



Forward

SOCIETY FOR
TECHNICAL
COMMUNICATION

The Newsletter of the UK chapter of the STC

Volume V, No. 5

September, 2002

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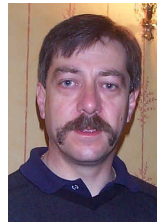
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President's message *Strictly un-PC*



By Mark Clifford

I'm going to make my apologies now because this column is bound to upset someone – if not everyone.

I've come to the conclusion that writing brings out my feminine side. There's an old joke along the lines of: In order for a woman to be passionate with her man, she needs to be

wined and dined by candlelight, soft music playing and the mood has to be just right.

A man on the other hand just needs an opportunity.

As both our Editors will testify, I do not hit deadlines without them chivvying me along – I've even had the threat of no sushi. Is this the editorial equivalent of being wined and dined?

So, from a writing viewpoint, I do not sit down and spontaneously create; I need the "candlelight and music". Worse still, I need to be in the mood subject-wise too.

From this politically incorrect beginning my thoughts stray to wondering what inspires other columnists? There are some seemingly obvious answers mainly concerning expertise or subject, for example the gardening or political columns. To be that creative daily is an art – and one I haven't practiced for too many years. Someone told me it's like riding a bike again. You don't forget how, it's just a bit wobbly at first.

This newsletter issue appears to be suffering from post holiday blues. Unfortunately, it has considerably fewer column inches than our last issue, though I'm doing my best to add more.

When I received an announcement from STC regarding the latest Chapter Newsletter competition it seemed an ideal opportunity to start throwing out some challenges.

So, for anyone who still hankers to be published; who is interested in editing a specific subject column; has a particular expertise to share or who just wants to write an occasional article the challenge is – Get Writing!

Forward is your Newsletter - let's use it.

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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STC Web site

<http://www.stc.org>

UK Chapter Web site

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

UK Chapter Discussion List

http://groups.yahoo.com/group/stc_uk_discuss

Membership News



By Mick Robinson

Welcome to our latest group of new members:

Amir Ansari of Orpington, Kent
David Boyce of Wilmslow, Cheshire
Emma Cuthbert of London N4
Jonathan Edney Of Willingham, Cambs.
Rob Falls of Longstanton, Cambs.

and farewell to Janet Paehr and Jonathan Stoppi who have both moved to Canada.

PCurrently our membership stands at 99, down on the month as we gained one and lost Janet and Jonathan. This is still less than last year but up on previous years.

Technical Publications Competition Deadline Draws Near

By Cynthia Thompson

Here's a reminder to get those entries in!

The closing date is fast approaching for entries to the UK Chapter of the STC's annual technical publications competition. Your entry must arrive by 27th September 2002.

Don't forget that anyone can enter (entrants do NOT have to be members of STC or affiliates) and full details are available on the UK Chapter site under "Programme > Competition".

Numerous categories are available and the only requirement is that entries must contain sufficient technical content to qualify as "technical communication" and must have been produced, or substantially revised, after January 1, 2002.

What's your favourite piece? Among the categories open this year are Brochures, User Guides, Reference Materials, Style Guides. Reports, Technical Art and Online work for either PC, Macintosh or UNIX systems.

If you need assistance or more information contact Cynthia Thompson on 07973-862203 or refer to posted details. Don't delay--time's quickly running out and 2002 could be your chance to take home a prestigious award.

Addressing the audience in technical writing

By David Farbey, Senior Member, UK Chapter

No-one can forget the opening sentence of the last chapter of Charlotte Bronte's novel *Jane Eyre*: "Reader, I married him." The author has suddenly turned from her narrative to address her audience directly, and this has great dramatic effect.

Technical writing tends to be less dramatic, but, like some types of fiction, it can often benefit from a direct address to the reader.

There has been a change in the tone of much formal writing over the last twenty years. In many cases, the language found in official forms and documents and in school text-books has become less formal. There have been campaigns for "plain Eng-

lish" in both the United States and Great Britain. Even the BBC now uses more accessible language. This trend has also become apparent in much contemporary technical writing, especially in the field of software documentation.

At one time technical manuals were expected to be very formal, for example "The user is able to set the screen resolution using the Preferences dialog". This is correct, but impersonal, and may seem unfriendly. It uses the passive voice and addresses the reader in the third person.

Today I would write "You can use the Preferences dialog to set your screen resolution" which is direct, and uses the active voice, and the second person. An even more direct form of words would be "Use the Preferences dialog to set your screen resolution", which uses the second person imperative.

Technically, this trend has involved a move away from the use of verbs in the passive voice in favour of verbs in the active voice, and towards addressing the reader in the second person rather than the third person. This more immediate style is thought to have greater impact, and has been welcomed by advocates of "plain language" who argue that less formal communication is usually easier to understand.

Simple and direct language that addresses the audience is suitable for many, but not all, kinds of technical

writing. "Informal" is certainly not a synonym for "inaccurate" or "incomplete", but there are situations in which the lack of rigour and discipline implied by informal forms of address is definitely unsuitable. Safety manuals for heavy equipment or for hazardous activities, or manuals used in the military, may require a degree of formality that is not needed in the user's guide for a spreadsheet or word-processing programme.

Whatever the circumstances, the technical writer must assess the needs and expectations of their audience, and write accordingly. A good writer is able to prepare work in both formal and informal styles, as the need arises.

Only you, dear reader, know which one is suitable in any particular case.

Congratulations

Christine Woskett, our former newsletter editor, announced her engagement on 7 May. She and her fiancé Neil have just bought a house in Kirkland, Washington State, and she is hoping to secure her Green Card in the not-too-distant future. No date or venue for the wedding as yet but we are all hoping for an invite!

STC News

STC membership discount

As part of its annual autumn membership drive, STC offers a special discount to new members who join the Society on or after October 1, 2002. For the regular member rate of \$140 (\$125 for dues plus a one-time \$15 enrollment fee), new members will be credited with dues paid for the remainder of 2002 and for calendar year 2003. That's fifteen months of Society membership for the price of twelve.

Among the benefits of Society membership are subscriptions to *Intercom*, the Society's monthly magazine, published ten times a year, and to *Technical Communication*, the Society's quarterly journal. These periodicals contain essential articles on the theory and practice of technical communication. Other membership benefits include discounts on STC's annual conference, the largest gathering of technical communicators in the world; eligibility for association group rate insurance; and access to STC's special interest groups. For more information on these and other benefits, visit the STC Web site at www.stc.org.

Please pass this article to a prospective member. To join STC, prospective members can fill out an electronic form or download a membership application at

www.stc.org. Those who prefer to have a membership application mailed to them can request one from the STC office at the following address:

Society for Technical Communication
901 North Stuart Street, Suite 904
Arlington, VA 22203-1822
(703) 522-4114
stc@stc.org

Note: UK members need to pay an additional overseas postage charge.

STC's 50th Annual Conference Call for Proposals



The deadline for the Society office to receive proposals is August 1, 2002.

The conference will be held May 18-21, 2003, in Dallas, Texas. The conference theme is "STC@50" in honor of the Society's 50th anniversary in 2003. For more information, please contact the STC office.

Conferences

STC

8th STC Transalpine meeting

The STC-TransAlpine Chapter will hold its 8th meeting. Ginny Redish will present "Focusing on Content: Information Design for the Web".

October 16-19, 2002

Maribor, Slovenia

For more info: <http://www.stc-transalpine.org/tac/>

STC Indian 4th annual conference

December 13-14, 2002

Bangalore, India

For more info: <http://www.stc-india.org/>

Other Organisations

FrameMaker and Acrobat seminars

Venue is always Brussels, Belgium

For more info: <http://www.microtype.com/>

Content management: Strategies for Single Sourcing

You are invited to join your peers at this key industry event. If you're trying to manage corporate data, reuse your content, and deliver information through many media, you don't want to miss this!

October 14-15, 2002

Brussels, Belgium

For more info: <http://www.cm-strategies.com/>

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

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