

SAN FRANCISCO

April 2003

ActiveVOICE

NEWSLETTER OF THE SOCIETY FOR TECHNICAL COMMUNICATION, SAN FRANCISCO CHAPTER

April 16th Meeting

Single-Sourcing, XML, Alphabet Soup – Help!

Presenter: Rob Frankland

Single sourcing has been a part of creating on-line help for more than two decades. When technical writers talk shop, subjects such as single-sourcing and XML are likely to come up. This presentation addresses the historical need for single sourcing to create help systems, tools for implementing single sourcing, the importance of XML, how to use XML for single sourcing, and an introduction to Rascal Software, a new help authoring product.

Rob Frankland has more than twenty years experience as a technical writer and documentation manager in companies such as Software Arts, Lotus Development Corporation, Rational Software, AT&T Wireless, and Aries Technology. His focus over the last decade of consulting has been documentation issues within startups. In his involvement with the STC Puget Sound chapter, he has been a judge for the last two years' annual competitions. Rob founded Rascal Software in the summer of 2002 when he assembled a dream team to create a tool for authoring help.

May 23rd Meeting

Writing for the Web

Presenter: Ron Person

Want to make your writing move faster and keep your readers looking forward to your next word? It's easy. Just leave out the parts they'll skip. But that's just the beginning if you want to capture readers on the Web.

The evening's foray into the world of writing will weave a web of tips covering such topics as your reader's personality, when corporate marketing knocks — don't answer, writing honestly in a world of shared content, examining your direct mail closely before trashing it, what eye-tracking research shows about reading on the Web, infostructuring content, adding velocity to words, and getting out of the way on the Web

Ron Person is an accomplished public speaker, trainer, and writer, who has written twenty-eight books including the best-selling series "Using Windows, Special Edition," "Using Excel, Special Edition," and others. Ron was one of the first trade book authors to apply principles developed in cognitive psychology to the writing of technical trade books. The computer book industry has adopted many of the principals he pioneered in 1986.

Ron has a B.S. in physics with honors from the U.S. Air Force Academy, an M.S. in physics from The Ohio State University, and an M.B.A. in marketing and finance with highest honors from Hardin-Simmons University.

SEE INSIDE FOR MEETING TIMES, LOCATION, & MORE DETAILS!



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Add Life to Your Web Site with Dynamic Features

by Peter S. Weygant

Today's technical communicator is a lot more than a simple wordsmith, and no one knows this better than Kristine Hahn, who described her experiences with client-server web design at the January meeting. She focused on using a variety of different technologies to develop a web application that lets a user enter, store, retrieve, search and delete data. Kris built such a web site for a group of software developers who needed to manage a set of documents. They were surprised at how readily a non-programmer could solve their problem for them. For the STC meeting, she simplified the application, using haiku as examples of simple text objects that can be created, stored, retrieved and managed on the web. Kris's example has great practical value for those of us who do web design, because it uses standard tools and methods to build a clear example that can be adapted easily to other purposes. But in addition, by stepping through her process of creating this application, including the installation and setup of the tools, you learn some valuable lessons in how to acquire, learn and use new tools and technologies to solve problems in our field.

What tools do you need?

Kris demonstrated at least three different current web technologies in this engaging demo: web page design tools, relational database software, and web server software and scripting interfaces. (Database support and special programming are needed for web sites with pages that include dynamic elements — that is, fields that allow user input and pages that display database content based on user input.) She also described how these tools are used on different platforms, including Mac,

Linux, and Windows. The tools were Macromedia Dreamweaver web design software; MySQL, an open-source relational database that is available free on many platforms; and the PHP scripting language, which is interpreted by the web server software. Kris's demo shows us how the tools can be employed together to achieve a specific practical result.

How do you tackle a web application?

The presentation raises a number of interesting questions for us as technical communicators, whether we are new members of the profession or more seasoned veterans: How do we learn new technology? How much do we need to know? How much can we afford? Most of us don't have the time to learn everything, nor can we always justify paying for expensive tools that we may not use again. The Haiku web site is a model of how to select the most appropriate tools, including free or inexpensive open source software, and how to learn just what we need to know to get concrete results.

Need more information?

To review Kris's lessons in dynamic web design, visit the Haiku web site (www.haiku.ws) and download the step-by-step guide, *Creating the Haiku Web Site*. Then create a similar site of your own. For information about the software, go to:

www.macromedia.com/software/dreamweaver

www.redhat.com/software/linux

www.mysql.com/downloads

Peter S. Weygant

(pweygant@sbcglobal.net) has been a technical communicator for more than 20 years. He is a member of the San Francisco chapter of STC. Visit his web site at: www.psw-consulting.com.

eHelp Reaches for Single Sourcing Holy Grail

by Hillary M. Russak

At our February 19 meeting, RJ Jacquez, eHelp Corporation's Product Manager for FrameMaker Technologies, reviewed RoboHelp X3 and leaked exciting details about an upcoming product (code name, "Mustang") that could increase eHelp's single sourcing market share. eHelp promises that "Mustang" (scheduled for a summer 2003 release) will be the FrameMaker compatible tool technical writers have long needed. It will turn FrameMaker documents into help without saving to .rtf and will handle formerly impossible translations of FrameMaker's advanced features, such as variables and conditional text.

eHelp creates user assistance software for applications, Intranets, and the Web. Their flagship product, RoboHelp, is the industry leader in Help authoring, earning the company more than 55 awards. Now eHelp has refined RoboHelp X3 into a more competitive solution for single sourcing.

RoboHelp X3 is Windows XP compatible, offers users major upgrades from previous versions of RoboHelp, and links the program to other eHelp tools.

Single Sourcing

RoboHelp X3 generates quality printed documents from Help projects, lets you re-organize and edit your table of contents for print, and maps HTML styles to Microsoft Word styles. You can use conditional text to generate multiple outputs with different content and preview outputs before compiling. You can define and save output settings to ensure consistency and use automated batch processing for simultaneously generating and publishing multiple Help outputs.

Context-Sensitive Help Toolkit

In X3, you can link your Help system to any C, C++, VB, Java, JavaScript, or Delphi application and automatically create

appropriate map files for each language by dropping provided source code into your development project to connect the Help system to your application. You can define your context-sensitive Help mapping with X3's interface. Map IDs and aliases can be manually assigned or automatically generated. If you switch output format, RoboHelp preserves the mapping and applies it to the new output. In addition, X3 provides a context-sensitive Help test tool.

Word Authoring Environment

X3 allows you to customize navigation panes, toolbars, icons, fonts, buttons, and colors of your Help system to match the style of your company or application. Using WebHelp Skins, you can create your own style, apply one from the gallery, or download one from the Help Community's WebHelp Skins.

X3 offers automated assistance for Section 508 compliance (U.S. federal accessibility standards). In addition, WebHelp overcomes Microsoft's removal of the Java Virtual Machine on Windows XP. WebHelp's XML/DHTML and pure HTML options allow cross-browser deployment and eliminate conflicts Java can cause with Windows XP and high-security firewalls.

Link to Additional eHelp Tools

X3 is integrated with eHelp's RoboDemo for creating compressed interactive tutorials in Flash format for online training and user support, product demonstration, or enhanced Help systems.

RoboHelp's Office Pro edition includes Airplane Help, allowing users who cannot connect to the Internet to access a server-based Help system (while traveling for example) through locally installed WebHelp files.

Hillary Russak is a technical editor and documentation project manager at Stanford Linear Accelerator Center and a student in the SF State Technical and Professional Writing BA Program.

Our Meetings

When

Third Wednesday of every month.
6 pm: Networking and hors d'oeuvres; 7 pm: Program.

Where

Downstairs at the London Wine Bar:
415 Sansome between Sacramento & Clay.

Reservations

Reservations
Make advance reservations at <http://www.stc-sf.org> (click Acteva)
Admission at the door is on a space-available basis.

Cost

With advance reservations:
\$10 STC members;
\$15 non-members; \$8 students.
At the door:
\$13 STC members;
\$18 non-members; \$11 students;
first-timers free with coupon
(from our Web site).

Directions

From BART

Get off at the Montgomery BART Station. Leave by the "Sansome Sutter" exit and walk straight ahead.

From the East Bay

Take the Bay Bridge (Hwy 80). Take the first exit, Fremont. Follow Fremont across Market, where it becomes Front. Go 1 block. Turn left onto Pine. Go 2 blocks. Turn right onto Sansome. Go 2 blocks.

From the Peninsula

Take Hwy 101 heading N. Continue on Interstate 80 heading NE. Take the 4th St./Embarcadero exit. Continue straight on Bryant for 1 block. Turn left on 3rd. Turn right on Folsom. Turn left on Fremont. Follow Fremont across Market, where it becomes Front. Bear right on Front. Turn left on Pine. Go 2 blocks. Turn right on Sansome.

From the North Bay

Take Hwy 101 heading S. Turn left on Broadway heading E. Go down Columbus heading SE. Bear right on Montgomery. Turn left on California. Turn left on Sansome.

Parking

The closest parking garage is at One Embarcadero Center. The entrance is located on Battery between Sacramento and Clay.

President's Notes and News

by Marc Smircich

*Marc Smircich is a Senior Technical Writer for Quintessential School Systems in San Mateo, California. He has 14 years of experience documenting financial and human resources applications.
Email: info@stc-sf.org.*

Welcome to Our Chapter!

New Members

Alexander Agbay
Theodore A. Barker
Alice B. Benedict
Bruce C. Bennett
Gary L. Coates
Marc A. Cohen
Charles A Fannan
Diane R. Fitzgibbon
Sara R. Greenwald
William C. Grout
Joe Jantz
Lara N. Markowitz
Shyrl K. Ponder
Erin N. Tribble
Charlotte K. White

Transfer and Reinstated Members

Andrea L. Fortus
Kate H. Leggett
Rosemary A. Reynolds
Laurel A. Robinson
Frances K. Sturtevant

In the last edition of the newsletter, I encouraged everyone to mark their calendars for the STC's 50th Annual Conference on May 18 through 21 in Dallas. Visit www.stc.org for more information.

Now mark your calendars for another event. On July 20 through 22, the Region 8 Conference will take place at the Imperial Palace Hotel and Casino in Las Vegas. This is the perfect opportunity to combine a weekend in Vegas with professional development. For more information, see www.stcregion8conference.org/index.htm.

Both conferences are well worth your time. But if you are unable to make it to Dallas, perhaps you can make it to Las Vegas. The registration fee for the Region 8 Conference is less than half of that for the 50th Annual Conference, and rooms at the Imperial Palace are only \$69 on Sunday through Thursday. For those who do not like to fly, Las Vegas is about a nine-hour drive from San Francisco according to Yahoo Maps.

San Francisco Chapter Information

Web site: <http://www.stc-sf.org> **Phone:** (415) 820-1566 **Email:** info@stc-sf.org

Regional STC Chapter Meetings

San Francisco chapter meets the 3rd Wednesday of each month.
For details: www.stc-sf.org

Silicon Valley chapter meets the 4th Thursday of each month.
For details: www.stc-siliconvalley.org

Berkeley chapter meets the 2nd Wednesday of each month.
For details: www.stc-berkeley.org

East Bay chapter meets the 2nd Thursday of each month.
For details: www.ebstc.org

North Bay chapter meets the 3rd Thursday of each month.
For details: www.stc-northbay.org

Sacramento chapter meets the 1st Wednesday of each month.
For details: www.stcsacramento.org

SAN FRANCISCO CHAPTER

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