

SAN FRANCISCO

October 2003

ActiveVOICE

NEWSLETTER OF THE SOCIETY FOR TECHNICAL COMMUNICATION, SAN FRANCISCO CHAPTER

October 15th Meeting

Lost in Translation

Presenter: Elaine Winters

Are you responsible for preparing print, electronic, or visual materials for a client base that markets, informs, or teaches in other parts of the world or to non-native English speakers here? If that doesn't describe your job now, it probably will in the near future. In a global economy, communicating effectively across cultural borders is an equal opportunity challenge. This session will focus on learning in environments beyond the Bay Area—domestic, as well as international. This will be a session for all of us who must communicate with people from cultural backgrounds different than our own.

With a background in the public and private sectors, academia, and the Peace Corps, Elaine Winters brings a substantial career of cultural adaptation to her work. Some of her clients include Apple, City of Berkeley, Fujian Teachers University, Nokia, University of California at Berkeley, and Wells Fargo Bank. Winters has won several STC writing awards and has presented at international and domestic conferences. She is the co-author of *Cultural Issues in Business Communication*. To learn more, visit her Web site <http://www.ewinters.com>.

November 19th Meeting

Extracting Information from Experts

Presenters: Andrea Fortus and Monya Baker

Writing user's guides or product information manuals usually requires approaching experts who are busy, inarticulate, or difficult to work with. In this session, our presenters will discuss methods of gathering information from subject-matter experts and will provide suggestions for improving response rates, minimizing conflicts, and making information-collecting sessions more efficient.

Monya Baker is a staff writer at Acumen. She has worked as a consultant for biotech companies, writing and editing regulatory submissions, user's guides, government grants, and articles in peer-reviewed journals. She is a member of the American Medical Writers Association and the Northern California Science Writers Association.

Andrea Fortus is a technical writer with Cisco Systems where she creates user guides for network management solutions. She has worked for a number of start-ups and small companies, creating end-user documentation for a variety of users and products. Andrea has been a member of STC for four years.

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



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Marketing Yourself in Tough Times

By Robert Lee

Topical and relevant, this July's STC San Francisco Chapter meeting "Marketing Yourself in Tough Times" was a departure from previous meetings where one guest speaker is given the stage. Instead, there were six speakers. In recent chapter history, this was definitely one of the most well-attended meetings. As a result of its format, it was also the most interactive. Attendees had the opportunity to meet with three out of six participating guests at a lively round-table discussion. Guests gave informative advice on surviving and persevering in a tough market, and included:

- Gwaltney Mountford: Using Your Network to Get a Job.
- Dana Chisnell: Recasting Your Experience in New Directions.
- Andrew Davis: Making a Compelling Portfolio for Hiring Managers.
- Dana Oliver: Making Internships and Class Projects Marketable.
- Cliff Flamer: Developing Your Résumé.
- Susan Becker: Gaining Visibility Through a Web Site.

The following are highlights of the sessions conducted by Dana Oliver, Cliff Flamer, and Andrew Davis.

Dana Oliver, a graduate of the Technical Writing Program at San Francisco State University, gave an example of how her internship turned into a job lead simply because someone saw her work. In her case, her desktop publishing skills and graphic design background landed her a contract position, which created leads to others. Some examples of her job skills came from a portfolio that included class projects. This is a lesson to current and new students not to dismiss the work they do for school.

Cliff Flamer handed out valuable advice on developing a résumé. The

most important three things to keep in mind are:

1. Avoid typos.
2. Consider including an "objective" at the top, which is tailored to the specific job title. Sometimes, a summary that states your accomplishments will suffice.
3. Remember to tailor your resume to the job. If the position is for an editing position, you will want to emphasize your editing skills. The same strategy goes for desktop publishing, web work, and all other job positions.

Another myth is that resumes need to be limited to one page, which is no longer the case.

Andrew Davis, formally with Synergistech, had practical advice for making a portfolio stand-out to hiring managers. This advice included:

1. Know your audience and their challenges. To do this, visit to the company's Web site.
2. Don't wait to be asked for portfolio samples.
3. Leave one or two short portfolio samples with the hiring manager. Include a table of contents, reference chapters, and an index. (Remember to change relevant information on samples that are covered by non-disclosure agreements.)

Overall the meeting was a rousing success. We can only hope that there are more meetings like this in the future. The only drawback to this format is that there is simply not enough time to meet and talk to everyone—a sign of how enjoyable and enriching the meeting was. Each of the speakers had full tables and it was apparent that attendees could easily have stayed much longer.

Robert Lee is a member of our chapter.

Technical Writing for the Biotech Industry

By Susan Fife

At the August 20, 2003 San Francisco Chapter meeting, Titiana Bucholdt, RN, JD, a technical writer at Chiron Corporation, shared her knowledge of the biotechnology industry.

Bucholdt's career in biotechnology began when she found herself reading a genetics engineering magazine in the office lobby. Once she determined she wanted to pursue a career in this field, she used a college contact to get her foot in the door at Chiron.

At Chiron, 50% of Bucholdt's work is editing. This includes applying her quality-assurance knowledge to resolve conflicting information issues and cutting unneeded content. Bucholdt has developed exceptional communication skills to effectively produce documentation that accurately represents the knowledge and expertise of the scientists she works with. Her experience has taught her that a science degree or experience in a related field gives editors the authority to challenge scientist-writers and smoothly resolve differences.

For manufacturing, Bucholdt writes reports and procedures for assays—the recipe books for FDA submissions. (For example, an assay to determine if a product is what its creators purport it is called an “identity” test). The FDA performs audits of biotechnical organizations for regulatory and policy compliance, the results of which are public record. Much of the documentation and organization imperative is to accommodate FDA and EU compliance responsibilities. (For more information, see <http://www.fda.gov/> or <http://www.pheur.org/>). Bucholdt writes assays for FDA submissions, which often total thousands of pages. Among other information, the submissions contain

SOPs—reports or processes and procedures for assays or tests.

To break into the field

Bucholdt recommends that writers educate themselves about the biotech industry. For example, writers working in an IT environment can study the Bio-IT World magazine (<http://www.bio-itworld.com/>). She also suggests that if you currently have no science background, you should carefully consider whether science is a real interest to you before you embark on re-training for biotech writing.

- For writers who do not have an extensive medical or science background, a good starting point to a biotechnology writing career may be to work as a contractor for a small biotechnology company. A biochemistry course is extremely helpful. Bucholdt postulates that larger biotechnology companies tend to employ technical writers in IT or as medical writers in the clinical groups.
- For advice and direction about different fields and positions, it's a good idea to have a mentor.
- To coordinate information and enforce deadlines, you need good people skills. In addition, computer, graphic design, language, writing and editing skills are also important.
- The most common titles are Medical writer, Patent law writer, or Research writer (usually in a university).

Resources

To acquire some familiarity with important concepts in biotechnology, visit <http://www.biospace.com> and the American Medical Writers Association, Northern California at <http://www.amwancal.org> . You can also take biotechnology courses at USCS. Small startups and large corporations, such as Genentech, are a few additional resources.

Susan Fife is a member of the Berkeley chapter of the STC.

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

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 Susan C. Becker

Susan Becker is a technical communicator and online help developer. She has 15 years of experience working primarily as a contractor in software development for the financial services and human resources industries. sbecker@codewords.com

Welcome to Our Chapter!

New Members

Joe Alvear
Vicky M. Cheng
Andrea E. Drane
Andrew J. Grutza
Jeremy Lyon
Dana Oliver

Transfer and Reinstated Members

Brenda E. Jordan
Arthur Manzi

Congratulations to Gordon Scholarship winners Laura Miller, Hillary Russak, Yolande Salyer, and Nancy Weir, all of whom are students in the Technical and Professional Writing Program at San Francisco State. The Kenneth M. Gordon scholarship supports outstanding students preparing for careers in technical communication. It is sponsored by the Northern California STC chapters and funded by proceeds from Touchstone and direct contributions.

Unfortunately, Touchstone is not being held this year; however, we plan to bring it back strong in 2004. You can still enter the Technical Publications, Online Communication, and Technical Art competitions held by other STC chapters. But hurry because the deadlines are passing quickly.

For information, visit the STC Web site at <http://www.stc.org/competitions.asp> or the Touchstone Web site at <http://www.stc-touchstone.org>.

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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