



SOCIETY FOR
TECHNICAL
COMMUNICATION

Forward

The Newsletter of the UK Chapter of the STC

Volume IV, No. 4

July, 2001

Editorial

Welcome to the new-look Chapter Newsletter. As the newly appointed Editors, we face a double challenge - not only do we have to manage a Newsletter that will satisfy the needs of our members, but we also have to match the high standards set by our predecessor in this job, Christine Woskett.

Christine is leaving the UK to take up a new post with Microsoft in Seattle, Washington. We wish Christine every success in her new job and look forward to keeping in touch with her.

Becoming Newsletter editors means we received a pack of mailing labels, which gave us the opportunity of seeing the chapter membership list for the first time. The order of names and addresses was a bit puzzling, until we realised they were printed in alphabetical order of postcode! That obviously makes sense to someone at the STC headquarters, if not to us.

It was a surprise to look at the mailing labels and see what a geographically wide-spread Chapter we are. Many of our members do live in London and the South-East, but many others are far away. That means that it is

very unlikely that any one Chapter meeting will be able to attract all our members to one venue at one time.

This fact makes other activities, such as the Chapter email discussion list (discussed elsewhere in this Newsletter) as well as the Newsletter itself, much more important than in some, more geographically compact, Chapters.

Elsewhere in this edition of the Newsletter we have a full report on the Chapter AGM, and a message from Liz Hale, our new Chapter President.

There is also a very important personal message from Caroline Jarrett, who was unable to attend the AGM as planned.

We hope you enjoy reading this Newsletter, and we welcome your comments, and your contributions.

*David Farbey and Birgit Bolata,
Editors*

Forward is the official newsletter of the UK Chapter of the Society for Technical Communication (STC).

*It is published six times each year:
January, March, May, July, September
and November.*

*Please send articles, letters, comments,
and other items for inclusion in the news-
letter to the editors by the beginning of a
publication month.*

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AGM Report

The UK Chapter Annual General Meeting took place on 23rd June 2001 in Committee Room 2 at Kensington Town Hall, Hornton Street, London W8, between 11:00 and 13:00.

The meeting was chaired jointly by Mark Clifford and Liz Hale.

The meeting included:

- Handover to new Chapter President, Liz Hale
- Election of new officers for 2001-2
- Report on results of recent Members' Survey
- Events and meeting plans for the coming year
- Presentation to retiring Newsletter Editor, Christine Woskett

Handover to new Chapter President, Liz Hale. In time honoured fashion, Mark Clifford handed over the reins to last year's First Vice-President, Liz Hale, who will serve as STC UK Chapter President for the coming year 2001-2. Many of you will know Liz, as she has been active in the UK Tech Comms industry for more years than she cares to admit (!) and has been the STC UK Chapter's competitions manager since 1999.

Of course Mark will continue to be involved with the STC UK Chapter, both as Immediate Past President and as the officer in charge of Education & Employment for 2001-2 (see New Officers below). Liz Hale can be contacted at: l.hale@kudosidd.com or by phone on +44 (0)7970 - 649579.

New Officers Elected. The following officers were proposed and elected to serve for the coming year, 2001-2:

- Secretary - David Harrison
- Treasurer - Kim Berquist
- Programs/Conference Organizer - Tina Hoffman
- Education/Employment - Mark Clifford
- Chapter Communications/PR (incorporating Newsletter Editorship) - David Farbey and Birgit Bolata
- Competitions - Liz Hale
- Website - Richard Tuft

The Chapter would like to thank the retiring officers, who have given so freely of their time and expertise in the past years:

- Caroline Jarrett
- Marcus Street
- Christine Woskett

Report on Members' Survey. Of the 105 questionnaires sent to members (with SAE enclosed) only 18 were actually returned. The officers commented that it is to be hoped the other 87 members made good use of their SAEs, since they did not use them to reply to

the survey, nor to suggest Chapter events/ideas for the forthcoming year! Only 4 members stated that "they are only in it for the publications".

The other 14 offered various suggestions as to events, venues and topics which they would like to see covered by the UK Chapter in the coming year:

- Overwhelmingly the most popular venue is London (although we did receive individual requests for events in Eire, Scotland, Leicester, Reading and Birmingham)
- Information Design and Usability are the most frequently requested event topics
- "What new software tools offer to authors/designers" is also popular with members

Several members also pointed out that evening/week-end events (which members have to attend in their own time and fund out of their own pockets) are typically less well attended than whole-day seminars or conferences during the working week. The officers will therefore pursue the idea of a one-day conference, to be held in central London and addressing the topics requested by members (see Next Year's Events).

Next Year's Events. Taking into account the requests expressed by members via the Survey replies and the wishes of the officers present at the AGM, the STC UK Chapter plans the following services and events for 2001-2:

- European online Discussion Group (members can share problems and solutions with colleagues across all the European STC Chapters). The group URL is stc-europe@yahoogroups.com. To subscribe, send an email to: *stc-europe-subscribe@egroups.com*
- Annual UK Publications Competition (Autumn 2001)
- Competition Awards Dinner, venue TBC (Saturday, November 24th, 2001)
- One-day Conference, Kensington Town Hall (date TBC, Nov/Dec 2001 or Spring 2002)
- European Conference, date and venue TBC (in conjunction with other STC Chapters in Europe)

Goodbye to Christine Woskett. Mark Clifford's final (but pleasurable) task as retiring Chapter President was to say "goodbye" and "thank you" to our excellent Newsletter Editor, Christine Woskett, who is soon to leave the UK to take up a position with Microsoft based in Seattle, USA. Christine has worked tirelessly for the Chapter for the past two

Officers

The following members have been elected as officers of the UK Chapter of the STC for 2001-2002.

UK Chapter President

Liz Hale

l.hale@kudos-idd.com

First Vice President

Vacancy

Second Vice President

Vacancy

Secretary

David Harrison

david.harrison5@virgin.net

Treasurer

Kim Berquist

kim@2kinformatic.lu

UK Chapter Managers.

Membership

Mick Robinson

mick@xara.com

Employment, Education, & Academic

Mark Clifford

m.clifford@kudos-idd.com

Competitions

Liz Hale

l.hale@kudos-idd.com

Program and meetings

Tina Hoffman

thoffman@pathtrace.com

Legal advisor

Paul Bakker

paul@petecom.co.uk

Web site

Richard Tuft

richard.tuft@iint.co.uk

Newsletter and PR

Birgit Bolata

birgit@bolata.co.uk

and David Farbey

dfarbey@yahoo.co.uk

STC Web site

<http://www.stc.org>

UK Chapter Web site

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

UK Chapter Discussion List

stcuk-discuss@chiark.greenend.org.uk

President's message

Our new Chapter President, Liz Hale, writes:

Hello everyone and thank you for giving me the opportunity to serve as the STC UK Chapter's president for the coming year. I am taking over from Mark Clifford, who has done a great job for the past 12 months and also been kind enough to stay on - not just as "past president" but also as

our Education & Employment officer for 2001-2.

Thanks a lot Mark and I look forward to learning from you over the coming year!

This year looks like being an exciting one for the Chapter, with our first ever one-day conference to plan, our third competition to organize and judge, and the first ever STC European Conference to work towards achieving sometime in the near future (hopefully). I can't wait!!

As you will see from the minutes of our AGM, we also have a number of new officers in the Chapter this coming year, so I look forward to working closely with all of them to making your Chapter an even bigger success this year. (*The new Chapter Officers are all listed in the left-hand column on this page - the Editors*)

And for myself, I am off to sunny France for July, to build up my energies for a challenging year ahead. I will be back in harness from the start of August, so please do contact me and say "hello" when you get time.

Cheers!!

Liz Hale

l.hale@kudos-idd.com

AGM Report (cont.)

years and we think she probably deserves a break! We will miss you, Christine but wish you every success in your new job and your move to the U.S. of A.

Mark presented Christine with a beautiful bouquet of flowers on behalf of all the STC UK Chapter members (so she had to go out and buy a vase to put them in after the AGM - sorry about that Christine!!).

Thanks to Liz Hale who took the minutes for the AGM, as our Chapter Secretary, David Harrison, was unable to attend.

Membership News

Mick Robinson, Chapter Membership Officer, reports: The list of new members is slightly longer than usual this time as I missed the deadline for the April newsletter. Apologies to those receiving a belated welcome.

At the end of June we had 105 members. Most are in the UK but we have 15 members in other countries. (The largest non-UK country is Ireland with six members.)

Welcome to these new members since the last membership report:

- Jacquelyn Archibald-Hope, of Bury
- Melanie Davis Theale, of Berkshire
- Steve Hollas, of Woking, Surrey
- Indi Liepa, of Camberley, Surrey
- John Osborn, of Great Dunmow, Essex
- Todd Rowan, of Bracknell, Berkshire
- Debbie Wickens, of London W14

And a welcome also to Julie Edwards of Haarlem, The Netherlands who transfers into our chapter. We've also lost one member, Dirk Manuel, who has moved to Texas.

Personal Message from Caroline Jarret

Dear STC UK chapter members,

I was expecting to speak at the recent Chapter AGM but unfortunately I was diagnosed with breast cancer on 1st June. My operation was on the Friday before the meeting. I am pleased to tell you that it went very well. Two small tumours are now in the dustbin and it has not spread anywhere. I will now go on to radiotherapy but it is possible that I will not need chemotherapy due to having caught it at an early stage.

I mention this to you all because obviously when I found the lump, the thought went through my head "if I ignore this, then it won't exist". However, I did the right thing and went directly to the doctor. I am now exceedingly glad that I did so and want other people to know that the treatment wasn't anything like as bad as I feared. It's also a big relief to know that it is dealt with.

I am not quite sure yet when I will be back to normal working, but I am gradually picking up activities and expect to be fully functional again in the not too distant future.

All the best,
Caroline Jarrett

Email lists that can help technical writers

by David Farbey

Although many employers take a relaxed approach to their employees email use, some have begun to regard email and internet access as time-wasting and costly and are introducing restrictive policies. Some staff now have to justify their use of email and the internet before access is granted in the way that they would have to justify the cost of a magazine subscription or a training course.

Email can be a great way of swapping Bill Gates jokes or chatting with friends and family across the globe, but it can also be a great way of keeping up with your profession and solving technical problems. There are a number of email discussion groups that are run by technical writers and for technical writers that can help you do your job. Many groups offer technical writers fast, friendly and free advice about a particular activity such as help authoring, or about a specific tool such as Adobe Acrobat. Many list contributors are expert users, often including (in the case of commercial products) some of the engineers and who designed and wrote the original code. If I ever needed to show my employer justification for email access, I would be able to cite plenty of occasions when I had been able to keep working only because someone on an email discussion group had offered a solution to my problem.

Origins and variations. The internet grew from a system that was designed to allow scientists and technicians to exchange technical information. Long before Tim Berners-Lee invented the World Wide Web, internet users were using email and Usenet newsgroups to exchange ideas. The designations of Usenet groups always include a top-level indication of the area of interest such as "comp." for computing topics and "rec." for recreational topics. The top-level indicator "alt." (meaning "alternative") has become infamous for some of its bizarre and controversial subjects.

Usenet is still there, with thousands of newsgroups on every possible subject. If your ISP doesn't provide a newsgroup or Usenet server, you can access newsgroups over the World Wide Web through the Google Groups site at <http://groups.google.com>, which has recently taken over the more well known Deja News service.

Unfortunately, many newsgroups suffer from unsolicited bulk commercial mailings ("spam"). More unfortunately still, there is a strong possibility that any email address you use to post a message to a newsgroup will be "harvested" by spammers, and you will start to receive unsolicited commercial mail in your own inbox.

Usenet newsgroups require you to go to read and post messages on a specific server. Many more mailing lists work on an email basis, with messages delivered to your inbox. When you post a message to the list, it is delivered to the inbox of every subscriber. Most email discussion lists offer administrative options which allow you to sus-

For the first time in the UK, Shlomo Perets presents his

FrameMaker-to-Acrobat Advanced Techniques Seminar

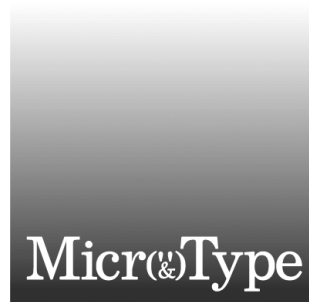
September 17, 2001 • Edinburgh, Scotland
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(www.europdf.com)

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- Ari's Link Checker (Dionis, US \$99 value)



"Thank you for this class, it was definitely the most worthwhile seminar I've attended. . .

The many specific, valuable recommendations, based on a wealth of knowledge and experience, will save us from wasting time on manual fixes and trial and error."

"The course was wonderful.

There is some prejudice against PDF in my company and I would like to reverse this trend. Now I think I should be able to do that . . . I was most interested in how FrameMaker and Acrobat work together to give real life to PDF documents."

"The most valuable topics for me were all the factors which could contribute to imperfect PDFs . . . what is possible using FrameMaker and Acrobat together in terms of creating instructional materials . . . and the topic of interactive PDFs, which opened a whole new world for me."

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Email lists (cont.)

pend your subscription temporarily (usually called the “NOMAIL” command), useful for when you are on vacation, or to receive all the days contributions in a single message (usually called the “DIGEST” command).

Some commercial software vendors run lists for their users. Some of these lists offer access to technical support, and others are one-way announcement lists, which send news and information from the company to registered users.

Some email discussion lists offer Web-based access as an alternative to delivering emails to your inbox. You can read mail, check the message archive, and post messages from a web page if you prefer not to clutter up your inbox. You can set up a web-based email discussion group for free on Yahoo Groups (<http://groups.yahoo.com>) which is exactly what the European group of STC chapters has done (details later).

Etiquette. Email discussion groups have their own etiquette. A new member is always a “newbie”, which is by no means a derogatory term. Many lists have message archive or a web page with a list of Frequently Answered Questions, and many lists send an introductory message to all new members, with technical instructions and etiquette rules. It is a good idea to “lurk” on the list for a while - that is, join the list and read messages without joining in by posting to the list - until you get the feel of the conversations on the list.

If you want to be respected in an email discussion group, take care not to “flame” any other poster by being rude or insulting. Never be rude to a list member because you disagree with their opinion. And never “shout” - anything you write in CAPITALS is considered “shouting”

Try these lists. Here are some of the technical writing lists that I have taken part in from time to time. If you can't find a list on a topic that interests you, try looking at the “Mailing Lists” section on Peter Ring's “User Friendly Manuals” Web site (<http://www.prc.dk/user-friendly-manuals/home.html>). The list was originally compiled by Mark Levinson, former President of the Israel STC Chapter, and now an Editorial Board member for the STC quarterly “Technical Communication”.

The techwr-l list (pronounced “tech-whirl”) is the grand-daddy of all tech writing lists. It has over 4,000 subscribers, and is managed with a knowledgeable but firm hand by Eric Ray. Anything that is even mildly off topic is pounced upon ferociously, but on the other hand, the list archives are a goldmine of information. The traffic on this list is very high, and a Digest subscription is a good idea. The list has its own website, which has feature articles as well as subscription information and archive access. The Web address is <http://www.ray-comm.com/techwhirl/index.php3>.

Framers is the list for FrameMaker users, and can be found at <http://www.frameusers.com>. This list has a searchable archive, and you don't need to subscribe in

order to search. If you use Adobe Acrobat, then you should look at the lists available at the PDF Zone, at <http://www.pdfzone.com/resources/discussions.html>.

If you are responsible for creating online help of any kind, you should consider joining the Help Authoring Tools and Techniques - hatt - list at <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/HATT>. Another useful group which has it home on Yahoo Group is the WebWorks Publisher users group. Their address is <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/wwwp-users>. If you register at Yahoo Groups you can subscribe to as many lists there as you want with the same member details.

The most popular arena for information on Microsoft Word is not an email discussion list, but a collection of more than thirty newsgroups under the “microsoft.public.word.” hierarchy. The names of the groups are informative, for example “microsoft.public.word.docmanagement” or “microsoft.public.word.formattinglongdocs”.

Many STC Special Interest Groups - SIGs - have their own lists as well. The discussion list for the Lone Writers SIG has its home page at <http://stcsig.org/lw/list-serv.htm>. (Lone Writers are those who work on their own or in very small departments.) As many of you know, the UK Chapter has its own email list based at <http://www.chiark.greenend.org.uk/mailman/listinfo/stcuk-discuss>, and you may have read in an earlier issue of “Forward” about the European Chapters mailing list at <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/stc-europe>.

If techwr-l is the most regimented discussion list for technical writers, then TechComm is the least regimented. In fact its rules state that the only topic that is off-topic is discussing whether something is off-topic or not. The list describes itself as the “bar” where members can relax while the serious “conference” takes place on techwr-l. If you would like to discuss anything from pregnant chads to Britney Spears in the company of other tech writers, you can find out all about the TechComm list at <http://home.clara.net/hairydog/tech-comm.html>.

Conclusion. As well as being a source of information, email discussion groups can create a sense of camaraderie, where group members share a common interest or work under similar situations. The Lone Writers list has a very strong community feeling to it and the TechComm list, for all its jokiness and banter, is a very supportive group as well.

As the UK Chapter is very spread out geographically, perhaps we should get together more regularly (even if only virtually) by using our mailing list. We could start a mailing list home page on our Chapter Web site, with pictures and biographies of list members. If you think that's a good idea, or even if you think it's a bad idea, why don't you write to the Chapter list about it, as that's exactly the right place to have a discussion!

David Farbey
dfarbey@yahoo.co.uk

Forthcoming Chapter Meetings

The following Chapter meetings are planned for the coming months:

15th September 2001. The September meeting will be in Sheffield, and we'll be hosted by Anne-Florence du Jardin, who leads the MA course in Technical Authorship at Sheffield Hallam University.

The meeting will be held in Room 7132 of the Stoddart Building (Technology Centre) which is part of Sheffield Hallam's City Campus, about five minutes walk from the railway station. The meeting will start at 11:00 am.

24th November 2001. 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.

More details will be posted soon.

Chapter Competition

There is still time to submit your entry for the 2001 UK Chapter Technical Writing Competition. The closing date for all entries is 28th September 2001.

You can submit an entry for any of the following categories: Brochures, User Guides, Reference Materials, Style Guides, Reports, and Online.

More details and entry forms are available from Liz Hale at l.hale@kudos-idd.com or phone 0208-969-3139

Conferences

Developing A Content-management Strategy: Implications For A Multi-language Environment

18 - 20 September 2001, Amsterdam, The Netherlands

Speakers: Dr. JoAnn Hackos, Director, CIDM; Grace Velardi, Simultrans, LLC; and representatives of leading content-management vendors

There is a special reduced price for STC members of \$925 (as opposed to \$1,100).

For more information see: <http://www.infomanagementcenter.com/01cms.htm> or call 00-1-303-232-7586

The costs of maintaining your information resources in multiple languages continue to soar. Publishing to your Web site, your enterprise Intranet, and your Extranet in many languages and keeping the content current can seem daunting.

In this mini-conference, you will review the 10-step methodology for implementing content management in your organization and address the cost savings and effi-

ciencies gained by managing your multi-language requirements.

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 8th.

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.interchange-conference.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

Communicators in Concert . The STC Region One/Two Participatory Conference, 17-19 January 2002

Regions One and Two invite you to attend a conference that emphasizes participation. Session leaders will present a wide range of insights, tools, and techniques, and devote at least a third of the session's time to audience involvement. You will then participate in discussions with these session leaders and your peers. We envision a lively dialog in which our collective thoughts, ideas, information, and experience raise everyone's expertise and awareness of the challenges and opportunities found in technical communication.

As technical communicators, we must keep pace with an ever-changing business environment. To remain competitive, we must master emerging skills and technologies while managing our careers in a highly demanding field. This is especially true today, when an uncertain economic future requires every firm to consider carefully the business practices, direction, and resources needed to meet their goals.

Communicators in Concert: A Participatory Conference can help you find answers. It will be held from Thursday, January 17 through Saturday, January 19 at a site (still to be determined) in northern New Jersey.

Conferences (cont.)

Thursday is scheduled to be STC Leadership Day; all members currently in STC leadership position and those interested in becoming leaders are encouraged to attend. Friday and Saturday are scheduled for concert sessions.

Convenience was a key factor in our early planning. Thus, we chose a date that would not conflict with any other STC regional event. We selected northern New Jersey because it offers a central location and ease of access. In addition, the conference hotel will be served by public transportation.

For your entertainment, Friday evening will feature a dinner/dance with a live performance by a local ensemble. The following Monday, January 21, is a holiday

(Martin Luther King Day), so you can take time to explore New York City. Conference planners will provide information on area attractions and events.

The closing date for submitting your proposal for the Communicators in Concert conference has been extended to August 10th 2001. Send your proposal to mary@pdicreative.com

So save the date. And talk up the conference among your peers. The greater the attendance, the greater the participation, the greater the value.

Rich Maggiani, Conference Manager
rich@pdicreative.com

Advertising rates (per issue):

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

This newsletter invites writers to submit articles that they wish to be considered for publication.

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