

# SAN FRANCISCO

June 2003

# ActiveVOICE

NEWSLETTER OF THE SOCIETY FOR TECHNICAL COMMUNICATION, SAN FRANCISCO CHAPTER

## June 18<sup>th</sup> Meeting

### Tips and Tricks for FrameMaker

*Presenter: Marc Smircich*

FrameMaker is an excellent tool for producing large documents. But it does have a steep learning curve, and the user interface is not always intuitive. During this talk, I'll share some things I've learned from using FrameMaker to produce and maintain about a dozen large manuals. Some of the topics include setting up styles so they are easy to select, using shortcuts and variables to make writing go faster, considerations for PDF publishing, and indexing.

*Marc Smircich is the outgoing President of the San Francisco Chapter STC. He has 14 years of experience writing user manuals for financial and human resources applications. His background also includes a B.A. in English from the University of Texas and work experience as a self-taught word processor, computer operator, and computer programmer. He is currently employed as a senior technical writer at Quintessential School Systems in San Mateo.*

## July 16<sup>th</sup> Meeting

### Marketing Yourself in Tough Times

*Moderator: Susan Becker*

*Speakers: Dana Chisnell of Usability Works, Andrew Davis of Synergistech, Gwaltney Mountford of Mountford Group Inc., and others.*

Getting a job or finding a contract as a Technical Communicator can be challenging, especially in the current economic climate. But don't give up! At this "progression," we will set up stations to focus on specific marketing tools such as networking, resumes, portfolios, personal Web sites, volunteering, and internships. At each station, a technical communicator, who has actually found work in the past year with the tool, will give a short presentation and lead a follow-up discussion.

In case you've never participated in a progression, it is a series of small group exchanges consisting of three rounds of five-minute presentations followed by fifteen-minute discussions. We've never tried a progression at the London Wine Bar. It should be wild!

Bring your resume, portfolio, business cards, experiences, and hopes! Take home a few new ideas and perhaps a little more energy for your next job search.

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



**SOCIETY FOR TECHNICAL COMMUNICATION**

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# Tell a Story, Get a Job

*By Eckhart Beatty*

Speaking to an eager audience full of a number of job seekers at our March 2003 meeting, Mark Schaltz, an IT manager at ChevronTexaco, outlined the essential methods and practices interviewees should know before going into an interview.

Shaltz knows what he's talking about. He has been teaching interviewing techniques for over 15 years at his present firm. All told, he boasts over 20 years IT experience at Fortune 100 companies.

## Behavior-Based Interviewing

Before getting into what he meant by "Tell a Story, Get a Job," Shaltz started his talk by emphasizing interview basics. He began with that all-important rule "first impressions count." This means that you should make it a point of dressing for the occasion, even if the company's standard is "dress casual." And don't worry about feeling over-dressed. It's better to err on the side of caution. Other keys to making a good first impression include a solid handshake, consistent eye-contact, and using your interviewer's name during the conversation.

When he was through with the basics, Shaltz introduced the group to behavior-based interviewing—the method of interviewing behind the meeting's name. This method can be remembered using the acronym STAR: "S" refers to Situation; "T" to Task; "A" to Action; and "R" to Result. As the acronym suggests, behavior-based interviewing focuses on using situations from personal experiences to showcase your qualifications for accomplishing tasks in ways that are memorable. Thus, throughout the interview, you are always illustrating how you are capable of taking action to get good results.

To be proficient at this type of interviewing, you should begin collecting a file of stories which are organized according to

sets of skills, talents, etc. These stories should be both human and interesting. For example, if you had a boss that you didn't get along with, think about how you overcame this difficult situation. Really explore this question and come up with a unique response. Perhaps you learned ways of communicating via email that were less confrontational than in-person. Or maybe, you discovered that certain times of day were easier to work with him than others. Poignant examples of ways you have dealt with situations diplomatically demonstrate that you can overcome obstacles and make effective decisions.

A very important rule for this type of interviewing is to always get right to the point. No one likes to listen to long stories that don't seem to be going anywhere. You should be sure to introduce a situation and be wrapping up with how you got results within just a few minutes. There's no substitute for solid preparation here.

Finally, Shaltz made sure that other key points to good interviewing were emphasized. To make the experience a positive one for both you and the interviewer, always try to be an active participant in the interview by gently guiding the conversation along. However, be conscious that you aren't dominating the conversation or taking control away from the interviewer. Remember your job is to enable the interviewer do his job well. This way, you get the job. Make it a win-win situation.

The day after your interview, always remember to send a letter or email of thanks (whether or not you want the job). This practice reinforces a professional image and makes you stand out from the crowd.

Attitude is key. So take stock of your situation, move decisively, and get that job.

*Eckhart Beatty is a contract technical writer in the Bay area.*

# Single-Sourcing, XML, Alphabet Soup—Help!

by Kristine Hahn

Today, we're asked to pump large volumes of technical content into the information pipeline. It's difficult to manage all this content without standards such as eXtensible Markup Language (XML), the eXtensible Stylesheet Language (XSL), Cascading Style Sheets (CSS), the Document Type Definition (DTD), and others. "So many acronyms remind me of alphabet soup," says Ron Frankland, who spoke at our April meeting. Describing how XML solves the difficulties of publishing in multiple formats (e.g. print, Web, email, CD-ROM, etc.), Ron demystified the acronyms.

Using XML you can create multiple documents, differing in content and format, from a single, definitive source of information. If you're writing a report you can reuse the information—print the short version and post the long(er) version on the Web. Using XML, you can provide users selective access to information.

## Tools for Single-Sourcing

Some of us have tried combinations of Word and RoboHelp, or FrameMaker and WebWorks, for single-sourcing. The bugs in Word and the steep learning curve associated with FrameMaker and WebWorks have limited their popularity. AuthorIt—specifically designed for single-sourcing—hasn't received wide acceptance, perhaps because it is based on Word and manifests many of the problems of Word.

XML-based tools have advantages over these systems and others, such as ArborText and content management systems (CMS), for single-sourcing. For example, XML separates the data from the presentation (formatting), making

it possible to apply different formatting to the same data easily. XML also lends itself to program control. For example, a program can limit access to information—by user role or by other variables—when there is just too much information for everybody to sort through. XML enforces a consistent document structure, so writing groups can adhere to a schema. You write the content, just once, and maintain a single copy.

## The XML Process

The first step in the XML process is creating a namespace. An XML namespace is actually a collection of names, identified by a Uniform Resource Identifier (URI). Constructs of XML documents need universal names, which have a scope extending beyond the containing document. This XML namespace is such a mechanism. The next step in the process is to create a schema or use an existing DTD. Next, you create the XSL to apply a style to the XML content. You write content and then apply the XSL.

## Rascal Software

Ron Frankland founded Rascal Software in the summer of 2002 to create Veredus, an XML-based tool for authoring Help. You write content, including API documentation, just once, and then you reuse it for multiple output targets including HTML, compiled help systems, and print. You produce document variants using rule-based conditional text. Ron's company intends to be a leader in Help authoring by staying responsive to its customers and following up on their needs. We appreciate Ron explaining XML and single-sourcing.

*Kristine Hahn is a contract technical writer in the Bay area.*

## 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

Arianna Dogil  
Carol H. Fager-Higgins  
Severine A Tymon

### Transfer and Reinstated Members

Race Bannon  
Melvin R. Clark  
Julia M. Cope,  
Kathleen Hughes  
Robert E. Justice  
John A Lettelleir  
Meryl Natchez

This is my final column as President of this chapter. Last month, we held elections for the 2003-2004 year, and there is a new slate of officers starting on July 1, 2003.

|                |               |           |              |
|----------------|---------------|-----------|--------------|
| President      | Susan Becker  | Secretary | Reyn Johnson |
| Vice President | Joseph Fong   | Treasurer | Ben Johnson  |
| Past President | Marc Smircich |           |              |

There are also changes in non-elected volunteers. Catherine Hurd has stepped down as Programs Manager, and Christine Kozacko has taken her place. Kris Hahn has stepped down as Newsletter Editor, and Arianna Dogil has taken on that role. I have taken on the role of Announcements Manager. When Reyn Johnson begins his term as Secretary in July, Tim Sammon will become the Hospitality Manager.

I've enjoyed serving as President of the chapter for the last two years. But now it is time to pass on the torch to Susan Becker, who will be filling this space for the next six issues of the newsletter.

## San Francisco Chapter Information

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## Regional STC Chapter Meetings

**San Francisco chapter** meets the 3rd Wednesday of each month.  
For details: [www.stc-sf.org](http://www.stc-sf.org)

**Silicon Valley chapter** meets the 4th Thursday of each month.  
For details: [www.stc-siliconvalley.org](http://www.stc-siliconvalley.org)

**Berkeley chapter** meets the 2nd Wednesday of each month.  
For details: [www.stc-berkeley.org](http://www.stc-berkeley.org)

**East Bay chapter** meets the 2nd Thursday of each month.  
For details: [www.ebstc.org](http://www.ebstc.org)

**North Bay chapter** meets the 3rd Thursday of each month.  
For details: [www.stc-northbay.org](http://www.stc-northbay.org)

**Sacramento chapter** meets the 1st Wednesday of each month.  
For details: [www.stcsacramento.org](http://www.stcsacramento.org)

# SAN FRANCISCO CHAPTER

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**First Class Mail**