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For information about copyrights, reprinting articles, and submitting articles, 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.

February 2005 Meeting -- ISO Auditing for Technical Communicators: An Introduction

Presented by Kathy Stanley

The February meeting is on Wednesday, February 16, 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 February 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

Capitalize on your talent for communications by working in the ISO process.

- Research and preparation -- Required for our books and help, the auditor needs to understand the business that they are measuring and prepare the right set of questions. The same analytical skills that let us read and understand an engineering specifications transfer readily to understanding the ISO quality system components.
- Interviewing -- The interviewing skills required to develop technical information can help us focus and control an audit. Our ability to take notes and develop information from the responses comes in handy if you want to do ISO-related work.

- Writing -- Each audit requires a comprehensive report. Our ability to communicate complex information in a simple, effective way is a natural match for the type of writing required for an audit report.

- Professional growth and networking -- Being part of ISO will introduce you to people from all parts of the business world and different industries.

About the Speaker

Kathy Stanley has a B.A. in Mass Communication and more than 12 years of technical writing experience at start-ups and multinational corporations. Kathy has more than 10 years of involvement in the ISO process as both an auditor, division representative, and has been an audit subject. In 2005, Kathy will take her exam to be certified as an ISO lead auditor.

March 2005 Meeting -- From Tutorials to Programmer's Guides

Presented by James Bisso

The March meeting is on Wednesday, March 16, 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.

NOTE: During the networking hour, we will be displaying award winning entries from the Willamette Valley Chapter's 2004-2005 Technical Publications, Technical Art, and Online Communication. Award winners include entries from the Learning Products department at Advent Software, Inc., under the direction of chapter member Stewart Florsheim.

About the Presentation

This presentation looks at sample applications, tutorials, and other kinds of instructional code that can be leveraged to write an API programmer's guide.

About the Speaker

James Bisso, M.A., has almost 20 years of experience writing API documentation for such companies as Oracle, Sun Microsystems, Inprise, and Taligent. He has also taught computer science and documenting APIs at UC Berkeley Extension, Golden Gate University, Mills College, and the University of San Francisco. James has also been a corporate trainer for Oracle University and Bitzone LLC. He is currently CTO of Bitzone LLC.

November 2004 Meeting -- Information Architecture for Technical Communicators

Presented by Linda Urban

Reviewed by Gilbert Gonzalez

During the November chapter meeting, Linda Urban delivered an informative and compelling presentation during which she defined information architecture and some of its terminology, discussed the information architecture process, and demonstrated several information architecture techniques.

Information architecture consists of determining the structure, navigation, and findability of information. Structure refers to identifying, labeling, and determining the relationship between pieces of information. Navigation refers to how a user finds information and navigates through it. Findability consists of determining whether the information is actually there and searchable.

The role of the technical writer is to create content that works once it is found. The writer needs to develop content that is both in a usable form and is well written. The writing begins after the information architect defines the organization of the information. Technical writers can use information architecture techniques in our own work such as in

designing manuals, help systems, and large documentation sets.

Definitions of information architecture-specific terms are divided into two groups: technical terms related to labels and categories, and process terms related to content and information design. Technical terms include metadata, taxonomies, thesauri, controlled vocabularies, faceted classification, and synonym rings. Process terms include content inventory, site map or content map, wireframes, and personas. Linda then discussed each of these terms in detail along with showing concrete examples.

So what does the information architect deliver? An information architect's deliverables include: a content inventory, a site or content map, and page schematics (wireframes). Additional deliverables may include page templates, content element definitions, storyboards, personas and taxonomies. However, these are not unique to information architects and may be delivered by the technical writer.

A high-level overview of the processes by which an information architect works consists of: identifying business purposes and goals, identifying audiences and their needs, analyzing content, planning user navigation, designing topic/page architecture, creating prototypes with the aid of user testing and feedback, and documenting the final architecture and information design. It's important to remember that this does not include developing real content: that task is delegated to the content developer.

Linda next presented a variety of tools and techniques including user research, gap analysis, and using card sorts and categories. User research and usability are more integral parts of the information architecture process. You need to decide on what your "perfect" user will be like. After that, you can develop a user persona in which you develop a picture of a representative user. The patterns you obtain from your interviews and research will help you form your conclusions here. Research includes

interviews, contextual inquiry, task analysis, observational study, and documenting what users want, need, and do. Be sure to document user types. For example, you might need to document information for novice, expert, and occasional users. Validating your observations with real users will help you discover any areas that need further study.

Perform a content analysis to see what information is present and/or missing. There are two approaches to this task: bottom-up for a content approach and top-down for a framework approach. Use the content approach as an aid to determine what information already exists. Use the framework approach to determine what information should be included. After you take the content inventory, you will be able to match user needs to the actual content. Focus on what information is present, not on how easily a user can find it, then perform a gap analysis.

Use the gap analysis to review user tasks and needs and to match content to them. Identify what information is missing. Decide if there is extra information that's not needed. You can also use card sorting to see how users organize content and tasks. When using card sorting, make an effort to think about a task in new ways. Try rearranging cards that contain topics pertaining to a common task. Remember that your findings will be more valid if you use a large sample of users.

So, do you want to find a job as an information architect? If so, jobs will tend to be web-based, requiring web site development experience. In addition, you should be familiar with developing taxonomies. Finally, be prepared to show a sample of your work to the prospective employer.

The slides for this presentation are available at www.urbancreations.com.

Gilbert Gonzalez is an information developer with over 15 years experience writing software documentation for a variety of audiences: from end-user manuals and help systems to API refer-

ence developer documentation. Gilbert lives in San Francisco and works at iAnywhere Solutions, Inc. located in Dublin, California.

December 2004 Meeting -- Holiday Party

Reviewed by Marc Smircich

On December 15, 2004, the San Francisco Chapter STC bade a fond farewell to the London Wine Bar with our fifth annual holiday party. This special event brought the year to a festive close as revelers enjoyed fine wines, good food, animated conversations, and door prizes.

In a break from the normal pattern, there was no speaker this month. Instead, the entire meeting was a chance to schmooze, interrupted only by a networking game that revealed tantalizing bits of information, such as how former chapter president Patrick Lufkin's worst job was cleaning poison oak off a garage roof. Everyone had a good time, and the socializing went on well after the official ending time.

Thanks to the generosity of our sponsors, many of the celebrants did not go home empty-handed.

- Adobe provided the copy of Photoshop Elements that Karin Moore won.
- iAnywhere Solutions provided a CD-ROM case and a logo polo shirt.
- Macromedia provided a variety of door prizes.
 - Tim Bombosch won a full version of RoboHelp X5.
 - Keith Albert, Mary Choy, Julia Cope, and Steven Zegas won logo T-shirts.
 - Everyone got a RoboHelp X5 starter CD-ROM.
- The San Francisco Chapter STC provided polo shirts and wine glasses with our chapter logo.

- Donald Bartlett, Beau Cain, Christine Holzauer, and Richard Mateosian won polo shirts.
- Valerie May won a pair of wine glasses.

The holiday party was the chapter's final gathering at the London Wine Bar, where the chapter has been meeting for over eight years. Starting in January of 2005, the chapter's monthly meetings will be at the Elephant & Castle, which is on Clay near Battery (a couple of blocks from the London Wine Bar). We look forward to seeing you at the Elephant & Castle during 2005.

Marc Smircich is a senior technical writer who specializes in documenting human resources and accounting applications. He is also the treasurer and newsletter editor for the San Francisco Chapter STC.

President's Notes and News

By Susan Becker

Chapter Begins Rechartering Process

Our chapter has begun working on rechartering as a community in the STC as part of the Society's Transformation Initiative.

Rechartering means identifying and documenting the value -- in terms of programs, support, and services -- that our chapter offers to our members. Rechartering basically explains why someone would want to join our chapter.

The process of rechartering involves the chapter members coming together to agree upon our mission and goals, as well as the strategies, programs, and activities that we use to implement our goals. We will also define the members we hope to attract and the value we provide for the larger Society.

Our chapter leadership group, which consists of our chapter officers, managers, and other volunteers, has agreed to complete the work of rechartering,

under the direction of Reyn Johnson. If you would like to join us in this process, please contact Reyn Johnson.

Touchstone 2005?

If all goes well, Touchstone (the Northern California STC technical communication competition) will return in 2005. The presidents of the six Northern California STC chapters (Berkeley, East Bay, North Bay, Sacramento, Silicon Valley, and San Francisco) met in September to confirm our commitment to hold a competition and to begin planning.

As a result of the meeting, we asked Tim Bombosch (our chapter's Program Manager) to develop a preliminary project plan for the competition. Tim presented a program on Project Management for Technical Communicators at the SF STC's June 2004 meeting (www.stc-sf.org/newsletter/2004-aug/june_meeting.html) and at several other Northern California chapters, so we thought he'd do a good job.

And he has! We are meeting this month to move forward with his plan. If you would like to be involved with Touchstone this year or if you would just like to offer words of encouragement, please send an email message to Tim or me. And keep watching for more Touchstone news.

Renew Your Membership and Vote

If you have not already done so, now is a good time to renew your membership in the STC. To be eligible to vote in the next Society election, you need to renew by February 28, 2005.

The coming election should be exciting. For Society Second Vice President (the office that leads to Society President), we have two candidates from the Nominating Committee: Linda Oestreich (www.stcregion.org/region5/director-sponsor.html) and Deb Sauer (www.sauer-design.com). Joining them on the ballot as an official candidate as a result of a petition campaign is Laura Berger (www.paulaberger.com).

Also on the ballot will be a referendum to change the Society's bylaws in several ways:

- Refine the job of the second vice president more broadly so the office holder supports more than the geographic chapters
- Remove chapter sponsorship from the Director-Sponsors' role
- Eliminate regional representation on the STC Board

Andrea Ames, who is our current Society President, and the STC Board are asking you to vote in favor of these changes. As Andrea wrote in the January 2005 issue of *Intercom*: "They are necessary to support the transformation -- primarily to ensure equal representation across both practice-based and geographical communities." You can read Andrea's complete article and a supporting article by STC Fellow, John Hedtke, from www.stc.org/transformation.

On the other side of the argument, Joe Welinske, the president of WritersUA who presented at our January meeting, and Bill Leavitt, STC Fellow and past Society President, are encouraging members to vote No on the referendum. Joe thinks it "will leave the 150 Chapters of our Society without adequate representation to the Board." You can read his open letter to STC members from www.winwriters.com.

And I'd like to ask you again to choose the San Francisco chapter as your geographical community (or one of them) when you renew.

STC Annual Conference in Seattle

The STC Annual Conference will be held May 8-11, 2005, and it's back in Seattle this year. I attended my first STC Conference in Seattle in 1996 and remember spending time one evening watching the Olympic Torch arrive on a ferry and then following as it was carried through the downtown streets.

The Annual Conference is always a great place to attend workshops conducted by other technical communicators who can teach you things you can use when you get back on the job. It also provides many opportunities to network with colleagues from around the world.

And I can't say enough about how much fun a conference in Seattle can be. OK. It does rain. But bring your raincoat and you can walk down to Pike Place Market (www.pikeplacemarket.org) for lunch or catch a ferry to Bainbridge Island in the evening to see the Seattle skyline at sunset. I'll be there. I hope you can make it, too.

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.

TPW Program at SF State Receives Certificate of Excellence

By Marc Smircich

The Technical and Professional Writing (TPW) Program at San Francisco State University is one of only 11 programs that has received a Writing Program Certificate of Excellence from the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) (www.ncte.org/groups/cccc). The TPW Program will receive this award on March 18 during the CCCC convention in San Francisco.

Dr. Lu Rehling, the Director of the TPW Program, is well known at the San Francisco Chapter STC. She is a former president and a long-time member of the chapter. She has also been active in the Touchstone competition.

In announcing the award, the CCCC stated that:

The San Francisco State Technical and Professional Writing Program was cited for its excellent work, successfully demonstrating that their

program meets the following criteria: it imaginatively addresses the needs and opportunities of its students, instructors, and locale; offers exemplary ongoing professional development for faculty of all ranks, including adjunct/contingent faculty; treats contingent faculty respectfully, humanely, and professionally; uses current best practices in the field; uses effective, ongoing assessment and placement procedures; models diversity and/or serves diverse communities; has appropriate class size; and has an administrator (chair, director, coordinator, etc.) with academic credentials in writing. In particular, the San Francisco State program was noted for its cohesive curriculum of upper division coursework integrating theory and applied studies; its contextualized and ethical application of technology; its portfolio and internship-based assessment; and its attention to issues of diversity.

SFSU is the only university in California that offers a bachelor's degree in technical and professional writing. The TPW Program (www.sfsu.edu/~tpw) has offered a minor since 1983, a certificate program since 1984, and a major since 1990. At present, there are 46 students working toward a bachelor's degree and 25 to 50 working toward a minor or a certificate. The San Francisco Chapter STC sponsors an annual scholarship competition for students in the TPW Program.

The San Francisco and Silicon Valley chapters are providing an information table on the STC at the Association of Teachers of Technical Writing 2005 Conference, which is being held on March 16 in conjunction with the CCCC convention in San Francisco.

Marc Smircich is a technical communicator with over 15 years experience in documenting enterprise-wide systems for human resources, payroll, and financial applications. He is also the newsletter editor and treasurer for the San Francisco Chapter STC.

New and Senior Members

New Members

We welcome the following new members who joined the chapter during November and December of 2004.

- June Cancell
- Cody B. Catulla
- Thais Nye Derich
- Scott Dykstra
- John P. Elmore
- Daniel Gilly
- Beth S. Joson
- Jennifer Kollmer
- Scott Lambson
- Ari S. Langer
- Katherine T. Lasisz
- Geraldine Mckellar
- Anne Mehaffey
- Brian R. Miller
- Katherine D. Paxton
- Laura Persons
- Anjana Rajan
- Edward M. Rawlings
- Shannon O. L. Seaberg
- Christopher Thompson
- Colette Turbeville
- Tom Wetzel

Senior Members

The following people achieved senior member status during November and December of 2004.

- Julia M. Cope
- Joseph P. Gorin
- Abby L. Stoner

Going Into Your Fears

By Howard Miller

Recently I was asked if I would volunteer at a fundraising event. My role, with several other guys, was to sell off raffle tickets in skimpy holiday attire, consisting only of boxer shorts, boots, socks and a Santa hat! In addition, at the end of the evening, we would be available for photo opportunities with the guests.



While I was flattered to be asked, the thought of actually doing this terrified

me. It brought up my insecurities and fears.

I realized I had two choices.

I could decline the offer and not experience my insecurities and fears. Or I could confront them.

I'm a coach. So I chose option 2.

Prior to the event, I really thought about what was true and what my mind told me. I talked to a few people about it. I find verbalizing insecurities and fears takes away a lot of their power.

By the time I got to the event I was able to be in the moment. I ended up having a lot of fun and helped raised money for a worthy cause.

By confronting my fears I was able to:

- Enjoy the moment
- Be my true self
- Open up to other possibilities in my life

So while I'm not looking to become a professional stripper, the experience I had in confronting my fears is useful for me to remember so I become more fearless to make the most of my life.

Our lives are filled with so much possibility. Take them!

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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