

In This Edition

Announcements of Upcoming Meetings

- » October 2004 Meeting -- Fitting WebWorks Publisher Into a Publications Workflow, presented by Steve Homer (page 1)
- » November 2004 Meeting -- Information Architecture for Technical Communicators, presented by Linda Urban (page 1)

Reviews of Previous Meetings

- » July 2004 Meeting -- Your Writing Samples Portfolio: A Personal Sales Kit & Career History, presented by Lu Rehling and reviewed by Marc Smircich (page 2)
- » August 2004 Meeting -- Developing a Healthy Response to Stress, presented by Richard Pinneau and reviewed by Alison Gemmell (page 3)

Chapter News

- » In Memoriam Andy Tanner, by Susan Becker (page 4)
- » President's Notes and News, by Susan Becker (page 4)
- » New, Reinstated, Transferred, and Senior Members (page 5)

Columns

- » The Last Row of the Plane, by Howard Miller (page 5)

The ActiveVOICE is published six times a year in February, April, June, August, October, and December by the Society for Technical Communication, San Francisco Chapter, PO Box 2708, San Francisco, CA 94126, www.stc-sf.org. The editor is Marc Smircich (newsletter@stc-sf.org). For information about copyrights, reprinting articles, and submitting articles, see the article submission policies on page 6.

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

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

Presented by Steve Homer

The October meeting is on Wednesday, October 20, 2004, from 6:00 pm to 8:30 pm at the London Wine Bar in San Francisco's financial district. For details about the meeting location and instructions for purchasing tickets, visit www.stc-sf.org/stc-meetings.htm.

About the Presentation

This session offers a brief overview of WebWorks Publisher Pro 2003 and describes how this tool fits into a publications workflow.

We will address the following questions:

- How do you choose the best help authoring tool for your situation?
- Are you doing "single-sourcing" if you use WebWorks?
- What types of publications workflows lend themselves to single-sourcing?
- What types of organizations will find single-sourcing irritating?
- How does the size of your organization affect how a help authoring tool fits into your workflow?
- What kinds of customizations can you make to WebWorks output?

About the Speaker

Steve Homer (www.homertechpubs.com) is a consultant and freelance technical writer who specializes in setting up single-sourcing workflows for clients. He also writes documentation for engineering software and hardware applications. Steve is a Senior Member of the STC and has been a technical writer since 1984.



November 2004 Meeting -- Information Architecture for Technical Communicators

Presented by Linda Urban

The November meeting is on Wednesday, November 17, 2004, from 6:00 pm to 8:30 pm at the London Wine Bar in San Francisco's financial district. For details about the meeting location and instructions for purchasing tickets, visit www.stc-sf.org/stc-meetings.htm.

About the Presentation

How is being an "information architect" different from being a "technical communicator"? Both consider audience needs, identify information to be included, analyze existing content, determine information structure and organization, and determine how to make information "findable" for users. But for information architects, the work often stops at describing the architecture, rather than developing the content itself, and the deliverables may have names like site map, wire frames, taxonomies, metadata, and controlled vocabularies. For those who are new to IA, this may sound jargony and technical, but there are plenty of parallels in technical communication (think documentation plan, outline, sample topics, terminology list, index entries).

Often someone with the title Information Architect works on developing

intranets or web sites. But the IA role is becoming increasingly important in companies with very large documentation sets, especially ones that use structured documentation or content management systems.

In this presentation, Linda will define much of the "IA jargon" you may encounter, and describe techniques and approaches from information architecture that you can apply to your technical information projects (large or small), whether they are online help systems, user manuals, installation manuals, administrative guides, or whole documentation sets.

About the Speaker

Linda Urban is an award-winning technical writer, help author, and instructor. She has more than 20 years of experience designing and developing technical information, including online help, user guides, reference information, and training. She also works with writers and teams to improve the quality of their documentation, focusing on both usefulness and usability. Among the courses that she teaches at UC Berkeley Extension are Principles of Information Architecture, Usability Testing for Technical Communicators, and Developing Online Documentation.

July 2004 Meeting -- Your Writing Samples Portfolio: A Personal Sales Kit & Career History

*Presented by Lu Rehling
Reviewed by Marc Smircich*

At the July meeting, Dr. Lu Rehling, Director and Advisor for the Technical and Professional Writing (TPW) Program at San Francisco State University, explained why every technical communicator -- and particularly those looking for work -- should have an up-to-date and professional-looking portfolio. With a comprehensive portfolio of quality samples, job seekers can better stand out from other candidates during job interviews, demonstrate how they can meet professional expectations, and establish their credibility and competence.

Contents of a Portfolio

Dr. Rehling stressed that in putting your portfolio together, you should select and organize your samples carefully. Always save copies of the documents you create for potential inclusion in your portfolio. However, your portfolio should not include everything you have done, especially if you have many years of experience. Instead, a portfolio should highlight your very best work.

When deciding what to include in your portfolio, you should consider the following:

- Quality of samples:
 - Choose samples that demonstrate your ability to write clearly and appropriately for a given audience, purpose, and context
 - Your samples should also demonstrate your ability to persuasively develop and helpfully organize ideas and information
 - The samples you choose should demonstrate your ability to execute functional, attractive layout and design decisions and your attention to accuracy in copyediting and production details
- Breadth and selection of samples:
 - Select a range of samples in order to demonstrate your competence in a variety of technical writing genres and using a variety of development and production tools.
 - Select samples that demonstrate competence in primary and secondary research, and in writing both long and short documents
- Variety of clients and industries:
 - If possible, include samples from a variety of industries and for a variety of clients
 - Consider as well who will be viewing the portfolio and what might be most relevant to their needs

Presentation Medium

The first major choice is the medium for presenting the portfolio. You have a variety of options:

- Print
- Web site

- CD ROM
- Memory stick or other such media

If you choose a web site or other electronic format, be prepared for situations when a computer or internet connection is not available. In this case, you can use a printed copy as a back-up. If you have a laptop PC, use it to show your web sites or help files or whatever you would like the interviewer to see. Try to avoid having to use the interviewer's computer for your demo. This can be rather awkward, and the interviewer's computer may not have all the hardware or software needed to display your work to its best advantage.

Putting Together a Portfolio

After you have selected your samples and your format, next consider how best to prepare and arrange them. Much of this discussion is geared toward a printed portfolio, but the concepts also apply to an electronic presentation.

Preparing Samples. Rehling provided the following suggestions for preparing samples:

- For long pieces, select excerpts or display pages
- Always obtain originals of published materials
- Hide or remove confidential information
- Improve proofing, layout, or production when necessary
- Show before and after examples

Selecting a Container. A variety of containers can be used for your portfolio: binder, art display case, accordion file, sales case, folder, envelope, or box. Whatever one you do choose, it should be easy to take with you to interviews, and its contents easy to present. It should also be easy to insert, remove, or rearrange materials as needed. The container need not be expensive, and a variety of attractive options are available at Office Depot or Staples. If you have more specialized needs, try an art supply store.

As one example, an audience member shared his portfolio, very attractively dis-

played in a zippered leather binder. He created color-coded tabs to match the Table of Contents. The result was a very professional-looking portfolio.

Organizing Samples. There are a variety of ways to organize your samples. Most common, and possibly the most effective, is to organize your documents around your goals and your strengths. These can be such things as the skills required by the project, the industries for which you've worked, or the topic, purpose or audience for the piece. You may also organize your samples around what Rehling called "external" considerations: jobs, clients, reverse chronology, or work projects versus creative writing. The method that will work best depends on your personal situation and the kind of job you're hoping to get.

Annotating Samples. Annotate your samples to give the reader some context and to highlight particular challenges and how you successfully addressed them. Rehling suggested discussing the following:

- The document's purpose and/or originality of source materials
- Development considerations or challenges
- Design constraints
- Key rhetorical or production details
- Outcomes

One member of the audience found that it was best to keep the annotations short and sweet. In an earlier version of her portfolio, she had long narratives describing each piece. She found that people were not interested in reading that much text. To improve her portfolio, she replaced the long narratives with short descriptions that used bullet points.

Keeping It Up to Date. Rehling emphasized how important it is to keep your portfolio up to date. You should continually weed out weaker material, showcase any new skills, and reorganize the portfolio to match changes in your career objectives or the types of jobs you're seeking. Everyone, including

senior technical communicators with secure jobs, should have an up-to-date portfolio. No job (or anything else in life) is truly secure or certain, so it's always best to be prepared for life's inevitable changes.

The PowerPoint slides for this presentation and a portfolio checklist are available on the San Francisco Chapter STC web site.

Marc Smircich is a senior technical writer with 15 years of experience in documenting human resources, payroll, and financial applications. He is also the Treasurer and Newsletter Editor for the San Francisco Chapter STC.

August 2004 Meeting -- Developing a Healthy Response to Stress

*Presented By Richard Pinneau
Revised by Alison Gemmell*

Dr. Richard Pinneau, a national stress management and wellness consultant for WellPath Resources, LLC, took us on a stress-reduction journey during our August 18th San Francisco Chapter STC meeting.

"Do you hear that bell ringing?" said Pinneau. We all held our breaths while listening for the bell. "We often don't know we're holding our breath," said Pinneau. "But holding your breath under severe stress is one of most damaging things you can do. It agitates your brain waves and decreases your circulation." In Pinneau's experience, deep breathing is the fastest method to produce a sensation of relaxation. "Stress is inevitable," said Pinneau. "But distress is optional."

Rate Your Stress Levels 0 to 10

Pinneau asked our members to list typical symptoms of stress. Then, at the beginning of his presentation he asked us to assign stress levels to each of our symptoms. At the end of his presentation, he asked us to reassess those stress levels. Zero meant no stress, 10 meant "dial 9-1-1." Pinneau's stress assessment list included the following signs of stress:

- Head or neck ache
- Neck or shoulder tension or pain
- Tightness in chest
- Heartbeat (fast or hard)
- Stomach or abdomen discomfort
- Cold hands or feet
- Pain (anywhere else)
- Anxiety or uneasiness
- Worries (even in background)
- Burdens
- Irritations
- Discouragements

Practice Breathing

"Slow, soothe, and deepen your breaths," said Pinneau. "If you breathe from your abdomen instead of your middle rib or chest area, you'll increase your circulation. Normal breathing is about 15 breaths per minute. Slowing that down to 1 or 2 breaths per minute is the fastest way to drop adrenalin levels and feel less stressed."

Pinneau invited us to practice a deep breathing exercise with him:

1. Sit upright in a chair with your feet on the floor; get comfortable.
2. Rest your arms on your legs, face your palms up, and stretch your shoulders back to loosen them up.
3. Exhale all the air from your lungs.
4. Breathe in a deep, abdominal breath for 5 slow counts.
5. Hold the breath for another 5 counts. Drop your shoulders as you hold the breath.
6. Exhale for a final 5 counts.
7. Breathe normally for several breaths, keeping your mind focused on the breathing.
8. Repeat steps 3 through 7 as many times as needed to feel less stressed.

After practicing our breathing with Pinneau, we found we were less tired, less worried, and feeling less pain.

Attach the Breathing Response to Stress Triggers

To combat stress symptoms, Pinneau recommended identifying our stress triggers and practicing deep breathing as a response to those triggers. "Deep,

slow breathing is the fastest tool to reduce discomfort in 30 to 60 seconds. In our society, our self-imposed expectations sometimes sound like 'More, Faster, Higher, Harder.'" A member of the audience asked, "How do I make sure I'll respond the right way in a stressful situation? How do I make sure I don't revert to old habits?" "Practice this technique when you're not under stress," said Pinneau. "Find your stress trigger and change your response. Break your routine." Pinneau practiced deep breathing while driving in North Carolina commuter traffic. Eventually he noticed that his automatic response to a green street light was not a stressful, hurry-up-and-get-there response, but a relaxed, deep breathing response.

"Try putting a gold dot or a 'Breathe' sign on your telephone to trigger a deep breathing response," said Pinneau. "Attach something fuzzy or something that feels different on the phone so that when the phone rings, it will trigger you to take the following steps:

- Take in a slow, full breath
- Imagine your caller sitting relaxed in a chair, smiling
- Reach over slowly and answer the phone

"You'll find that when you say 'hello' people will hear a more relaxed, even, deeper voice."

Try Key Stress Management Tips

Pinneau provided a quick list of stress management tips at the end of his presentation. The tips included:

- Don't hold your breath!
- Picture the positive goals, not the risks
- Cultivate your social supports

For those of us experiencing increased stress in our work and personal lives, these tips can help us intervene with our minds and substitute healthy responses to stress triggers. More suggestions for reducing stress are available at Pinneau's web site, www.WellPathResources.com.

Alison Gemmell is a senior technical writer with a chemical engineering degree. As an engineer, Alison helps companies clean up polluted sites and comply with air, water, and hazardous waste regulations. As a technical communicator, Alison improves communication within a company and with external customers by researching and writing proposals, project plans, specifications, training manuals, user guides, policies and procedures, and operation and maintenance manuals.

In Memoriam Andy Tanner

By Susan Becker

Andy Tanner, a senior member of our chapter, died on September 1.

Andy was a San Francisco Bay Area native, who graduated from California Polytechnic State University in 1976 with a BA in Journalism. He worked for 17 years as a technical writer with PG&E and was a member of our chapter since 1995.

Many of you who attended chapter meetings will remember Andy as the tall, quiet, and often smiling man who arrived early, sat near the front of the room, and helped out by setting up the screen for our projector.

Chapter officers attended a gathering in Andy's honor in September, and Cindy Bashaar Tanner, Andy's wife of 20 years, came to our September chapter meeting. We will miss Andy.

President's Notes and News

By Susan Becker

New STC Membership Opportunities!

If you're working in business these days, you know that we don't have problems any more -- we have opportunities. Well, one is actually coming your way. The new STC membership structure presents an opportunity for you and for our chapter, too!

You can read more about it at www.stc.org/transformation/

[article9.asp](#), but I'll summarize some of your opportunities here. With the new membership categories you can

- Select which chapter (geographic community) you belong to, if any. You'll no longer be automatically assigned to a chapter based on your ZIP code.
- Select one or more Special Interest Groups or SIGs (communities of interest) or none, depending on the membership category.
- Choose to receive paper copies of intercom and Technical Communication and to access them online, or just to access them online.

The cost is about the same as now at \$145 or as low as \$125 for regular members (\$50 for students), depending on the category, and you can add more communities (SIGs and chapters) for \$5 or \$10 a pop, respectively.

The whole STC is at your fingertips. You can join any of the 21 SIGS that meet virtually on everything from Accessibility to Usability or any of the 150 chapters that meet locally around the world. (Why not Australia or France -- my personal favorites?) But contact with other technical communicators via email and the Internet, though important, is no substitute for face-to-face interaction.

If you live or work near San Francisco, I encourage you to choose our chapter as your local community for in-person networking, learning, and socializing.

Of course, I wish everyone would not just select the SF STC, but also attend chapter meetings regularly, join the leadership group, and run for office. But even if you attend a chapter meeting only occasionally or just the holiday party, if you respond to a survey or vote every year or so, if you send an email comment, question, or critique once in a blue moon, if you simply read the newsletter or email announcements now and then, you are an important part of our chapter. And we want to keep you.

We do get a "rebate" for each chapter member from the annual dues that you send to the Society when you renew. For fiscal year 2004-2005, we received \$24 each for the first 150 regular members, \$16 for each additional regular member, and \$10.80 for each student member, for a total of \$4,356.

But there is more than money involved. We value your presence in our community. Choosing the SF STC again is your vote of confidence that we are providing value through our chapter Web site, ActiveVOICE online, monthly chapter meetings, holiday party, chapter scholarship, and other activities.

Why Am I a Member of STC? Members Respond.

Thanks to those who responded to my request to hear why you are a member of the SF STC. I'd like to share what Lu Rehling, past president of our chapter, wrote:

I am an STC member because...

I want to keep my professional knowledge current, so I appreciate reading STC journal, magazine, and newsletter articles, participating in SIG listserv discussions, plus learning from presentations, chapter meetings and conferences. My career has benefited from my own STC publications, presentations and awards, as well. I also feel good about contributing to my profession by supporting an organization that promotes high standards and ethical practices. Networking also is an STC benefit for me and STC has helped me to find good faculty and internship sponsors for SFSU's Technical & Professional Writing Program. Last, but definitely not least, I sincerely enjoy the people that I've met through STC, especially the members of our San Francisco chapter!

Plan Ahead

The year-end holidays are not quite just around the corner, but it's not too early to mark December 15th on your calendar as our chapter holiday party. Hope to see you there!

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, Reinstated, Transferred, and Senior Members

This article summarizes the membership activity for August and September. We welcome the following new, reinstated, and transferred members. As of September 30, the chapter membership was 205 people.

New Members

- Robert Hayden
- Steven Heitman
- Tim Jones
- Sara L. Marovich
- Jennifer Masek
- Flo Sparks

Reinstated Members

- Heather M. Hayse
- Daniel L. Mohler
- Leslie A. Tilling

Transferred into Chapter

- Edward Patrick Hill
- Tiffany Craft Portwig

Senior Members

- Janet Bran
- Tony Cullen
- Lora Harrison
- Steve Rudman

The Last Row of the Plane

By Howard Miller

Last week I was returning from my New York vacation. On the return flight I was assigned seat 34D, which, as it turns out, was in the last row of the plane. As I sat down I got a little sad as I remembered when I use to fly more often and was in the front section of the plane. In just a few years I went from a steady paycheck and the frequent flier section



of the plane, to the up and down income generated from my (growing!) business, to the last row of the plane!

However, instead of going deeper into negative thoughts, I practiced what I preach to my clients and let these thoughts go. What is to be is to be, and I should see the opportunity instead of the negativity.

As it turned out, after the plane filled up, I had all three seats to myself. I was able to stretch out and enjoy my music, read a book and write in my journal, with lots of room and privacy. I was able to reflect on the great week I had in Manhattan with my parents and friends, the unexpected trip to my cousins at their beautiful house on the lake, and all the Broadway shows I had seen.

When the plane landed I had at least five more minutes on the plane than most people. During that time I was able to check my messages and use the facilities located at the rear of the plane, so that when I got off the plane I walked right from the plane to the sky train to the BART station (which showed up in under five minutes).

By being present to the opportunities of the moment and not going to what could be better I was able to:

- Stay focused on what was going on
- Be the most energetic and alive I could be at that moment
- Appreciate how much is always being offered to me if I am willing to see it!

So when something is not going the way you like, ask yourself: what is going right? You'll see how much is going your way!

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

The ActiveVOICE is published six times a year in February, April, June, August, October, and December by the Society for Technical Communication, San Francisco Chapter, PO Box 2708, San Francisco, CA 94126, www.stc-sf.org. The editor is Marc Smircich (newsletter@stc-sf.org).

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 newsletter 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.

Copyright

All materials published in the ActiveVOICE are copyrighted by the Society for Technical Communication, San Francisco Chapter. Other STC publications may republish articles from the ActiveVOICE, provided that they acknowledge the author and the ActiveVOICE as the source of the article. For print publications, mail two copies of reprinted articles to: Editor, San Francisco Chapter STC, PO Box 2708, San Francisco, CA 94126. For electronic republications, email the URL to newsletter@stc-sf.org. Make the same notification to the author if the postal address or URL is known.