



SOCIETY FOR  
TECHNICAL  
COMMUNICATION

# Forward

The Newsletter of the UK Chapter of the STC

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## No-one is trained to understand IT

Although IT has been part of the office landscape for more than twenty years, many staff still have a lot to learn. Two recent reports have highlighted that there is a significant skills and knowledge gap between what staff are capable of and what they are expected to do. Non-specialist staff lack training, and IT professionals lack the communication skills required to advise the co-workers who come to them for help. That sounds like an opportunity for professional technical communicators to step in and bridge the gap.

According to a recent survey published by the vocational awards body City & Guilds, using an office PC is still a challenge for a large proportion of the British workforce (see "*Office workers outfoxed by computers*" in the Press Releases section of their web site at <http://www.city-and-guilds.co.uk>).

The survey found that one in five workers needed help with basic tasks such as saving a file or printing a document, and that many firms had to employ outside IT consultants (at great expense) because their own staff were not competent to deal with problems.

A second survey, by recruitment consultants Computer People, (available on their web site, and reported in the London "*Metro*" newspaper on 5th September 2003), reported that 67% of staff found the jargon and techno-speak used by many IT professionals to be a hindrance, not a help, to better understanding.

Taken together, these two reports show that IT remains a problem area for too many people, and that far too few people know how to explain it. This is certainly true in my experience and should not sound like news to anyone involved in professional technical communications.

Many companies are happy to spend impressive budgets on advertising and marketing to put their commercial message across to people who they want to sell to. It is a great shame that so few companies are willing to spend any money at all on properly communicating their technical message to people who are already their customers.

To reap the rewards of 21st century technology companies need to invest in both training, and technical communications. The potential rewards are enormous.

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

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# Information Engineering Workshops in London, December 2003

*John Bowie, an STC Senior Member and frequent speaker at STC Conferences and events, will be in London in December 2003 to present a series of seminars and workshops on Information Engineering. John writes as follows:*

“Your company doesn't know it yet, but it needs your technical communication department like never before. The pressure is on to increase customer loyalty, reduce support costs, and deliver a world-class Total Customer Experience (TCE). Unbeknownst to senior management - and perhaps to you as well - the technical communication team is poised to address all of these issues and more.

Your team's natural customer empathy and expertise in information design make it the perfect candidate for owning customer loyalty and designing the total customer experience. All you need is a new way of thinking, a new department charter, a few new tools, and a new set of political strategies to make the transformation. That's what we will provide.

*Breakthrough Technical Communication Management* provides a roadmap for managers and

team leaders who want to transform their departments into strategically important corporate resources. This unique workshop demonstrates how technical communication roles, responsibilities, and deliverables must change at each phase of the product-development life cycle.

*Information Engineering: A Customer-Driven Approach to Technical Communication* details the practice of Information Engineering, the core mindset, theories and tools that the 21st technical communicator needs to succeed. Building on existing competencies, this workshop shows you how to replace the documentation reflex with a process of capturing, analyzing, and redesigning the information requirements a product or service foists upon its users.”

For the latest information about these seminars please contact John Bowie at TCE Labs:

Email: [john@tcelabs.com](mailto:john@tcelabs.com)

Voice: 970.282.1868

Fax: 970.282.8407

or visit the TC Labs Web site at: <http://www.tcelabs.com>

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## STC Salary Survey Online

STC's 2003 Salary Survey has been posted on the members-only section of the STC Web site. The annual survey provides technical communicators with information about compensation in Canada

and the United States. To read the results of the survey, visit the society Web site at: <http://www.stc.org/salary.asp>

To enter the members only pages you'll need your Society membership number, which is on the address label for STC publications such as this Newsletter and Intercom.

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## We're the second-largest Chapter outside North America

According to figures released by the STC in October 2003, the UK Chapter is currently the second largest Chapter outside North America, with 132 members, not far behind Israel which with 138 members is the largest non-North American Chapter.

The membership figures for other European Chapters are: Trans-Alpine 117 members; France 105; Nordic 57; Belgium 48; and Netherlands 40.

The largest Chapter of all is Silicon Valley, with 975 members, and Boston is in second place with 926. There are two more Chapters with more than 600 members, and 12 Chapters with between 300 and 600 members.

The smallest Chapter listed is the Republic of China with just 5 members.

# Scholarships for Technical Communication

*By Lenore S. Ridgway, Associate Fellow, Mohawk Chapter, and Manager, Scholarships Committee*

STC is now offering four scholarships (two for undergraduates and two for graduate students) for the 2004-2005 academic year. Each scholarship is worth \$1,000, paid directly to the school attended. Once again we are looking for qualified applicants. Please think about whether you or someone you know should apply for a scholarship. As the skills and knowledge needed in the field of technical communication continue to grow, the education of technical communicators becomes more important. For the future of STC and the profession of technical communication, students must be encouraged to develop their abilities and expertise.

STC awards scholarships to students who are enrolled full-time in undergraduate or graduate technical communication programs and studying for an academic or commercial career in technical communication.

Technical communication includes graphical and online information presentation as well as written and oral communication. It may include "smart programs" or expert systems development, in which the candidate's concern is the presentation of information rather than computer programming. It does not include ordinary journalism, general broadcasting, or fine arts.

Applicants need not be STC members or American citizens. They must be enrolled in a full-time technical communication program and have completed one year of postsecondary education before fall 2003. Students completing an undergraduate degree are eligible to apply for their first year of graduate school.

Students will be evaluated on their potential for contributing to the technical communication profession, their accomplishments as technical

communicators, their academic record, the content of their application letters, and recommendations of faculty members. Individual financial need is considered when applicants are judged comparable in the preceding areas. Usually, students are granted only one year of the scholarship, but those who have received the scholarship in the past are not disqualified from applying again. The scholarship may be used for tuition or other expenses that the school will pay.

To apply, students must submit a completed application package, including a description of their accomplishments and goals. The package must be received by February 16, 2004. Students can obtain application information from their department chairs, the STC Web site, or the STC office in Arlington, Virginia, or they can contact me at the address below.

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1/2 page	£25
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