



SOCIETY FOR  
TECHNICAL  
COMMUNICATION

# FORWARD

*The Newsletter of the UK Chapter*

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Forward is the official newsletter of the UK Chapter of the Society for Technical Communication (STC). It is published six times per year: January, March, May, July, September and November. Please send articles, letters, comments, and other items for inclusion in the newsletter to the editor by the beginning of a publication month.

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## From the Cuckoo's Nest

*Here's the final column from our Chapter President, Mark Clifford*



It's coming round to that time of year again. Spring is (almost) sprung, and my year in office is almost at an end (a little less of the cheers, please!). Anyway, this will be my last column in the newsletter. Liz Hale will take over as President in June, and I wish her every success.

As usual, there are a number of things happening over the next couple of months. Some of these you'll be aware of from the last newsletter, others are detailed in this one as well.

The next two meetings - in May and June - promise to be extremely interesting with presentations of relevance to everyone involved in technical communication. On 12<sup>th</sup> May we have Dr John Cuthbert from CASE giving a presentation on ISO2000. In June Caroline Jarrett will present User Interfaces. The June meeting is also the AGM. All are welcome at Kensington Town Hall.

Over the last few weeks, students at Coventry University have been working on three projects for us - designing a new Chapter Brochure, developing a new web site and designing a new look for the Newsletter. What we now need to do is put together three small teams of reviewers to evaluate what the student groups have produced, and decide which of the designs in each of the categories we will adopt for the Chapter. If you have a specific interest or expertise and will be willing to review these projects please let David Harrison know. His e-mail is: [david.harrison5@virgin.net](mailto:david.harrison5@virgin.net). David will get all the details to you.

Last but by no means least, I want to give a big thank you to Christine Woskett for her untiring efforts in editing and distributing the newsletter over the last two and a half years. Christine has succumbed to an enticing offer from Bill in Seattle and is joining the brain drain during the summer. Christine will be missed by all of us. It does mean we have to find a new Newsletter Editor though. Volunteers please!!

## Congratulations!

*From Mick Robinson, Chapter Membership Manager*

Congratulations to Karen T Burke, who has been with us 5 years and is therefore automatically made a Senior Member.

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**Advertising charges**

Business card	£10
1/4 page	£15
1/2 page	£25
Full page	£40

## Chapter meetings 2001

We have a varied program of events for 2001, and there will be a meeting in Sheffield as well as London to make them accessible to more members. Full details of the September meeting will be in the next newsletter. In addition to the speaker at each meeting, there'll be time to meet with other technical communicators for an informal chat, and to raise specific issues during the Agony Aunt session.

### 12<sup>th</sup> May

Dr. John Cuthbert from CASE (Counsel and Advice to Senior Executives) will be speaking about the new quality standard: ISO2000. His presentation will include advice on how to write Quality Manuals & Procedures to comply with ISO requirements, and how to work to ISO2000 as Technical Authors. For more information about CASE, see [www.case-jc.demon.co.uk](http://www.case-jc.demon.co.uk).

The meeting will be in Committee Room 2, Kensington Town Hall, Hornton Street, London W8 (behind Kensington High Street). This is just a few minutes walk from Kensington High Street tube station.

### 23<sup>rd</sup> June

The UK Chapter AGM will be held in London in mid June. Our speaker will be Caroline Jarrett of Effortmark, who will be speaking about interface design. Caroline is a consultant on forms and usability, and a member of the team that has been updating the Open University's course on interface design.

### September

The September meeting will be in Sheffield, and we'll be hosted by Florence du Jardin, who leads the MA course in Technical Authorship at Sheffield Hallam University.

### 24<sup>th</sup> November

The Awards Dinner for our Chapter Technical Publications Competition will be held in London, with Kitty Aughey, our Region Director Sponsor, as the guest of honour.

## Chapter Web site



### *From Richard Tuft, Chapter Webmaster*

Following the decision by the Society's head office to no longer host chapter Web sites, we have a new home for the UK Chapter's site on a server in The Netherlands that is hosting the majority of the European Chapters' Web sites.

A great deal of effort went in to arranging this and I'd like to thank Brian Martin (TransAlpine) and Jang Graat (Netherlands) for pushing the project through to a successful conclusion.

The URL for the U.K. site is:

<http://www.stc-europe.org/uk/stcukhome.htm>

Unfortunately the site is a mirror of the existing site on the STC HQ's EasyStreet server and I have to admit that some of the information is decidedly dated. A new design and revised content is being planned but some of this is waiting for results of a project by the Coventry University students. Hopefully this will be ready by the middle of the year.

## Projects with Coventry University

*Here's some more information about the projects from Jacqui Bleetman, who organises them.*

The projects are being run as part of the students' final year "self-initiated project". Each student will work on an individual or team project. The students work full-time on the projects for about 8 (term) weeks from 12th March. They are offered regular tutorial support from the teaching staff, but work mainly on their own. We encourage them to consider all aspects of Information Design, including usability and testing.

The submission date for the project is 24th May 2001. We have to assess and mark them within about 10 days and they may be displayed at the degree show.

## UK Chapter Technical Publications Competition



*From Chapter Competitions Manager, Liz Hale*

A reminder that anyone can enter STC's competitions. Entrants do not have to be members of STC or any other affiliated organisation. The

only requirements are that entries must contain sufficient technical, scientific, medical, or similar content to qualify as 'technical communication' and must have been produced or substantially revised after January 1<sup>st</sup> 2000.

Also, entries must not have been entered in any previous STC competition.

### Categories and closing date 2001

The competition categories for 2001 are listed below, and the closing date is Friday, 28<sup>th</sup> September. Entry forms will be sent out with the next Chapter newsletter.

1. **Brochures** - Publications that market a technical product, service, or organisation
2. **User Guides** - Guides that provide instructions for using a product (IT, medical or scientific – hardware or software).
3. **Reference Materials** - Guides that provide reference information on the features and functions of a product (books, posters, quick reference cards, keyboard strips etc.).
4. **Style Guides** - Guides that define the standards used for the style and presentation of a company's documentation (on paper and / or online).
5. **Reports** - Reports on IT, medical or scientific subjects, usually aimed at the professional community or a contracting agency.

6. **Technical Art** - Any single, mounted illustration or design idea intended for use in an IT, medical or scientific publication.
7. **Online (PC, Mac or UNIX)** - Online or web-based information that has a primary purpose of either providing assistance to users of a product, or of informing users about a company, product or service.

### Want to help out this year?

As always, help would be appreciated with any of the following:

- Liaising with the press and getting publicity for the competition
- Handling entries and co-ordinating judging
- Judging the entries (various categories; you say what you feel best qualified to judge)
- Organising the judges' consensus meeting (at which final awards are discussed and agreed)

Contact Liz Hale if you would like to get involved: [l.hale@kudos-idd.com](mailto:l.hale@kudos-idd.com) or phone 0208-969-3139.

For details of other STC Competitions worldwide, visit the STC's central website at [www.stc-va.org](http://www.stc-va.org)

## Information mapping

*STC UK has negotiated a substantial discount for UK Chapter members wishing to attend Information Mapping courses this Spring/Summer. Here are the details from Sally Young, Information Mapping® Manager with Kudos Information Ltd.*

You may already be aware of Information Mapping, and that Kudos has been appointed as a distributor in the UK. Information Mapping can help an organisation to develop and manage information so that it is not only available but also accessible to the reader. Organisations are using the methodology to:

- improve communication skills
- increase the clarity and usability of policies and procedures
- improve the effectiveness of a corporate intranet

Kudos is pleased to offer a special 25% discount to all members of the STC UK Chapter who attend a "Developing Procedures, Policies and Documentation" course in May or June 2001. The discounted rate is £650 (normal rate £870).

To book your place at the special STC Members' rate, contact Louise Knott at Kudos: e-mail [l.knott@kudos-idd.com](mailto:l.knott@kudos-idd.com) or telephone 01483 881349.

Course dates are:

14<sup>th</sup> – 16<sup>th</sup> May

25<sup>th</sup> – 27<sup>th</sup> June

To find out more about Information Mapping and Kudos courses, follow the Information Mapping links from the Kudos Web page at [www.kudos-idd.com](http://www.kudos-idd.com)

We look forward to hearing from you very soon.

# STC News

## STC France celebrates



*Our Secretary David Harrison represented the UK Chapter at the recent 10<sup>th</sup> birthday celebrations for STC France*

The first session started with a short talk from each of the main French

Chapter officers, who painted a picture about their role and background, then each of the European Chapters represented gave a presentation:

- Luc Bouquet, Past President of the Belgium Chapter, opened this session by talking about their recent success with their first conference.
- Suzana Rakovic, Vice-President of the Transalpine Chapter, described how they use considerable Telephone conferencing because of their wide geographical spread (this Chapter spreads right across Europe, from Germany in the north to Italy in the south, taking in the Alpine countries inbetween).
- Paul Bernstein of the Israel Chapter told us that this Chapter is both the biggest and oldest outside the United States. The Chapter has member contact through an e-mail site named "Techshoret", which we are invited to join.
- President of the France Chapter, Mike Thompson, concluded the session. In his Chapter, the most popular events tend to be organised workshops around such perennial favourites as FrameMaker and RoboHelp.

The afternoon session comprised several talks.

"Let Engineers Write" by Luc Bouquet, Atek

If Luc's promise is as good as his talk then the slides for this presentation will be on the Internet by now ([www.attek.be](http://www.attek.be)).

Luc's basic premise is, that although we Technical Communicators have been pleading with Engineers not to write but to leave it to us "experts", it would now be better to encourage their writing contribution.

However, we should be moving ahead and adopting the principles of information mapping, single sourcing and chunking in such a way that experts can contribute to the manual by writing the small chunk of information that only they know best. We should consider both encouraging and teaching the experts to put their knowledge down on paper. Our role as Technical Communicators is to guide the experts and tell them what we really need. Then we can move on and use our specialist skills to organise the chunks of information, reshape them where necessary into cohesive parts that fit together, and then integrate the chunks into a single-sourcing framework that uses

each piece in its right place, context and meaning. This paints a picture of experts as being the providers of information while we technical communicators are the gate-keepers who give access to assembled structures of total information that is put together in a way that will satisfy the user.

"How to Go Global without Going Broke" by Jennifer O'Neill, Interlogix – Europe and Africa

Jennifer works for a group that has contributing writers scattered all over the globe – this has brought her the unenviable task of co-ordinating manuals from four variants of English, all to be edited then translated into more than 20 different target languages, and all in time for the product to leave the factory door.

Here source text, as stated, comes from four sources:

- European and South African writers producing international English
- American writers producing American English text
- Australian writers and engineers producing a blend of international English along with an abundance of American and other non-native English terminology
- Other Writers (mostly Asian) who produce their own unique English variant that comes from writing text in a second language.

Although many European and American texts may remain in their original form, much of the text has to be "Commonalised" before it can be translated into the many European and Asian forms.

Of course, most of the rules are familiar to those who may have been involved in preparing text for translation. However, the scale of the exercise means that financial matters also cause their own needs.

**Concision** – writers are encouraged to be frugal with words and phrases. "Press the ENTER key" for instance has twice as many words as "Press ENTER" and when you are paying for translation by the word such phrases will quickly push up costs.

**Consistence** – Inconsistent writing increases translation costs so Interlogic use controls akin to Simplified English – glossaries of approved terms, standardised phrasing. Ideally words and terms should have only one meaning when translation costs are the driver.

**Neutral Information** – they avoid being country-specific in order to widen document use after translation. For example, an American engineer may specify that "wiring must conform to National Electric Code (NEC) and/or local codes having jurisdiction." To be neutral, it would be rewritten as "wiring must conform to national codes of approval": that is almost 50% shorter and translates uniformly into many languages.

Jennifer's talk went on to touch on other subjects within the topic such as Multilingual manuals, Planning Localisation and the development of a

Global Corporate Style Guide. If you want to hear it all, “straight from the horse’s mouth” then I suggest you go listen to her at the STC Conference in May.

“The Benefits of Bringing ‘Tool Developers’ into the Writing group” by Kathleen Calloway, ILOG Catherine explained that this new terminology was born out of financial constraints. Their group was rapidly coming to a similar conclusion to Luc Bouquet, which is that “Experts should write!”. However, the restraints were such that although they knew what they really needed, the writing group was not allowed to bring in a “Programmer” or “Developer”. The department head eventually circumnavigated this problem by creating a new position that was entitled “Tool Developer”. Their role was to liaise with the “techie” and interpret some of the jargon, bring the knowledge into the writing environment and help deliver the final product. Other roles that they took on were to keep an eye on current emerging technology to ensure that the writing team was using the latest and most productive software, and also to help out configuring software and widgets to ease life’s technical problems.

#### STC Europe Web Server by Brian Martin

Brian explained some of the technical issues pertinent to the new STC-Europe Web site, and organised a brief brainstorm over what we needed from the new site.

A straw poll showed that features like “Job Bank”, “Discussion Group” and “Events Calendar” were highly rated as necessities. However, there was some dissension from the floor and, as time was precious, Brian kept the meeting short by asking for a volunteer to co-ordinate local input – Patricia McClelland of the France Chapter volunteered.

Brian pointed out that there was a discussion list on the web (<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/stc-europe>) and that all are invited to contribute.

“Climbing the Corporate Ladder - >From Tech Writer to Corporate Communications Director” by Tom Scott, General Electric

Tom Scott was last to the speakers’ corner and he presented an image of an aspiring technical author who was able to draw on his essential writing skills in order to raise himself to Corporate Communications Director.

Tom drew up a list of personal skills that he considered necessary for self-advancement, and drew many parallels between these and the skills that make us technical communicators.

It started with a diagram with “you” in the centre, with attributes such as the people skills that we use to extract information from our subject matter experts. He drew three main points around this epicentre:

The **Business** – how we must know our business, and the business that we are in, and the business that employs us.

The **Functional Expertise** – the knowledge that we have of tools that we need to do our job, and the more we know about them then the more efficiently we perform.

**Change** – how we all know and encourage change, how we expect change, and how we can utilise change to our benefit.

According to Tom, the path to success comes from the following six elements:

1. **Performance:** you must know how good you are.
2. **Expertise:** you must have it and, what’s more, you must make sure that others know you have it.
3. **Ownership:** Be prepared to take charge of your own career – don’t wait for training opportunities – make them happen!
4. **Challenge versus Visibility:** when it comes to choosing tasks, go for the biggest, dirtiest job that you know is within (or just beyond) your capacity – learn from it and make sure that others notice you doing it.
5. **Mentors,** if you haven’t got one then go out and find one. If you’re new in the job, you need to learn fast and find out fast. If you’re reasonably well time-served in the job, you can always discover more. And if you’re almost at the top of your job then the only mentor is the man at the top – get him to teach you everything he knows.
6. **Global,** look out to other work domains and don’t miss an opportunity

Tom finished off with a few career dis-railers :

- Not dealing with conflict
- Not Listening
- Not delivering
- Not inviting change

## Tech writing funnies



Two fonts walk into a pub. The barman immediately asks them to leave. When they ask why, he says “We don’t serve your type in here”.



A linguistics professor was lecturing to his Californian class one day. “In English,” he said, “A double negative forms a positive. In some languages, though, such as Russian, a double negative is still a negative. However, there is no language wherein a double positive can form a negative.”

A voice from the back of the room piped up, “Yeah, right.”

# Conferences

## Online Help Conference

27 – 30 June 2001, Copenhagen, Denmark

This year's conference is the largest yet, beating last year's record number of seminars, conference sessions, showcase events, and networking opportunities. The keynote presentation is by leading author and Help expert William Horton, who reveals how to double the value of your Help system.

To help you plan your track through the programme, the sessions are organised into 5 key interest areas:

- Windows Help
- Browser-based Help
- Information Design
- Content Development
- Web Technology

For full details, see the Web site at

[www.digitext.co.uk/conf2001](http://www.digitext.co.uk/conf2001).

## TECH\*COMM 2001

15 – 18 July 2001, Washington DC

Registration is open for TECH\*COMM 2001, the conference for experienced technical communicators!

Conference details are available at

<http://www.SolutionsEvents.com/01techcomm/index.html>.

The 3rd Annual TECH\*COMM Conference features more than 50 sessions presented by 35 top speakers over 4 days. We're committed to bringing you the information you need to build your knowledge and advance your career. You'll learn new ways to handle old problems and proven strategies for dealing with new issues.

The conference sessions span the broad range of topics you need.

- Knotty questions on usability and design
- Best practices for defining and developing content
- Implementing single-sourcing and knowledge management initiatives
- Managing projects, teams, and departments
- Selecting and getting the most from tools and technologies

- Approaching your job like a business

The program is packed, but we've also built in time for networking and fun. The Ultimate Chocolate Party is a TECH\*COMM tradition you won't want to miss.

Other activities include the Networking Lunch on Monday and the Conference Exhibition & Reception on Tuesday. You'll have plenty of opportunities to get together with old friends and meet new colleagues from around the world.

For details or to register contact SOLUTIONS, Inc.

[info@SolutionsEvents.com](mailto:info@SolutionsEvents.com)

800-448-4230 or 781-942-1610

<http://www.SolutionsEvents.com>

## InterChange 2001

15 – 16 October 2001, Boxborough, Massachusetts

InterChange is an annual conference co-sponsored by the University of Massachusetts Boston and the Northern New England and Boston chapters of the Society for Technical Communication.

Experienced professionals are invited to submit proposals for conference sessions. We welcome new and relevant research. We encourage sessions on advanced topics, especially innovative technology. The submission deadline is June 8<sup>th</sup>.

Presenters do not pay a registration fee for the day of their presentation. They do pay the regular fee to attend on the other day. Lunch is included. There is an additional \$25 walk-in registration fee.

For more information, go to

<http://www.interchangeconference.com>.

## Communicating in the New Millennium

21 - 24 October 2001, Santa Fe, New Mexico

SIGDOC is the Association for Computing Machinery's (ACM) Special Interest Group for Documentation, a professional organization dedicated to advanced topics in documentation for and with computers. SIGDOC 2001 will provide an opportunity for the exchange of information related to exciting new research and experience reports in a number of areas.

For more information see:

[www.cs.ucr.edu/~stilley/sigdoc2001](http://www.cs.ucr.edu/~stilley/sigdoc2001)

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