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Marc Smircich, Editor
Marilyn Latham, Assistant Editor
Keith A. Albert, Quality Control

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For information about copyrights, reprinting articles, and submitting articles, see the article submission policies on page 4.

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 2005 Meeting -- Holiday Party

The December meeting is on Wednesday, December 14, 2005, from 6:00 pm to 8:00 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.

NOTE: This party is on the second Wednesday of the month, instead of the customary meeting date on the third Wednesday.

About the Event

The San Francisco STC is bringing the year to a rousing finale with a special holiday party at the Elephant & Castle in downtown San Francisco.

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

The price of admission for this special event (\$20 for STC members and students and \$25 for non-members) includes refreshments. We will also have door prizes.

Because we have to pre-order from the Elephant & Castle, it is important that you register in advance by noon on December 13, 2005. 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!

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

January 2006 Meeting -- AuthorIT in the Real World

Presented by Rolfe Dlugy-Hegwer and Chris Muntzer

The January meeting is on Wednesday, January 18, 2006, 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.

About the Presentation

AuthorIT is the most significant technical communication tools to take hold in recent years. AuthorIT is an authoring environment and single source content management tool that can be used for the following:

- Content management
- Web site management
- Translation and localization management
- Multi-user authoring
- Publishing to PDF, Word, XML, HTML, XHTML, CHM, HLP, DITA
- Workflow and project management
- Automated document conversion

Widely adopted and used in Fortune 500 companies, AuthorIT provides many benefits and a few challenges to those who make the switch. Hear some of these first-hand from two senior technical writers, Chris Muntzer and Rolfe Dlugy-Hegwer, who were responsible for bringing AuthorIT to their organizations in the past 12 months. Come and gain insights for learning and using this tool.

About Chris Muntzer

Chris grew up in London, England, and, after training as an electrical engineer, gained his BSC EE from Brunel University. As he enjoyed both travel and a challenge, he took a job with an oil field service company, designing data acquisition systems for use on remote drilling locations throughout Europe, Africa, and the Americas. Good documentation of those systems was much appreciated by the folks who operated and serviced the equipment.



Little by little the technical communication content of his work increased to where he now does it full-time. His interest in object oriented programming became a good fit for the implementation of AuthorIT as a single source documentation tool. At present, he is using a single library of AuthorIT to produce documents for a family of test and measurement instruments. The single source provides output formats for mobile instruments, PCs, and hard copy.

In a surprising way, he is as happy and challenged creating multiple publications in multiple languages as he was working at Prudhoe Bay in Alaska, the Ivory Coast, or Libya in Africa.

About Rolfe Dlugy-Hegwer

Rolfe is a Senior Technical Writer at Symmetricom's Timing, Test, & Measurement division. He has served the STC North Bay chapter for over three years as President and Vice President, and is currently the chapter's E-Media Manager. In addition to technical writing and videography, Rolfe is passionate about exploring Northern California's rivers, estuaries, and bays by paddle. His essays, articles, and photographs are available at www.baynorth.com.



September 2005 Meeting -- Visio for Technical Communicators

Presented by Beau Cain and reviewed by Laura Persons

To make quick, easy and effective diagrams to illustrate procedures, Beau Cain suggests using Microsoft Visio. Cain, who teaches a course on Visio at San Jose State's Professional Development Center, gave an entertaining presentation on the program at the September meeting.

Visio Basics

What Is Visio? A business and technical drawing and diagramming tool that facilitates creating graphic representations (diagrams) of concepts, procedures, product information, and specifications.

What Is a Diagram? A plan, sketch, drawing, or outline designed to demonstrate or explain how something works or to clarify the relationship between the parts of a whole. "A diagram describes a relationship," explained Cain. It says, "this is the central idea and these are the ideas that relate to it."

Who Might Benefit from Using Visio? Anyone who needs a graphic tool that facilitates creating diagrams, including marketing writers, engineers, and, yes, technical writers. "You don't necessarily need a fancy graphics program," Cain said.

Why Visio? First, let's answer "Why diagrams?" "People see images before their brain registers text," said Cain. Research shows that the eye is drawn to pictures before anything else on a page. Effective diagrams "can help you have an unconscious impact. They can get ideas into someone's mind quickly and easily."

As for why you should use Visio in particular to create diagrams, Cain said you should ask yourself, "How long would it take to create this diagram using MS Illustrator?" Chances are, it would be quicker and easier to use Visio.

When Not To Use Visio? When the native program that you are using, such as FrameMaker or Word, can easily meet your needs. Or if a more appropriate tool is available, such as Adobe PhotoShop, which would work better for photos. But if you are creating a complex diagram, Visio could prove helpful.

Visio Versions. Visio comes in two versions, Standard and Professional, differentiated according to the type and number of templates each features. The Standard version includes templates for block diagrams, building plans, flowcharts, and forms and charts, whereas the Professional version's templates include those for building plans, databases, electrical and mechanical engineering, and software.

Caveat. Cain had one caveat for both versions of Visio -- the program's terminology is inconsistent. For example, it uses the terms "template," "drawing type," and "solutions" interchangeably, which can be confusing.

Using Visio to Diagram Procedures

Cain described a procedure as a sequence of steps and demonstrated that Visio can easily be used to illustrate these steps, even by those who would call themselves "artistically challenged."

Opening up a blank document, he pointed out that Visio has many ready-to-use templates from which to choose, which feature styles, macros, toolbars, and autotext, similar to Word templates. Visio's primary features include standard toolbars and menus available in most Microsoft programs, a pasteboard (or background), the drawing page, and drag-and-drop stencils.

Visio features two kinds of stencil shapes: objects and connectors, the latter being items that describe the relationships between the former. Cain demonstrated the shapes by linking two objects with a connector, pointing out the red square that appears to show when the two objects are connected. He showed that when you drag and drop different objects, the connectors move with them, so the items can be moved quickly and easily. He also demonstrated the flexibility available when using stencils: you can use your own illustrations, other icons, make your own stencils, and even combine and customize existing stencils.

Other features Cain highlighted were the Backgrounds gallery, which works like the Master Page in page layout programs; headers and footers, like those found in Word; and layers. The thought of using layers might strike fear into the hearts of novice users, but Cain showed that in Visio, using layers is easy. He demonstrated on a photo of himself, showing how to add layers, remove them, and even render them invisible.

Cain then successfully fielded some not-so-easy questions from meeting attend-

ees, including 'how do you turn an object into a hyperlink?' and 'how do you save a layer as an HTML file?'

He summed up by saying that Visio is "deceptively simple." He said that it has a few constraints, but there are many different ways to work around those constraints to create clear, effective diagrams.

Cain's presentation was made using Visio 2000 (although the most recent version of the program is Visio 2003). For those who want to learn more about the features of Visio 2000, Cain recommended the book *Visio 2000: The Official Guide* by John V. Hedtke.

Laura Persons is an STC member with a technical writing and editing background in the health care and nonprofit fields.

October 2005 Meeting -- Don't Be a Schmoie with SMEs -- and Other Tales of How Becoming a Better Speaker Will Make You a Better Writer

Presented by Marianne Fleischer and reviewed by Patrick Lufkin

Many technical communicators pride themselves on their communication skills. They've mastered the tools and techniques of their profession; they easily learn new things and can tailor written materials to the appropriate audience. But ask us to communicate live and in public -- to interview an important person, present at a meeting, or give a full-blown speech -- and some of us morph into a quivering tower of Jello.

This October, Marianne Fleischer visited the San Francisco chapter of STC offering help. Fleischer is a speech coach, writes white papers on technical subjects, and has been an independent writer/producer with a specialty in speech writing for the past 15 years. Fleischer readily acknowledges that the prospect of speaking in public can be daunting. "With public speaking, a lot is

on the line," she said, "our credibility, even our careers."

But while speaking in public can be frightening, she stresses, the cost of not doing so can be great. We are not judged just by our writing, she said, but by our ability to move hearts and minds while on our feet. No communicator should overlook this important aspect of his or her career.

Fleischer laid a foundation by reminding communicators that they have nothing to be shy about. As communicators, she said, "We are the translators, the storytellers, the bridge, the customer advocates. You are the strategists and the voice of the company. You do a service that saves them time and money."

Fleischer recalled an old Japanese proverb, "If you work for them, they work for you." No matter where you are on the organization chart, she said, you are partners in the enterprise. By speaking up, you can reframe people's perception of yourself and your profession. "You need to be clear with people about the importance of what you do." Speaking up has many benefits. These can range from securing the support and conditions you need to do your job, to opening up the possibility of growing your own dream project within a company. (Fleischer launched a career in video production in just this way when she learned of a company project that needed to be promoted.)

Fleischer addressed three areas in which technical communicators are often called on to perform as speakers:

- Interacting with subject matter experts or senior management
- Presenting in meetings
- Delivering a formal speech

Each of these presents its own particular challenges and opportunities.

Working with Subject Matter Experts (SMEs)

Fleischer acknowledged that sometimes SMEs can be hard to work with. They can also be arrogant, elusive, and hard to get a hold of. One key to working

with SMEs is earning their respect. You do this by doing your homework and by managing expectations. You should find out as much about the subject as you can before the interview. Fleischer advises that you quickly let them know what you already know, and what you need explained: "I understand XYZ, but I don't understand ABC."

It is also important to manage expectations, she said. You should talk to them as partners in producing the end product: "I trust you to do the technology, you trust me to pick the media, format, the language and so on." Let them know what you need from them, and if necessary, issue your own time-line.

As a rule, SMEs are very busy and you don't want to waste their time. Do everything you can to get your facts straight the first time: use audiotape, or take shorthand.

Working in Teams

Technical communicators must often attend meetings and work with teams. Fleischer recommends you volunteer to chair meetings. When you chair, you control the agenda, she said. As chair, you can develop a reputation as a person who can push for closure and as a consensus maker who can get things done. A good way to get agreement is to ask people if they can live with a particular draft. When people outrank you, ask what they would do in your position.

Public Speaking

Giving a full-blown speech is the situation people most dread, but it also offers the biggest rewards. "Speaking is a chance to really connect to people," she said. When faced with stage fright, Fleischer suggests that you remind yourself that "Public speaking is not about you." Instead, "public speaking is about giving people news they can use, and taking them on a journey away from their lives for a moment. This is all people want from a speech," she said.

As when writing for print, you must analyze your audience, Fleischer said. Ask yourself "why this audience would want to hear from you with your background on this subject on this night."

Fleischer recommends that speeches be organized around one big idea that is clearly expressed -- for example: buy off on this new release, support this approach, or whatever it may be.

There are some subtle differences between writing and public speaking. Because people can't go back to reread your speech, Fleischer said that speeches must be more vivid and direct. Use speaker's techniques -- evocative language, personal stories, shifts in tone and volume and mood -- to wake up the audience and draw them in.

It is also important to be straight with the audience, to communicate conviction. The audience wants to know that you are being candid with them and that you believe what you say. Fleischer said, "Audiences will forgive a lot, nervousness, pauses, and so on, but they won't forgive lack of conviction. It is not enough to just talk. If you don't care, they won't care."

Patrick Lufkin is the current Secretary and former President of the San Francisco STC.

President's Notes and News

By Julia Cope

STC San Francisco Celebrates 25 Years

I'd like to personally thank everyone who participated in the November 16th celebration of STC San Francisco's 25 year anniversary. Susan Becker, this year's immediate past president, organized a fantastic event with door prizes and a slate of panelists that included moderator Barbara Giammona, past presidents Andrew Davis and Meryl Natchez, as well as yours truly. Panelists and audience members alike contributed insights into the past, present, and future of the profession. I, for one, enjoyed the often amusing and lively anecdotes about STC SF's long and interesting history in the bay area.

'Tis the Season! Holiday Party to be Held December 14

Yes, it's that time of year again! Come join us December 14th at the Elephant

& Castle for our sixth holiday party to reminiscence with old friends, make new acquaintances, and raise a glass in good cheer, as we successfully conclude 2005 and look forward to the possibilities that only a new year can bring.

Door prizes and fun are on the agenda for this meeting, so come ready to eat, drink, and be merry. Visit the STC-SF website for more information.

Because Inquiring Minds Want to Know-Strategic Initiative Update

Yes, the leadership team is diligently working on the 2005-6 strategic initiatives for our chapter.

And the Three Key Strategies Are...

- Training & Professional Development -- Provides education and training, such as seminars, short-courses, and tools instruction, as well as networking opportunities
- Membership Recruitment & Retention -- Promotes the profession, facilitates participation in chapter events, and encourages volunteerism
- Chapter Services Support -- Identifies and implements added-value services for chapter members

So far, the team is focusing on education and professional development opportunities for the coming year...so stay tuned!

What You Can Do

Our leadership team is always looking for volunteers. If you are interested in making a difference, contact me at julia.cope@sbcglobal.net or attend our next monthly chapter meeting on December 14th.

New and Transferred Members

By Marc Smircich

We welcome the following people who joined or transferred into the San Francisco Chapter STC during September:

- Jennifer A. Colvin
- Larry A. Faulks
- Gael Erickson
- Jennifer A. Polk
- Laura S. Zupko

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 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.

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