:

- Microsoft Word format as an attachment.

- Plain ASCII text in the message body or as an attachment.

If your article contains copyrighted materials, you are responsible for obtaining permission for the ActiveVOICE to publish the copyrighted materials.

Please include the following with your article:

- Your name. Please spell it exactly as you want it published.
- The title of the article. If you get to choose the title, make it descriptive and inviting. When readers are looking at the front page of the online newsletter, the title is the only basis they have for deciding whether to click on the link to your article.

NOTE: For recurring monthly articles, such as reviews of meetings, you do not get to choose the title.

- Headings. Please include headings so that it is easy for busy readers to scan your article (just as you do when reading technical publications). Headings are especially important when people are reading online. If your article does not have headings, the editor may add them.
- A brief bio (no more than 50 to 75 words). This bio is a chance for you to say a little bit about yourself that you want to share with the world.

Articles Published

The ActiveVOICE publishes the following kinds of articles:

- Reviews of previous meetings. Each edition contains reviews of previous meetings. Normally, they should be no more than 1,000 words, but some meetings may require a longer article for adequate coverage. The purpose of these articles is to provide a summary of the meeting for those who did not attend.
- Columns by STC officials. To keep our audience informed of what is happening with the STC, the newslet-

ter accepts articles from STC officers at the chapter, regional, and international levels.

- Publicity for STC events and other professional organizations. The newsletter accepts publicity articles for conferences, seminars, and other events sponsored by the STC, an STC chapter, an STC SIG, and closely related non-profit organizations.
- Articles related to technical communication. The newsletter accepts software reviews, book reviews, information about industry trends, tips on how to use popular software packages, and other such articles. To be accepted for publication, the primary purpose of the article must be to inform and educate, rather than to market a particular product or service. If you have an idea for an article, please contact the newsletter editor at newsletter@stc-sf.org.

Editorial Discretion

The Society for Technical Communication, San Francisco Chapter reserves the right to edit all submitted articles for length and appropriateness. The chapter is the sole arbiter of whether to accept an article for publication and when to publish it, either in whole or in part.

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