

Moving Your Career to the Internet

by Donna Marcotte, Project Manager, BindView Corporation

Last year I decided I was going to take my skills and experience, add some training, and move my career to the Internet. When I told a co-worker (not a technical communicator) about the intensive Internet/e-commerce training that I was taking, she exclaimed, "So, you'll be out of technical writing completely."

To some people, the Internet is a brand new thing, unlike any seen before. However, to those of us in technical communication, the Internet is a new vehicle for doing what we in this profession have always done—analyze audience needs and develop, organize, and provide access to information that meets those needs. Of course, this new vehicle has more power and goes faster and farther than anything we could have imagined just 10 years ago.

What Do We Deliver on the Internet?

To me, one of the most exciting things about the Internet is that it has blurred the line between application software and information. Why is this exciting? Because our skills are more vital than

ever before; however, we need to take a broader view of information.

In the "old days" of command-line software, users needed manuals to help them understand how to use the software. But the process for developing the "information" (documentation) was quite separate from the soft-

From online manuals, to hypertext, to graphical user interfaces, to context-sensitive help systems, to embedded performance support systems, we have moved to integrate information into the software itself.

ware development and was usually done by programmers. Early on, the need for professional communicators became clear.

As software progressed, many industry professionals saw the need to integrate more information into the software itself and developed the technology to do this. From online

manuals, to hypertext, to graphical user interfaces, to context-sensitive help systems, to embedded performance support systems, we have moved to integrate information into the software itself.

With these technological developments, the communication professional has become more integrated into and involved earlier in the software development process—and is thereby able to improve software design instead of trying to compensate for poor design with more documentation.

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Dateline Houston

Dateline Houston is the newsletter of the Houston Chapter of the Society for Technical Communication, a nonprofit organization. Ten issues are published each year (September through June).

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Submit newsletter contributions by the first of each month for the coming month's issue. Submissions in ASCII, Microsoft Word 97, or FrameMaker 5.x format are appreciated. Send submissions to Rhonda Hector:

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All submissions are subject to editing.

Reprints

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Address Changes

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From the Editor . . .

STC Website Offers Much to Members

by Rhonda Hector, President, New Millennium Communications

STC Houston members know about *Dateline Houston*, the chapter listserv, and the www.stc-houston.org chapter website. They also receive *Intercom* magazine and the *Technical communication* journal. But not all members know about the wealth of resources available to them at the STC Headquarters website, www.stc-va.org. The site offers much of interest to new and long-term members.

Show Me the Money

The salary survey information from 1997 through 2000 is on the STC Headquarters site, under the Job & Salary Info link. (STC Houston is preparing to conduct a salary survey of its own in the near future.) Of particular interest to consultants and independent contractors is a contractor survey from 1999. The survey features information on salaries and other demographics of interest to independent contractors, such as work habits and marketing practices. Employers can post their job listings (just as they can on the STC Houston listserv). Members looking for work can browse the postings.

Feed Your Brain

New members will find this page of interest. The anthologies cover a variety of technical communication-related topics, ranging from contracting and independent consulting to technical communication and ethics. STC also publishes guides such as "Secrets of User Seductive Documents," by William Horton.

Make Professional Contacts

STC will hold its annual conference this May in Chicago, while our chapter will host the Region 5 Conference this October. The STC site and our chapter site have pages devoted to these conferences.

Conferences are great opportunities for members to develop their knowledge, make professional contacts, and get some good ideas about where the technical communication field is headed.

You'll want to visit these pages often as conference plans develop. The Annual Conference page is www.stc-va.org/48thconf/index.html. The Region 5 Conference page is www.stc-houston.org/r5conference.

Other Pages of Interest

Here are some other links on the STC website that members will find of interest:

- The Membership page gives members an opportunity to renew their membership online and save themselves time, postage, and paperwork.
- The Grants and Loans page gives students an opportunity to learn about and apply for scholarships.

The mission of the Society for Technical Communication is to improve the quality and effectiveness of technical communication for audiences worldwide.

From the President . . .

Leadership Is a Learning Experience

by Deborah Long, Strategic Communications, Enron Net Works

When I took over the role of STC Houston chapter president, I thought I knew what “leadership” meant. After all, I had held management positions before and as a native New Yorker I was certainly not shy (in fact, “chutzpah” was one of my qualifications originally spotted by the Nominating committee). Think again—I had no idea how much more there was to learn . . . and what a learning experience it has been!



Deborah Long

At the 2000–2001 transition meeting, Linda Oestreich elucidated on the subject of leadership as the previous year’s officers and directors passed the baton to a new leadership team. Armed with her advice to “delegate and empower others,” plus the assurance of past leaders’ support (including permission to call in the middle of the night, if needed), I felt confident, even fearless.

In retrospect, I had a bad case of hubris. I had just turned 50 and felt like a survivor, able to “do it all”—work, family, social, and STC commitments. Wrong! But, while we may not be able to do it all *by ourselves*, we can do a great deal *as a team*—and we will make a difference by *doing whatever we can*.

I would have liked to implement further change and to accomplish more than I’ve been able to do in one year’s time. However, I leave the unfinished business (issues, ideas, and aspirations) to future leaders.

So, as my term as president comes to an end, I ready myself to take a different role—immediate past president—with a new set of challenges and, no doubt, new opportunities for learning. What I have humbly discovered is that we never stop learning!

I wish the chapter candidates good luck with the election and encourage all members to cast your votes, on the chapter and international levels. You can count on the 2001–2002 season being another exciting year, as we work together to “Create the Future of Technical Communication.”

Deborah

STC Annual Conference

May 13–16, 2001

Visit the STC website: www.stc-va.org/48thconf/index.html

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Moving Your Career to the Internet

by Donna Marcotte

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Nowhere is this melding of information and application more evident than on the Internet. A customer goes to **www.Amazon.com** to search for and buy books. To Amazon's customers, these are not separate activities but a continuum of activities. Technical communicators need to be involved in the development and integration of all information and applications on a site.

How Do We Determine What To Deliver?

The focus still begins with the needs of the user, understanding who they are (novice, expert, computer-savvy, or not) and what they are trying to do (research a disease, find a tax form, check the balance of their checking account).

New tools and technology on the Internet allow us—without great inconvenience or intrusion—to track the activity of users on a website so that we can know what content people have accessed or what tasks they have tried to complete. But without knowing what users intend to do, we cannot know if they are successful.

The only way to learn users' intentions is through the type of usability testing (and other information-gathering techniques) that technical communicators have traditionally used to determine who the audience is and what we are trying to accomplish.

How Do We Deliver It?

Perhaps the Internet has most changed the way we deliver information. First, there is the notion of the browser and the way it interprets and displays information. In theory, the browser was supposed to work the same, regardless of vendor or platform. But, as users of

the Web, we all know that this is not necessarily so. These variations are things that technical communicators must account for when designing and developing for the Web.

Because we can now track and save users' past activities on a website, the data that we accumulate provides a way to predict what they might want to see or do the next time they return

New technology provides the means to affordably display content “on the fly.” We no longer have to confine ourselves to a single solution that meets the greatest needs of a cross-section audience.

to the same site. Good predictions can, in turn, facilitate specifically customized content.

New technology provides the means to affordably display content “on the fly.” We no longer have to confine ourselves to a single solution that meets the greatest needs of a cross-section audience. It is now technically and economically feasible to produce all (or most) variations of information to meet very specific needs of very specific users.

Technical communicators must

- expand their capabilities and knowledge about creating modular information solutions that can meet the needs of their current audience

- scale to meet the needs of future audiences
- learn about the tools and technologies they must use to implement such solutions

Conclusion

The Internet has a multitude of purposes for business and commerce. Developing successful websites requires people with talents in many areas such as advertising, marketing, software development, and more. But the essence of the Internet is communication, which makes our skills and experience vital to every aspect of a successful website.

Resources

1. User Interface Engineering. “Web Sites that Work: Designing with Your Eyes Open” (training course). Houston, TX. September 2000.
2. iGeneration. “E-Commerce Planning: Key Issues and Strategies” (training course at SMU Advanced Computer Training Center). Bellaire, TX. Fall 2000.

Keeping Tabs On What's Going On

by Thea Teich, STC Region 4 Director-Sponsor

How frustrated are you by the impossible task of keeping up with the thinkers in our field? I'm not discussing the developers of the latest release of FrameMaker or RoboHELP; I mean the people who are writing the books and giving sessions on the major overriding concepts or subjects such as instructional design, usability, management, document design, and communications effectiveness, among others. I have a stack of books on my bedside table that seems never to go down in size, only up.

What would you think of a website specifically designed to help technical communicators keep up with this information—developed, updated, and maintained *for* technical communicators, *by* technical communicators, as a service to STC?

IdeaWatch Works

That's what **IdeaWatch.org** is all about. Developed by Jennifer Square of the Central Ohio chapter and Heidi Hansen of the Chicago chapter, IdeaWatch.org provides reviews of the works of various "gurus," original ideas of particular usefulness to technical communicators, and ways those ideas can be implemented to make your jobs easier, your work more enjoyable, and the world a better place.

Well, maybe I exaggerate. However, IdeaWatch.org does act like an information filter, making these mountains of material "digestible." And the people who are doing the filtering and sifting of the information are your fellow members—so the result is specifically designed for your needs. And it's free.

In addition, Jennifer and Heidi have organized monthly book discussion groups at their chapters and are

assisting other chapters in setting up similar groups. Each group reviews a specific book, and the resulting information becomes the basis for that month's IdeaWatch website offerings.

The result is inexpensive professional development whenever you need it, plus the opportunity to meet and work with fellow members to support one another in this endeavor.

Unlike other sites that may offer compilations of information on specific subjects, IdeaWatch.org doesn't overload you with massive lists of references and other related websites. Those sites require you to do the filtering and sifting.

The people behind IdeaWatch.org—and this can include any interested STC member—have read the gurus' books or attended their presentations; the information is therefore qualified by people just like you.

Explore the Site

To take advantage of IdeaWatch.org, visit the site and use what's there. Help organize an IdeaWatch monthly discussion group in your chapter.

IdeaWatch SIGs are starting at the local level in the Central Ohio, Chicago, and Southwestern Ohio chapters. Eventually, IdeaWatch organizers hope to apply for Society SIG status.

For more information, check out IdeaWatch.org and distribute the informational flyer you find there. Also, you may contact Jennifer Square of the Central Ohio chapter at squarej@nationwide.com.

And let me know how things go, too!

Chapter Website Wins STC Award

by Patrick Rockecharlie,
Information Developer,
BMC Software, Inc.

STC Houston has won an Award of Merit in the STC Public Relations Competition for its redesigned chapter website.

The website, **www.stc-houston.org**, was entered in the promotional communication category and was the only chapter site to receive such an award this year.

"Gerri Huck, our former Web master, and Joelle Hallowell, one of our members, played key roles in the creation of both our website feasibility study and proposal," says George Slaughter, STC Houston director of communications. "While we would review the websites of other chapters for ideas, we also knew that we needed to make our own mark. Our goal was to create the definitive chapter resource. These two documents played a role in setting a strategic direction for our site."

George says one reward of working on this project has been the number of volunteers who participated, and who continue to be active with the website today.

"April Cooper and Kate Compton took charge of the execution of the redesign," George says. "April and Kate are new to our chapter, and they, with Steve Cunningham and Robin Scott, were honored as Volunteers of the Month last October. They've done great work. Their honor is well deserved."

STC Houston Chapter 2001–2002 Election of Officers and Directors

For President: George Slaughter



George Slaughter has been a member of STC since 1991 and returned to Houston in 1998. George served on the Publicity committee for two years, and he has served on the Houston chapter administrative council since 1999 as director of communications.

In his role as communications director he has led a number of chapter initiatives, including the recent chapter website redesign. George created the publicity plan for the upcoming Region 5 Conference. He has received several volunteer recognition awards for his initiative and creativity and his direct involvement in revitalizing the Houston chapter.

George is an information developer at BMC Software and has more than 15 years experience in communications. His work has appeared in numerous publications, including the *STC Technical Communication* quarterly journal.

As president of the Houston chapter, George will oversee the chapter's planning and hosting of the Region 5 Conference in October.

For Vice President: Dorothy Murray



Dorothy Murray joined STC in 1996. She began her chapter service by volunteering for community service activities, one of which was answering telephone calls for the KUHT Channel 8 fundraising drive. Dorothy was newsletter copy editor in 1998, when our newsletter won an international society award of

Distinguished Technical Communication.

Dorothy was twice a judge in the Houston chapter-sponsored essay contest for the Science Engineering Fair of Houston. She was also a team lead in judging annual reports for the 2001 STC Houston Technical Publications, Art and Online Competitions.

Dorothy served as arrangements manager for our monthly program meetings from 1997–1999 and was the arrangements manager for the 2000–2001 competition awards banquet. In addition, she is the arrangements

manager for the 2001 Region 5 Conference to be hosted by the Houston chapter.

Dorothy received B.A. and M.A. degrees in English from the University of Houston. She will receive an Associate degree in Technical Communication from Houston Community College in May 2001. As senior technical writer for Outpost Enterprises, she documents next-generation servers at Compaq Computer.

As vice president of the Houston chapter, Dorothy will encourage member involvement in planning interesting programs and will extend hospitality to new members, especially students who are just entering the technical communication job market.

For Treasurer: Wayne Schmadeka



Wayne Schmadeka has been a member of STC since the mid-1990s. Last year he made a presentation at the Region 5 Conference in New Mexico about options for deploying hardcopy documents to the web.

Wayne is an information developer at BMC Software. He writes user documentation for the BMC Software PATROL for Lotus Domino product.

As treasurer of the Houston chapter, Wayne will continue the long-standing chapter tradition of fiscal responsibility.

For Secretary: Sahar Othman



Sahar Othman has been a member of the Houston chapter for more than three years and served as the Houston chapter Student committee co-manager in 1999.

After graduating from the University of Houston–Downtown with a B.S. in Professional Writing, Sahar worked with H. Shoup &

Associates Inc., where she learned the art of Information Mapping and intranet development.

Sahar now works for Kitba Consulting Services Inc. as a senior information developer. Her responsibilities include creating maintenance and service guides, end-user

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replacement parts documents, and user guides. Her most recent professional achievement was winning an award of Distinguished Technical Communication in this year's Technical Publications, Art and Online Competition.

As secretary of the Houston chapter, Sahar will ensure that chapter records are distributed on time and are maintained accurately.

For Director: April Cooper



April Cooper has served on the Houston chapter Web Site committee since July 2000. As co-manager and webmaster, April created the design and graphics for the new Houston chapter website. In October 2000, she was recognized as Volunteer of the Month for her participation in the redesign and launch of the chapter

website. April has worked closely with chapter special interest group (SIG) leaders to develop and update their websites.

April attends weekend classes at the University of Houston–Downtown, where she is pursuing a degree in Professional Writing. After three years writing for the petrochemical industry, she recently changed careers to work in software documentation. April is a technical writer for NetIQ Corp. where she has been creating online help systems. In her spare time, April enjoys designing websites and creating multimedia for the Web.

As director of the Houston chapter, April will work closely with other administrative council members to aid the success of this year's Region 5 Conference. She will continue to support developing SIG websites and using the Web to benefit the Houston chapter.

For Director: Mary Gwynne



Since joining STC in 1996, Mary Gwynne has volunteered in various capacities for the International and Houston chapter Technical Publications, Art and Online Competitions.

After five years of teaching college composition courses, Mary decided that technical communication was

her career of choice. Since that time, she has acquired six years of experience in writing and editing a diverse range of material for construction design, environmental services, oil and gas services, and systems and database administration.

Mary is an information developer at BMC Software, documenting the distributed systems database backup and recovery products. She is interested in enhancing the user's experience by developing user-centric information and by striving for consistency in the message delivered by user documentation, customer support websites, marketing and training material, and other product areas.

Mary would like to be a director of the Houston chapter so that she can contribute more to STC and to the technical communication profession.

For Director: Ron Kirk



Ron Kirk attended his first STC meeting in 1982 and joined STC in 1985. He was a judge for the Technical Publications, Art and Online Competitions in 1992, and he participated in the KUHT Channel 8 fundraising drive in 1999.

Ron joined Kitba Consulting Services in November 2000 as manager of documentation solutions. In this role he ensures that Kitba's actions and deliverables are consistent with clients' goals and values and that Kitba meets deadlines and fulfills responsibilities.

As director of the Houston chapter, Ron will help the chapter accomplish its goals in the coming year.

For Director: Paul Mueller



Paul Mueller has been an STC member for more than six years. He is the programs co-manager for the Region 5 Conference hosted in October.

Paul is a technical publications manager at NetIQ Corp. He has been a presenter at the STC annual conference for the past three years. He has received several regional documentation awards. Paul uses his training, computer science, and mathematical background to bring a

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well-rounded approach to technical documentation and management.

As director of the Houston chapter, Paul will concentrate on valuable programs and presentations. He would like to bring information to members about changes in our information delivery and to help members develop new, innovative ways of providing information.

For Director: Linda Oestreich



Linda Oestreich has been a member of STC since 1979, when she joined the San Diego chapter. After filling several offices in that chapter, including two years as chapter president, Linda transferred to the Houston chapter in 1990. She has been active in our chapter as director, seminar

manager, presenter, and competition judge. She is now Programs committee co-manager for the upcoming Region 5 Conference.

Linda's STC international-level positions include program manager for the 1995 annual conference, assistant to the president for external relations, Nominating committee member, co-manager of the Chapter and Regional Conferences committee, and current manager of the Honorary Fellows Nominating committee.

Her most cherished STC award is that of Fellow, which she received in 1996. Linda also received the STC Distinguished Chapter Achievement award in 1995. Over the years, she has received several awards from the International Technical Publications, Art and Online Competitions in San Diego and Houston local competitions. In 1990, she won an award of Excellence at the international level.

In 1992, Linda received a Bronze Quill award from the International Association of Business Communicators, Houston chapter.

Linda is a senior technical editor at BMC Software, working with writers documenting distributed systems products.

Linda has held several management positions in her career, including vice president of a documentation consulting firm. In addition, she holds a lifetime teaching credential for teaching communication services and related technologies from the California Community College system. She has also served as an adjunct faculty member at the University

of Houston–Downtown, where she taught courses in the Professional Writing program. Linda enjoys training, mentoring, and teaching other communicators to be better at their craft.

As director of the Houston chapter, Linda will enrich the experience of new members while she helps others attain greater value in their work. Her vast experience will help our chapter continue to grow and learn.

For Director: Heather Shelly



Heather Shelly joined STC and the Houston chapter in 1997, and she has always been active in the chapter.

Heather began volunteering when she served on the Recognition committee in 1998. In 1999, she was co-manager of the Recognition committee.

Service on the committee has given Heather exceptional insight about how to recruit, recognize, and maintain volunteers to run the chapter.

Heather now serves as chapter director of competitions and was very active in this year's STC Technical Publications, Art and Online Competitions activities. She received the chapter's Volunteer of the Month award in December 2000.

Heather received a B.S. in Professional Writing from the University of Houston and is a candidate for an M.S. degree in Occupational Technology with an emphasis in Training and Development.

She has been a technical communicator since 1996 and has created technical documentation for computer hardware and software products in a variety of industries.

Heather is now an information developer at BMC Software, where she creates technical documentation for the PATROL product line.

As director of the Houston chapter, Heather will help our chapter grow and will help ensure that chapter leaders meet the needs of our members.

STC Houston Chapter 2001–2002 Election of Officers and Directors

For Director:

Suzanne Stuckly-Taboada



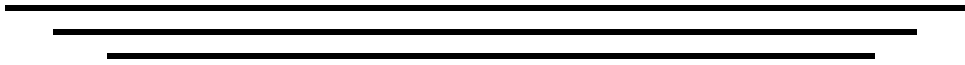
Suzanne Stuckly-Taboada has been an STC and Houston chapter member for 15 years. She has served on a variety of different chapter committees, including Hospitality, Nominating, and Arrangements. Suzanne was the judging party manager for our Technical Publications, Art and Online Competitions. She has

also been a chapter director. Suzanne's varied and extended service gives her a broad understanding and historical

perspective of chapter and Society activities, which will provide valuable mentoring for new officers.

Suzanne has worked for BMC Software for the past six years, where she started as a writer and is now a technical publications manager for the PATROL product line. Her areas of professional interest include project management, online help, single-source documents, and the brave new world of XML.

As director of the Houston chapter, Suzanne will concentrate on activities that are associated with our annual Technical Publications, Art and Online Competitions.



STC Houston Chapter Election Bylaws

Article VIII – Elections

Section 5. Voting and Election

Officers are elected by a majority of Chapter members voting, in person or by proxy. If no majority is obtained on the first ballot for an office, a second ballot is taken to decide by plurality among the two or more candidates who received the greatest number of

votes on the preceding ballot, or to decide ties. Directors are elected by a plurality of the votes cast, in person or by proxy. If a tie occurs, additional ballots are cast to decide the winner.

To be valid, a proxy transferring the voting privilege of one voting member to another must be signed by the member who grants the proxy and must be presented to the tellers committee before the ballots are cast.

A proxy authorizing another member to vote in person for the absent member will be honored on every ballot; a proxy designating a specific candidate will be honored only on the first ballot for any office.

The tellers committee is responsible for determining the validity of votes cast (including proxies), for counting the votes, and for announcing the election results.

Ballot and Authorization Proxy

STC Houston Chapter 2001–2002 Election of Officers and Directors

Please select *one* of the following proxy options. (The section of the Houston chapter bylaws concerning elections is printed on page 9.)

1. I authorize the following member in good standing (please print name), _____, to vote in my place in the election on April 10, 2000.

Name (please print)SignatureDate

2. I cast my vote or I authorize the following member in good standing (print name), _____, to cast my vote for the candidates selected.

Name (please print)SignatureDate

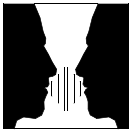
Officers:	For	Directors:	For
President—unopposed <i>George Slaughter</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	7 directors will be elected: <i>April Cooper</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Vice President—unopposed <i>Dorothy Murray</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<i>Mary Gwynne</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Treasurer—unopposed <i>Wayne Schmadeka</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<i>Ron Kirk</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Secretary—unopposed <i>Sahar Othman</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<i>Paul Mueller</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>
		<i>Linda Oestreich</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>
		<i>Heather Shelly</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>
		<i>Suzanne Stuckly-Taboada</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Mail your proxy ballot to:
 Deborah Silvi
 8223 LaRoche Lane
 Houston TX 77036

Authorization proxies that are mailed must be *received* by **Monday, April 9**.

If you are voting by proxy for another member at the meeting, you must have the proxy verified by a member of the Tellers committee at the registration table the night of the meeting. All first-round proxies must be cast before the meeting program starts.

Members attending the chapter meeting on April 10 will receive a ballot at the meeting.



The Contractor and Quality

by Barbara Harmon, Contract Writer on assignment at ExxonMobil

Is a quality system only for big companies? Absolutely not! Every contractor can—and should—have a quality system in place. A quality system is your process of fulfilling a contract with your customer in a way that meets your customer's needs and expectations.

The foundation of your quality system is a positive quality attitude—a pattern of behavior and beliefs that translates into a commitment to build quality into your everyday business practices. You do this by developing mechanisms and methods to ensure a quality product.

It doesn't have to get complicated, but an organized methodology is absolutely critical, according to Maria Ellul, president of Kitba Consulting Services, Inc. Kitba has grown considerably in a mere five years. According to Maria, its growth—by

word-of-mouth recommendations from one customer to another—is the result of their strong quality control and of hiring people who know what quality is.

So, how does a contractor—even a one-person company—create a quality system? Experienced contractors already have at least some of the typical quality tools in place. Essential quality practices include:

- becoming informed about the current standards (ISO 9000 standards, for example, make a good roadmap for developing your processes.)
- creating contracts and work orders that clearly spell out your product or service (Maria calls this “defining quality and expectations up front.”)
- developing written procedures that describe how you produce your product

- developing checklists to help you avoid mistakes and rework
- tracking each job by setting up measurements that gauge the level of quality and customer satisfaction
- assessing your quality by gathering feedback, to find out what your customers think about your product and your methods

Your customers aren't the only winners; you win by having a predictable and successful method for satisfying your contracts. Then you can concentrate on solving your customers' problems instead of your own.

Contractors build customer loyalty with quality products and service. The best marketing tool is a quality product and a happy customer. For a contractor, there is nothing better than a repeat customer.

Donations Help Sponsor Region 5 Conference

by Melanie G. Flanders, Chief Information Architect, KnowledgeMasters Inc.

The STC Region 5 Conference proceedings will be offered on CD—thanks to Houston-based Interactive Documentation Corporation (InterDoc). “STC does a tremendous job in promoting quality technical communications. InterDoc is very interested in supporting their efforts,” says Gerald Gau, InterDoc president. “CDs are an excellent way to disseminate a large amount of data quickly and inexpensively.” InterDoc is the first Houston-area company to become an STC Region 5 Conference sponsor.

InterDoc specializes in the design, packaging, and distribution of technical information. The company was founded in 1995 as a technical communications company. InterDoc has evolved into an electronic publishing company creating and duplicating CDs, CD-ROMs, and business card CDs.

The Region 5 Conference will be held October 11–13 at the Westchase Hilton in Houston. For more information, visit the STC Region 5

Conference web page at <http://www.stc-houston.org/r5conference>.



“Beyond the Bleeding Edge” Wants You!

Waves of new technologies are sweeping over us, and many writers can barely keep up with the daily grind, let alone find time to research the next wave.

In 1999 the STC 46th Annual Conference addressed this concern by adding a series of sessions called “Beyond the Bleeding Edge.” These sessions offer quick looks at technologies too new to present in traditional formats.

It’s now time to start thinking about “Beyond the Bleeding Edge” topics for the STC 48th Annual Conference in Chicago in May.

In 1999 we covered XSL, JavaHelp, and WebTV. In 2000, it was XHTML and database-driven publishing systems. This year the sessions might cover smart cards, mCommerce, and the issue of writing quality in the online age and the tools that support it.

As always, other possible topics include existing technologies that may be new to technical communicators, such as active server pages.

Are you working on something that’s so new that practically no one has ever heard of it?

- Do you work with wearable computers for field service technicians?
- Do you design virtual people for use as help interfaces?
- Do you write content for voice portals—minimalism at its most extreme?
- Do you deal with something else equally new, innovative, interesting, and applicable to technical communication?

To be considered for a “Beyond the Bleeding Edge” session, a topic must be novel in 2001. This means the technology should be emerging now, or should exist now and be applicable to technical communicators but be little known.

“Beyond the Bleeding Edge” presentations are:

- short—You will have 25 minutes to cover the topic and take questions.

- informal—Attendees prefer handouts, but this is at your discretion.
- level-appropriate—You may cover a topic at any technical level you consider necessary.

If you enjoy investigating new technologies and like to talk about them, STC wants to hear from you. A formal proposal is not required; send a brief description of your presentation to Neil Perlin, Hyper/Word Services, at nperlin@concentric.net or call 978-657-5464.

April Volunteer of the Month

by Peggy Head, Technical Writer, Kitba Consulting

The April Volunteer of the Month, Jessica Dickerson, can frequently be seen working the registration desk for the chapter program meetings.

An employee of BMC Software, Jessica is a lead information developer in the Recovery and Storage Management group. Her career includes experience as a technical writer for NASA and for the oil industry.

Jessica’s co-workers describe her as a gifted writer who is extremely helpful. Her talents for running projects

smoothly and efficiently are appreciated by her teammates.

In her professional career and in volunteer efforts for STC, Jessica’s abilities to quickly analyze tasks and prioritize needs help her accomplish goals efficiently. She is a cheerful volunteer who is always ready to anticipate the needs of others and to act quickly without having to be asked.

Jessica’s STC contributions for this year’s Technical Publications Competition include acting as a judging team lead; receiving,

checking in, and cataloging entries at the judging consensus party; and working on the registration table at the competition banquet.

Jessica’s experience as technical publications judging manager last year made her a valuable advisor for this year’s competition organizers.

STC Houston thanks Jessica for her excellent support and contributions of time and talent.

(Thanks to Heather Shelley and Zach Taylor for contributing to this article.)



Region 5 Director-Sponsor Report: Leaders Light the Way

by Suzanna Laurent, Region 5 Director-Sponsor

Quite often I hear people make the comment “I just can’t get up in front of a group to speak; it bothers me too much!” Of course, the problem is more intense for some than for others, but remember that our attitudes, mannerisms, body language, and the voice we use in private all go with us into public settings.

Unless we speak up, persuade, and convince, unless we have the power of speech, and unless we have a say in what goes on, we are not in control of our lives. That’s an awesome thought, isn’t it? Yet the fear of public speaking is still the number one phobia in America today!

I’d like to tell you about my friend Mary B. She joined another organization to which I belong, and she quickly accepted a committee management position. She took on one of the hardest committees, but that didn’t bother her at all—it was the fear of giving a report at our meeting that almost made her quit!

It took a lot of courage, but Mary worked hard and was determined to succeed. Since then she has led the chapter as president, served as president of a related citywide organization, and the other night she even performed as “Dolly Parton” in front of a large group of businesswomen! Because of her willingness to leave her comfort zone, she achieved more than she ever thought possible.

Actually, except for when you mutter to yourself, all speaking is public speaking. When you think of it in that context, we are all public speakers—it’s just that some of us have learned

how to speak more effectively than others. Because fear of public speaking is such a widespread problem, I’d like to share some tips about how to reduce anxiety when faced with this task that “gives you butterflies.”

Be Prepared

I’ve found that lack of preparation is a major cause of anxiety. Knowing exactly what you are going to say and how to say it will give you more confidence, which allows you to focus on your presentation. Don’t be afraid to use your notes, I do it all the time!

Picture Success

Imagine walking into a room, being introduced, delivering your presentation with enthusiasm, fielding questions with confidence, and leaving the room knowing you did a great job. Visualization is very powerful, and it will help you focus on what you need to do to be successful.

Rehearse

Practice standing up, with an audience if possible, using any props needed and wearing the clothes you will wear when you speak. If possible, have someone videotape your presentation to play later. Watch the tape and incorporate any changes you think necessary before your final practice session. *This is the best possible preparation!*

Relax

Focus on relaxing instead of thinking about how much you dread speaking.

This part is easy once you learn the technique of how to breathe correctly. When your muscles tighten and you feel nervous, you may not breathe deeply enough.

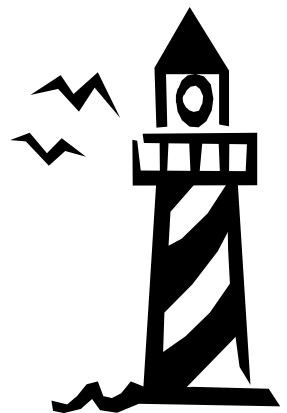
So sit up straight—erect but relaxed—and inhale deeply at least three times. As you breathe, tell yourself when you inhale, “I am” and on the exhale, “relaxed.” Don’t think of anything else except “I am relaxed,” and repeat this exercise several times.

Make Eye Contact

Eye contact helps you connect with your audience. Don’t focus on just one person, though; move your eyes slowly around the room. You can relate better to your audience as individuals if you look into their eyes as you speak. This also helps you react to their interest in you.

Let me encourage you to take advantage of STC to help you improve your speaking skills. Use our chapter meetings and conferences to give reports, presentations, and to practice, practice, practice.

Remember, too, that Aristotle once said “We are what we repeatedly do; excellence then is not an act, but a habit.”



STC Telephone Seminar: Managing Documentation with Humor and Grace

Managing the people and projects associated with technical documentation gets more difficult every day. Coping with changes in technology, blending teams after mergers and acquisitions, facing layoffs, finding qualified candidates, meeting ever-changing deadlines and requirements—these are just some of the challenges that technical communication managers and team leaders face.

This telephone seminar will give you practical tips and techniques to use to help keep your sanity while those around you seem to be losing theirs—as well as a greater appreciation for all the good things about technical documentation that led you to the field in the first place.

The objectives of this seminar are:

- to develop methods to promote your department
- to discover your professional passion
- to understand the real reasons that subject matter experts are not more cooperative
- to appreciate the role of humor in ensuring your success

- to learn a sure-fire way of helping coworkers appreciate the challenges of being a technical communicator
- to understand how respect and credibility are earned, not awarded

You will also get two PowerPoint presentations supporting the objectives of this seminar that you can tailor and offer to your colleagues at the office.

About the Speaker

Doreen A. Mannion, a senior member of STC, has been a professional communicator for more than 15 years. She is also an award-winning author, a frequent speaker at STC annual conferences, and the Management and Professional Development stem manager for the STC 48th Annual Conference, May 13–16, in Chicago.

Doreen has worked as a stand-up comedienne, an advertising salesperson, a trade show coordinator, a technical editor, a technical writer, an indexer, an insurance agent, a sports talk-show host, and a football official. She is a project manager at McDonald Bradley, Inc., in McLean, Virginia. McDonald Bradley consultants provide lifecycle information

technology to federal government and commercial clients.

Benefits

- no travel time
- pay per site, not per person
- opportunity to train all your people without anyone leaving the office

When?

Wednesday, April 18, 12:00–1:30 p.m.

Cost

- U.S.: \$125 per site
- Other countries: Contact the STC office

An additional \$8 will be charged for registrations received less than five days before the seminar.

What Is a Telephone Seminar?

A telephone seminar is like a large conference call—but in a more controlled, radio-like environment. Register in advance, then dial the 800 number from your phone, enter your personal identification number, and you're connected! Sit back and listen to the presentations, and join in the lively Q&A sessions.

Managing Documentation with Humor and Grace: STC Telephone Seminar Registration Form

Wednesday, April 18, 2001, 12:00-1:30 CST #STC6040-0

Name: _____ Company: _____

Street Address _____

(no PO boxes): _____

City, State/Province: _____ Zip/Postal Code: _____

Phone: _____ Fax: _____

E-mail: _____

Will you be able to receive seminar handouts via the Web? Yes No

Cost: \$125 U.S. sites \$140 Canadian sites Payment must accompany registration

Method of payment: Check enclosed, payable to *KRM* MasterCard Visa Discover American Express

Card#: _____ / _____ / _____ / _____

Expiration Date: _____ / _____

Signature: _____ Amount Charged: _____ Date: _____

Calendar of Upcoming Events

Date	Time	Event/Topic	Location	Contact
April 10	6:30 p.m.	General Meeting	Westchase Hilton 9999 Westheimer	Dorothy Murray dorothy_murray@msn.com
April 10	8:00 p.m.	STC Houston administrative council meeting	Westchase Hilton 9999 Westheimer	Deborah Long deborah.long@enron.com
April 25	EBD*	deadline for June newsletter		Rhonda Hector rhonda@newmc.cc
May 8	6:30 p.m.	General Meeting	TBD	Deborah Long deborah.long@enron.com
May 8	8:00 p.m.	STC Houston administrative council meeting	TBD	Deborah Long deborah.long@enron.com

* end of business day

April 10, 2001 Program Taking Charge of Your Career In an Uncertain World

presented by
Joan Bolmer

Career coach Joan Bolmer will speak on a variety of topics about managing your career, including *eliminating fear, thinking like a consultant, proving your value, promoting your profession, and staying in demand.*

Joan Bolmer has been in private practice as a business and personal coach, consultant, and trainer since 1985. She has 30 years experience in corporate and small business management, training and personnel development.

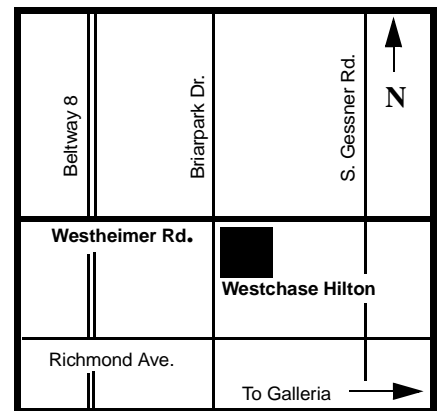
Joan has taken Dr. W. Edwards Deming's course on Quality, Productivity, and Competitive Position. She is a professional certified coach and a member of the International Coach Federation. She has published several instruction books on employee management skills and has had articles published in several magazines.

Over the last 15 years Joan has worked with hundreds of business owners, self-employed professionals, and corporate managers to develop and refine their business, communication, and management skills.

Meeting Basics

Place:

Westchase Hilton Hotel
9999 Westheimer Road
(at Briarpark, between
S. Gessner and Beltway 8)



Date:

Tuesday, April 10, 2001

Time:

5:30 p.m. networking
(hors d'oeuvres)
6:20 p.m. announcements
6:30 p.m. program

Cost:

\$10 (members)
\$13 (non-members)
\$3 (student and unemployed
members)
\$6 (student non-members)

Drawing:

A drawing for various prizes is held at the end of each general meeting. Proceeds benefit the Marx Isaacs Student Scholarship Fund.