



# CAPITAL LETTER

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### Quotable Quote:

“The doors we open and close each day decide the lives we live.”

– Flora Whittemore

## Winners Honored at Competition Awards Celebration

by Russell Woolard

On February 7, over 100 people came to the Capital Hilton in Washington, DC to celebrate the winners of the STC Washington, DC Chapter’s professional competitions, attend a document design workshop given by Saul Carliner, who also delivered the keynote address, and view the winning entries. Technical communicators submitted over 105 entries to the Technical Publications, Technical Art, and Online

Communication competitions, with 54 of those receiving awards of Merit, Excellence, or Distinguished Technical Communication (DTC). Entries were submitted by individuals at companies primarily in the Washington, DC area, but several also came from as far away as Korea and Germany. The following table lists the Best of Show winners in the three competitions. Best of Show winners are selected from the pool of DTC winners.

<b>Best of Show for Online Communication</b>	<b>Best of Show for Technical Art</b>	<b>Best of Show for Technical Publications</b>
CD-ROM Safety Integrated—Hazards are only neutralized when safety networks are truly seamless	Characterization in Cell Culture Calendar	Report of the Columbia Accident Investigation Board
Johanna Angela Gebhardt, Sabine Stengel, and Peter Keil	Martin-Schaffer, Inc.	Lester A. Reingold, Christopher M. Kirchhoff, and Patricia D. Trenner
Siemens AG, A&D CD MM 3	Martin-Schaffer, Inc.	Valador, Inc.

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Creating and supporting a forum for communities of practice in the profession of technical communication

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The *Capital Letter* is published six times per year by the Washington, DC Chapter of the Society for Technical Communication. Its purpose is to provide articles and essays in the field of technical communication as well as inform chapter members about special functions and regular activities of the chapter and Society. Material for publication should be submitted to the editor:

**Pam Daily at [news@stcfdc.org](mailto:news@stcfdc.org)**

This newsletter invites writers to submit articles that they wish to be considered for publication. Note: By submitting an article, you implicitly grant a license to this newsletter to run the article and for other STC publications to reprint it without permission. Copyright is held by the writer. In your cover letter, please let the editor know if this article has run elsewhere, and if it has been submitted for consideration to other publications. The design and layout of this newsletter are copyright STC 2004.

## Daily's Dish: Letter from the Editor

Pam Daily



It feels as though life is settling back to normal now that the holidays are well behind us. We contemplate what we really need to

focus on from this day forward. What matters most? Is it our loved ones? Is it our professional lives? Is it those few cherished hours of downtime after a long day at the office? For me, it is a constant balancing act. One way I keep it all in balance is by finding professional development opportunities within STC that fit into my life and schedule. One such opportunity is the upcoming STC Annual Conference.

The Baltimore Convention Center will be hosting the STC 51st Annual Conference. The four-day conference, May 9-12, will offer more than 200 educational presentations, or technical sessions as they are called. There will also be an Employment Information Booth and a display of International Competition Winners. SIG meetings, open jam, and vendor showcases are some more extras that will perhaps get you to attend. Go to <http://www.stc.org/51stConf/> for general information, schedule, registration, and more.

STC is chock full of opportunities. This conference will offer several events that will be inspiring, motivating, and leave an impression, creating memories in the process. (And a perfect icebreaker for good conversation at programs to come.) Baltimore is conveniently located to us here in the DC area, so there is no reason not to join in the festivities. It is likely that you will walk away from the experience more assured of your value to your employer or clients, aware of the latest technical developments in our field, and motivated by having spent time in a community of other technical communicators. You may even find your dream job!

We would really like to hear your reviews after the conference of the various sessions, workshops, speakers, presentations, and more. We are very eager to get feedback. Send reviews to [news@stcfdc.org](mailto:news@stcfdc.org) and we will gladly put them in our July newsletter. Also, feel free to send me Letters to the Editor regarding ideas, corrections, and general feedback. We would love to hear from you. Hope to see you at the conference!

### STC's 51st Annual Conference



#### NAVIGATING THE FUTURE OF TECHNICAL COMMUNICATION

Baltimore, MD

May 9-12, 2004

For more information: <http://www.stc.org/51stConf/index.asp>

## From the President

Daree Allen-Woodard



I shared my first STC Annual Conference experience in the summer 2000 issue of the *Capital Letter*. One of the things I didn't quite have a grasp on back then was how

to network effectively.

Networking involves connecting people and building relationships between those open to new opportunities and those with information to share. STC WDC is a professional organization here not only to educate and train technical communicators, but also to bring them together to help strengthen and support each other. It is interesting to read chapter surveys that go out month after month, only to find that people are generally not as interested in networking as in what they can learn. Both networking and training are equally important! It does you little good to be knowledgeable about the latest tool when no one is willing to hire you.

Networking is tied to the hidden job market. Most jobs come by way of referrals, giving strength to the adage, "It's who you know." Who do you think is an employer's first choice—a person referred by a trustworthy friend or reliable employee, or someone who is completely unknown to them?

Successful networking is a five-step process (Thomas, 2004):

1. Meeting with a person to gather information; seek advice; discuss trends in the industry; identify professional organizations, events, or publications; and ask for the names of others—professionals, suppliers, vendors, competitors, salespersons—who might be willing to share information.
2. Following up on these referrals and repeating step 1 to continue expanding your network.
3. Contacting previous contacts to keep them posted on the results of their referrals and the status of your career search.
4. Notifying your contacts when you've accepted a position and thanking them for their help.
5. Maintaining your networking relationships on a regular basis (once every three to four months), and passing on information that might be of interest to your contacts, including career opportunities.

A not-so-scary way of networking for conference newbies and professionals alike is to meet with other chapter members. Several chapter members will be presenting at various conference sessions, including Conni Evans, Leslie Reed, Marissa Levin, Cynthia Lockley, and myself! (See details at the end of this article.)

Another excellent way of networking (without really trying) is to be a volunteer at the conference! The Baltimore chapter is looking for help at their host table booth. For more information, contact Erin Beal Welch at [erin\\_a\\_beal\\_welch@yahoo.com](mailto:erin_a_beal_welch@yahoo.com).

Since the conference is in Baltimore this year, you can save a great deal more than on budgets from years past. For one thing, you don't need to purchase a flight, and, depending on your preferences, may not need to stay at a hotel, either. The conference registration fees continue to be among the lowest in professional conference fees, and with all the technical

### Chapter Leadership

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sessions and networking exposure available, it's worth every penny.

You should go.

For more information on budgeting for the conference, see Kathy Bine's article, "Attending an STC Conference on a Shoestring Budget," in the July/August 2003 issue of the *Capital Letter*.

Conference presenters from STC WDC (as notified to me by February 15, 2004):

**Daree Allen-Woodard:**

- Resumes, Portfolios, and All the Rest (Panel)

**Marguerite Autry and Bill Killam:**

- Are Design Standards Any Use for Designing Systems

**Conni Evans:**

- Policies and Procedures (Progression)

- Manual Evaluations (Workshop)

**Cynthia Lockley and Leslie Reed:**

- Section 508 for Dummies (Progression)

**Marissa Levin:**

- Entrepreneurial Lessons Not Found in a Classroom (Workshop)
- Marketing Yourself Effectively (Panel)
- Providing Training/E-Learning within an Integrated Communications Strategy (Workshop)
- Beyond the Bleeding Edge: An Explanation of SCORM (Shareable Content Object Reference Models) and Why Technical Communicators Need to Know About It (Panel)

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Thomas, L. (2004). The right way to network. Ohio State University. Retrieved February 11, 2004 from <http://osualumnidemco.legepublisher.com/news/2002/07/09/CareerMoves/The-Right.Way.To.Network.shtml>.

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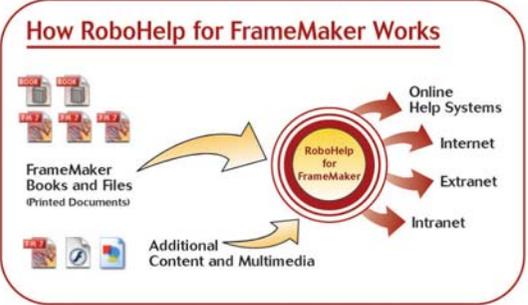
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– Brandy Alexander, Technical Writer  
Prelude Systems, Inc.



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## Chapter Chatter

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### Announcements

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We would like to congratulate our newest inductees into the WDC Hall of Fame:

- Leslie Reed, who has earned our Distinguished Chapter Service Award, and
- Cynthia Lockley and Mary Wise, who have both been elected as Fellows of the Society.

Congratulations to all of you! It is a testament to your years of hard work, dedication, and sacrifice to serve this Chapter.

We would also like to acknowledge the following individuals for their support:

- Elena Chapeton: For your dedicated and upbeat assistance in managing registrations for the Events committee.
- Kristen L. Sweet: For your reliable and creative assistance with planning and supporting innovative and successful chapter activities.
- Jennifer L. Reed: For your steadfast contributions and reliability, in performing various STC Washington, DC Chapter public relations tasks with the Programs and Newsletter committees since 2002.

### Member News

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Paul Stregovsky, a member of our chapter, has an article in *The Washington Post*.

The Practical Gift: Some Women Have No Use for It  
By Paul Franklin Stregovsky  
Special to *The Washington Post*  
Monday, February 9, 2004; Page C10

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A24445-2004Feb8.html>

Do you have any news you would like to share? We would really love to hear what you have been up to. Have you recently been promoted? Maybe you just started your own business? Do you have a byline? Have you recently published a book? Email us at [news@stcfdc.org](mailto:news@stcfdc.org).

### Save the Date!

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- **Wednesday, May 5:** So You Want to Go Out on Your Own? – Leaving Captivity for Independent Employment
- **May 9-12:** STC's 51st Annual Conference in Baltimore, MD
- **Saturday, June 5:** Volunteer Recognition Luncheon

Watch for more information at <http://www.stcfdc.org/calendar.shtml>.

### Web Gems

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The Bulwer-Lytton Fiction Contest: <http://www.bulwer-lytton.com/>

WriteThinking newsletter by Michael Knowles: <http://www.writethinking.net>

STC scholarship information: <http://www.stcfdc.org/scholarships.shtml>

Test the maturity of the publication products in your organization using the Information Process Maturity Model (IPMM) Quiz: [http://www.tds.co.il/ipmm\\_quiz\\_intro.htm](http://www.tds.co.il/ipmm_quiz_intro.htm)

STC communication resources: [http://www.stcfdc.org/communicate\\_stc\\_2.shtml](http://www.stcfdc.org/communicate_stc_2.shtml)

Educational opportunities at EEI Communications, Inc.: <http://www.eecomunications.com>

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## Upcoming Events

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**Event:** Chocolate Tasting Fundraiser

**When:** Thursday, March 11, 2004, 6:30 p.m. - 8:30 p.m.

**Where:** Chef Geoff's Downtown, 1301 Pennsylvania Ave, NW, Washington, DC

**Cost:** \$35 STC members; \$40 Non-STC members

**Info:** Join us for an event devoted to chocolate and good cheer. Learn the basics of baking with (and tasting!) today's huge variety of chocolate styles and flavors while you network with others in the technical communication profession and help support a great cause.

All proceeds from this event will benefit the STC Washington, DC Chapter's scholarship fund. The scholarship fund makes it possible to award prizes in the Austin T. Brown High School Technical Communication Competition and award the Shirley G. Carter Memorial Scholarship.

For more information and to make a reservation, go to [http://www.stcfdc.org/prgm\\_mar04.shtml](http://www.stcfdc.org/prgm_mar04.shtml).



**Event:** Career Day

**When:** Saturday, March 20, 2004 10:30 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.

**Where:** Booz Allen Hamilton, Hamilton 2001 A&B, 8283 Greensboro Dr., McLean, VA

**Cost:** \$15 STC members; \$25 Non-STC members

**Info:** This annual event features a progression of roundtable discussions about careers in technical communication. This year's agenda includes topics of interest to those who are new to the field and established practitioners alike. Speakers include Ann Ray, Eddie VanArsdall, Daree Allen-Woodard, Melissa Brown, Marissa Levin, and Conni Evans. Attendees have a choice of attending four of the following six table topics:

- Interviewing Techniques - A Manager's Perspective
- Creating Online & Print Portfolios
- Fine-Tuning Your MS Word Skills So You Can Get a Better Job
- Personal Branding: The importance of branding to distinguish yourself in a sea of professionals
- Résumé Critique Session
- Salary Negotiation

For more information and to make a reservation, go to [http://www.stcfdc.org/prgm\\_career\\_mar04.shtml](http://www.stcfdc.org/prgm_career_mar04.shtml).

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**Event:** Writing Great Web Content *Within* a Content Management System

**When:** Wednesday, April 28, 2004

6:00 p.m. – 6:30 p.m. Registration

6:30 p.m. – 7:00 p.m. Light dinner, and networking

7:00 p.m. – 8:30 p.m. Program

**Where:** Bethesda-Chevy Chase Regional Services Center, Meeting Room A, 4805 Edgemoor Lane, Bethesda, MD 20814

**Cost:** \$10 STC members; \$5 Current STC WDC chapter volunteers; \$15 Non-STC members; \$20 Late registration and walk-ins

**Info:** The dream goes something like this: “Now that we have a content management system, we’ll be able to work more efficiently, use and share our knowledge across business functions, streamline our human resources activities, and better serve our internal (and external) customers.” And in this dream, the CMS-managed website is a mighty thing to behold: a current, useful, frequently-visited, information-rich automated wonder!

Well, the content management system may be gonzo, the technology cutting-edge, but it’s still well-written content that makes your website (or intranet) worthwhile. While the web makes it easy to disseminate information quickly and broadly, that advantage can become a danger if content contributors lack the web writing skills they need to communicate effectively.

This workshop will provide the tools and techniques needed to write effectively in CMS systems and coach web content contributors to also write effectively for the web. Our presenter will discuss how CMS affects the web writing process and how to write well within the limits placed by the CMS.

For more information and to make a reservation, go to [http://www.stewdc.org/prgm\\_apr04.shtml](http://www.stewdc.org/prgm_apr04.shtml).

## Educational Opportunities

### Dreamweaver MX 2004, Designing with CSS, a FREE Workshop from EEI Communications on Wednesday, April 7th

Macromedia Dreamweaver MX 2004 is the professional choice for building websites and applications. The new release of Dreamweaver MX 2004 has some great new functionality including the ability to separate design from content with new powerful Cascading Style Sheet (CSS) support.

Join us for a FREE seminar to learn how to utilize Cascading Style Sheets capabilities to build powerful and modern web page layouts. Among the topics that will be discussed include:

- The CSS Rule inspector
- Using CSS with DIV tags for page layouts

- CSS layout visualization
- Using behaviors to control Layers and DIVs
- CSS text property inspector
- General Dreamweaver and Tips and Tricks

Join Khaled Hadi is our Dreamweaver expert for this exciting free seminar. Space is limited. [Click here to register](#) for this FREE seminar, or call Lorenza Harris or Joe Robinson at 703-683-0683 to register by phone.

This seminar will be held at our [Alexandria Training Center](#), on Wednesday April 7th, from 9:00 a.m. until noon. Please send any questions you may have to [seminars@eicomcommunications.com](mailto:seminars@eicomcommunications.com).

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## “Writers Without Borders,” STC Region 4 Conference

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The Pittsburgh chapter of the Society for Technical Communication (STC) is proud to host “Writers Without Borders: Trends in Technical Communication,” the STC Region 4 conference, on Saturday, April 17, 2004. This one-day conference focuses on the evolving roles of technical communicators in a rapidly changing economy. It explores some “out of the box” jobs that technical communicators perform today, looks at the latest technology trends, and examines aspects of technical communication to consider in the future. Conference topics include:

- **Content is king (again!).** Keynote speaker Cheryl Lockett Zubak will talk about the return of content as a focus in web development, software interface design, and technical communication, and what this means for technical communicators.
- **Single-sourcing.** Neil Perlin will host a session on simple steps writers can take to implement single-sourcing. Alan Houser will host a session on using Adobe® FrameMaker® for XML and single-source publishing.
- **Consulting and career development.** Beth Williams and Lori Klepfer will talk about the essential consulting skills needed for career success.
- **Usability.** Mike Bates will host a workshop on preparing and conducting usability tests and interpreting the results.

- **User-centered design.** Whitney Quesenberry will talk about the role of technical writers in the user-centered design process.
- **Microsoft® Windows® “Longhorn” online help.** Cheryl Lockett Zubak will discuss the new Windows “Longhorn” help system and what it means for help authors.
- **Enhancing creativity.** Closing speaker John Hedtke will describe ways to enhance your creativity, identify common creative blocks, and foster creative thinking in yourself and others.

“Writers Without Borders” will be held at the Holiday Inn Select, University Center, Pittsburgh, PA on Saturday April 17, 2004, from 8:30 a.m. - 5:30 p.m. Registration cost is \$99 before March 15 and \$119 after March 15. Register early and save \$20! The registration fee includes admission to the keynote session, choice of presentations, vendor area, continental breakfast, buffet lunch with a vendor demo, and a conference t-shirt.

For more information (including registration forms), visit <http://www.stcpgh.org/conference/index.html>.

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<b>Advice Column</b>
<p><i>Jerry Cohen, Column Editor</i></p> <p>With the next issue of the <i>Capital Letter</i>, I will be managing an advice column for technical writers. I will put my experience and research abilities to the test by offering answers to questions of all types related to our profession, such as those related to tools and technology, workplace dilemmas, and continuing education.</p> <p>Starting immediately, email your questions to me at <a href="mailto:jerrold_cohen@yahoo.com">jerrold_cohen@yahoo.com</a>. If you would like to remain anonymous, let me know and I will not print your name. I’m looking forward to the challenges you send my way!</p>

## Membership News

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***New Members Who Joined Between December 16, 2003 and  
February 15, 2004***

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Lynn K. Anslow	Walt L. Mann
Christina D. Beck	Jerry Maclean
Margaret Cole	Christine B. McCaughin
Karen Duff	TerriAnn McDonald
Denise Felix	Lisa Mitchell
Donna Fox	Deborah Neve
Ruth Frost	Devlan O'Connor
Claude Gianino	Alan D. Oslick
Linda H. Hillmer	Edward Sargent
Larry D. Hinton	Mary Schaefer
Bruce Holmes	Katherine Senzee
Jan M. Janes	Marcia Shields
Tanya Lyle	Erin-Elizabeth Tadie

***Welcome to STC!***

According to the STC *Bylaws*, the grade of senior member is conferred upon those who have held the grade of member in STC for five years. We congratulate the following new senior members of the Washington, DC chapter.

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***Senior Members as of February 15, 2004***

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Jonathan Buehl	Michelle Le Teigner
Mitchell Cho	Carol Malmi
Donna Fox	Walt Mann
Linda Frankish	Margaret Nelson
Linda Hillmer	Dale Nunnery
Larry Hinton	Alan Oslick

***Congratulations***

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***Member Totals***

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Total STC Members: 21,043  
Total STC WDC Members: 685

## Newsletter Events

### Important Newsletter Deadlines

- All Content: 10<sup>th</sup> of even numbered months
- All Edits to Production Designer: 20<sup>th</sup> of even numbered months
- Final Review of Layout: 25<sup>th</sup> of even numbered months
- Publish Online and Send to Printer: 1<sup>st</sup> of odd numbered months

### Themes for Editorial Calendar 2003-2004 (six issues per year)

- September: Job Strategies, Career Moves and Transitions
- November: The Importance of Volunteerism, SIGs
- January: Working From Home, Pros and Cons, Questions and Answers
- March: Baltimore Conference News
- May: Continuing Education
- July: Technology Trends

(Continued from page 1)

Colorful manuals and instruction books, such as resolving workplace issues, waging political campaigns online, and even a report on the causes of a major disaster for America's space program showed that people are willing to make a difference. In order to positively illustrate our purpose and mission as technical communicators, we need to establish our goals and attempt to fulfill those of our clients at the same time.

"We have to acknowledge who we are and who we aren't," said Carliner, a longtime leader in the technical communication field and former STC president. "If we don't do it, others will put labels on us... and they might not be the labels we like. ... Every project that we do needs to be linked to the needs of the organization that we serve."

The projects receiving Best in Show honors illustrated how technical communicators are attempting to meet that challenge. One notable example was the editorial team of the Columbia Accident Investigation Board (CAIB), who won Best in Show honors in the Technical Publications category. The editorial team worked to produce the CAIB's final report on the loss of the space shuttle Columbia on Feb. 1, 2003,

and on recommendations to prevent a recurrence.

Lester Reingold, a Maryland-based freelance writer who served on the CAIB's editorial team, noted that the team looked at physical and organizational problems and was given latitude to explore new ways of presenting information. He also noted the team was created on the day of the disaster and that its members had to improvise their approach to the project, in contrast to the careful planning that goes into many other technical presentations.

"We were a large staff thrown together," said Reingold. "We had to get to know each other as we went along. And it worked surprisingly well. ... The future of the U.S. space program depends on [the report's] contents."

Reingold credited Valador, Inc., a Herndon-based professional services company, with providing key technical and administrative support. He also said that the report received positive feedback from NASA and others in the aviation and space community, as well as supportive letters from the general public. "I was amazed at this—there were actually fan letters for a technical report," said Reingold.

In his keynote speech, Carliner (who earlier in the day conducted a workshop focusing on document design) noted "phenomenal developments" in technical communication since *Techniques for Technical Communicators*, a book he collaborated on with Carol Barnum, was published in 1992. In the next 10 years, Carliner said, many of the issues technical communicators address will be human-based, such as the continued migration of jobs overseas. The best way for technical communicators to stay relevant, Carliner said, is to help their customers in at least one of three areas: (1) generating revenue, (2) holding down expenses, and (3) complying with government regulations.

Carliner praised each of the Best in Show entries as "good examples for each of us who want to have an impact."

Winners of the Distinguished Technical Communication Awards go on to the International Online Communication Competition (IOCC). Winners of the IOCC are presented at the STC Annual Conference in May.

A complete list of winners is available at [http://www.stcfdc.org/0304\\_winners.shtml](http://www.stcfdc.org/0304_winners.shtml).

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## SIGs Revealed

This column explores selected Special Interest Groups (SIGs) and discusses how you can benefit from joining one. If you have feedback or would like to write an article for this column, contact Jennifer Reed at [jlreed4@aol.com](mailto:jlreed4@aol.com).

JENNIFER REED, Column Editor

## Special Interest Groups (SIGs) at STC's 51st Annual Conference

by STC Washington, DC Chapter Member Jennifer Reed

It's getting to be that time again. You know what I'm talking about; it's time to start planning your trip to the annual STC Conference. While planning that trip, don't forget to leave time to attend SIG events, perhaps for a SIG you are involved with or a group you are interested in learning more about. This could include technical sessions, the network luncheon, a business meeting, or a social gathering.

When I think of the STC Conference, I automatically think of the technical sessions. This year there are over 200 technical sessions to choose from, with many of them relating

directly to one or more SIGs. Check the session search page, <http://www.stc.org/51stConf/sesSearch.asp>, to find sessions that you're interested in attending.

The annual SIG Networking Luncheon will be held Tuesday, May 11, from 12:15 -2:00 p.m. This luncheon will give you the opportunity to network with people interested in the same SIGs. Each table's discussions will focus on topics specific to a SIG. Your hardest decision here might be choosing which SIG to dine with since tickets must be purchased in advance (for \$20 a person).

Each SIG has a management team that handles the daily ins-&-outs of the group. The conference provides the opportune time for this team, and other interested individuals, to meet and discuss changes for the SIG, including management changes, newsletters, visions, etc. If you're interested in becoming more active in one of the SIGs you belong to (or would like to join), consider attending the Business Meeting. Below are the times currently scheduled; please see <http://www.stc.org/51stConf/extraSIGmeetings.asp> for location information and updates.

Date	Time	SIG(s) Meeting
Sunday, May 9	1:30 - 3:00 p.m.	• SIG Managers & Advisory Committee Meeting
Sunday, May 9	3:30 - 4:30 p.m.	• AccessAbility • Canadian Issues • Consulting & Independent Contracting • Emerging Technologies • Indexing • Technical Editing
Sunday, May 9	5:00 - 6:00 p.m.	• Lone Writer • Management
Monday, May 10	12:30 - 1:30 p.m.	• Usability
Tuesday, May 11	7:00 - 8:00 a.m.	• Policies & Procedures
Wednesday, May 12	7:00 - 8:00 a.m.	• Environmental, Health & Safety
Wednesday, May 12	12:30 - 1:30 p.m.	• Instructional Design & Learning

Don't forget to check the bulletin board/message board for social gatherings. The Lone Writers, for example, always get together for dinner one night during the conference. This is a great time to socialize and put a face to the names you see on the SIG listserv.



## ***The Independent Voice***

*This column explores issues and trends encountered by independent technical communicators in the Washington, DC metropolitan area. If you have feedback or would like to write an article for this column, contact Carolyn Kelley Klinger at [pastpres@stcwwdc.org](mailto:pastpres@stcwwdc.org).*

CAROLYN KELLEY KLINGER, *Column Editor*

## **Economy Up with Jobs Down: Solving the Riddle**

*by Gene Zaino, President and CEO of MyBizOffice, Inc.*

The media bombards us every day with stories about this so-called “jobless recovery.” Much of the blame is being laid at the feet of corporate America for the recent rise in outsourcing of services. The untold story, however, is that outsourcing is a significant driver of the current economic recovery.

Today, creating “jobs” is not necessarily equated with creating “work.” A workforce revolution is transforming the traditional employer-employee relationship and redefining our concept of employment. Currently, nearly ten million working Americans are not counted among those with traditional jobs. Instead, these people are blazing their own trails as contractors, consultants, or freelancers.

The good economic news is that these are generally high-end service providers—highly paid professionals who serve the needs of companies of every size and industry. Don’t be fooled: these client companies are indeed creating work without creating jobs... and this hidden sector of the economy is now coming to the forefront as outsourcing gains prominence and notoriety.

My firm, MyBizOffice, is a leading employment services provider for

independently minded professionals. While catering to the needs of contract professionals, we also serve their clients—the companies that are leveraging contractors’ talents by outsourcing their non-core functions. Across the board, we are seeing an upsurge in corporate dependency on contract workers, with a doubling in our membership of knowledge workers over the past year. Many top firms are rapidly increasing their contractor requisitions, not just for technology professionals, but also for business managers, economists, lawyers, freelance writers, background investigators, engineers, and others.

More and more, these self-starters are choosing to take control of their own careers to build a more secure future for themselves and their families. In a post-Enron, post tech-bubble environment, these knowledge entrepreneurs are foregoing the traditional storefront in favor of businesses based on their skills and the value they can deliver to clients worldwide. Likewise, companies seeking to maintain or improve their flexibility are innovating their strategic human resources decision-making by reconsidering what’s done in-house and what can be outsourced. Research has proven that companies

that use outsourcing purely to cut costs in the short-term consistently underperform those that outsource to maximize the value of their product or service. Thus, in an ironic twist, economic security—both on an individual and collective basis—is rooted not in traditional “jobs,” but in an environment that embraces contractual, contingent workers.

The solution to the “jobless recovery” riddle is this: while outsourcing has been blamed for job losses in America, the push for outsourcing is creating a wealth of economic opportunities for a growing class of self-entrepreneurs. Each day, more individuals join the growing ranks of independent knowledge workers who are capitalizing on the outsourcing trend. In doing so, these professionals are reinforcing their own security and underlining best-selling business author James Brian Quinn’s characterization of outsourcing as “one of the greatest organizational and industry structure shifts of the century.”

*Gene Zaino is the President and CEO of MyBizOffice, Inc. (<http://www.mybizoffice.com>), the leading provider of “portable” business and employment services that deliver significant benefits to worldwide*

professional contract workers and their client organizations. By spearheading the evolution of the innovative MyBizOffice employment model, Mr. Zaino has become a

major force in legitimizing and advocating workplace independence. Reach Gene at [gzaino@mybizoffice.com](mailto:gzaino@mybizoffice.com).

Mention this article and receive a \$500 bonus for joining MyBizOffice. Call 1-877-391-8463 for details.



## Telecommuting

This column examines the challenges and rewards of working from home and the ways in which telecommuting changes the way we work, play, and do business.

If you have comments or questions, please contact Patricia Srinath at [srinath1@earthlink.net](mailto:srinath1@earthlink.net).

PATRICIA SRINATH, Column Editor

## Telecommuting: A Viable Workforce Alternative for You and Your Company

by STC Washington, DC Chapter Member Patricia Srinath

You have weighed the pros and cons of telecommuting and have decided that it's time to trade in your dress shoes for your slippers. You are convinced that you have the skills, self-discipline, motivation, and personality needed to make telecommuting work for both you and your employer. Now, you just have to convince your boss. But how? You are certain that he or she will balk at the idea, if not reject it altogether. You suspect that like a lot of people, your boss may associate working from home with goofing off a "when the cat's away, the mice shall play" type of philosophy.

So how do you change this misconception? Unfortunately, you may not be able to change this misconception right away or at least until you are given the opportunity to prove yourself. What you can do is build a strong business case for telecommuting by developing and presenting a telecommuting proposal to your boss or your employer's decision makers. Developing a proposal not only shows that you have thoroughly researched the idea,

it reinforces your commitment to making telecommuting work and increases your chance for success.

One surefire way to build a strong business case is to include as much detail as possible regarding the work arrangement and expectations. Here are just a few questions you may want to address in your proposal:

- From where will you be telecommuting?
- What will your telecommuting schedule be? For example, will you work three days a week at home and two days at the office?
- What will your hours be?
- Which duties will you perform at home and which duties will you perform at the office?
- How will you communicate with your supervisors, clients, and colleagues?
- What will your response time be?
- What type of equipment will you need to perform your duties (e.g., hardware, software, office equipment)?
- How will you deliver your work?
- How will your work be evaluated?

- How will you participate in meetings?

Emphasize how your employer would benefit from a telecommuting work arrangement. Some major benefits include:

- **A decrease in operating expenses** – A reduction in overhead costs (e.g., real estate, utilities, office space rental, desks, chairs, bathrooms, and parking spaces) saves companies money. For example, AT&T saved approximately \$150 million in 2003 because of its telework program.
- **Increased productivity** – During the past two decades, studies have shown that teleworkers have been consistently 10-15% more productive than their office counterparts because telecommuters work during the time they would normally be commuting.
- **Enhanced retention and recruitment** – According to a study performed by AT&T, telecommuting was one reason that roughly half of those teleworkers with competing job offers decided to stay with the company. If told

that they could no longer work from home, two out of five teleworkers (43%) said that they would seek another position that supported telework.

- **Better corporate image** – Not only does telecommuting save gasoline and cut down on pollution, it increases job satisfaction and fosters a better work/family balance. Which company wouldn't want to be viewed as an environmentally conscious organization that cares about its employees both personally and professionally?

Another persuasive strategy is to propose a trial period. Your boss may give telecommuting a shot if he or she can test the waters first before

jumping into a long-term commitment. In addition, outline those circumstances under which either party can cancel the arrangement. Offering your boss the opportunity to back out may be all the assurance he or she needs to get the ball rolling.

To help you get started, visit AT&T's Telework Web Guide at <http://www.att.com/telework/>. In addition to telecommuting case studies and surveys, this site offers ways to secure a telecommuting position, manage a virtual office, and utilize new advances in technology. Here you can complete a personal screener to see if telecommuting is right for you or use the telecommuting

calculator to see how much carbon dioxide you can save by telecommuting.

Good luck! You may need it. The most persuasive proposal may still not get the results you want because a lot of companies still do not embrace the idea of telecommuting. But you'll never know unless you try. So give it your best effort and see what happens. Remember: if you are committed to working from home, there are several companies that do have strong telecommuting programs. Plus, you always have the option of striking out on your own. Please send questions and comments to Patricia Srinath at [srinath1@earthlink.net](mailto:srinath1@earthlink.net).

## Rave Reviews

*This column provides reviews on books, software, programs, or other topics of interest to technical communicators. These reviews are the opinions of the reviewer and not necessarily the opinion of the STC WDC chapter or STC. If you are interested in submitting a review, contact the Capital Letter at [news@stcwdc.org](mailto:news@stcwdc.org).*

## Paper Prototyping, The Fast and Easy Way to Design and Refine User Interfaces by Carolyn Snyder

*Reviewed by STC Washington, DC Chapter Member David Dick*

My experience has been that to create a prototype is to create a working model to allow users to test functions and features. Because so much time and effort goes into creating the prototype, time constraints prevent refining the design, and the product is rushed to market—design issues are fixed in the next release. There's a solution that's low-cost, quick, and effective in finding design issues—paper prototyping. If you want to learn about paper prototyping from a renowned practitioner then I highly recommend *Paper Prototyping* by Carolyn Snyder.

Snyder advocates paper prototyping because it's easy to design (requires

minimal drawing skills), cheap to create (needs only paper and markers), and offers an opportunity for developers and users to evaluate design concepts. If you wonder where the beginning of the design process starts, it begins when great minds meet and brainstorm ideas, and drawing is a natural approach to illustrate new ideas.

Paper Prototyping consists of four parts:

1. "Introduction to Paper Prototyping" presents case studies for a variety of products (e.g., web applications, e-commerce websites, small screen displays, and touch screen interfaces), lists

benefits for users and product team, and outlines the materials needed to create a paper prototype.

I learned the how to plan and design a prototype. Understanding how to conceptualize ideas is a critical skill. Fortunately, Snyder included examples that proved helpful because they are real and relevant.

2. "Conducting a Usability Study with a Paper Prototype" describes how to plan a usability study, how to choose tasks, how to create a paper prototype, how to prepare for usability testing by doing

walkthroughs, how to facilitate a usability test, the do's and don'ts of usability testing with a paper prototype, observer protocols, and what to do with the results of testing.

If you are not a usability specialist, you may be tackling some of these tasks for the first time. If you have a process for conducting a usability study, this chapter will help you identify the activities that are different from what you typically do.

Conducting a usability test with a paper prototype is unique, because the goal is to verify ideas and correct the prototype to validate improvements. An additional bonus is the ability to evaluate the types of tasks the product would be able to perform.

A paper prototype does not rely on databases, networks, servers, or any form of technology, and eliminates most of the things that can go wrong. This process is portable—if the users cannot come to you—you can take the prototype to the users. You don't need a sophisticated lab to conduct usability tests or big budget to get good feedback.

3. "Deciding Whether to Use Paper" covers the advantages and disadvantages of paper prototyping, the dimensions of a prototype, and the issues of introducing paper prototyping into your organization.

Snyder describes how paper is not suitable to evaluate interaction issues:

- Paper does not show subtle screen changes that are typically shown at the bottom of the screen.

- Paper does not allow scrolling, a variety of menu effects, and cascading menus.
- Paper does not simulate download time and response time.

Obviously, paper is not the medium to evaluate interaction, but it is ideal to evaluate the following "look" issues:

- Design concepts and terminology
- Navigation
- Work flow
- Task flow
- Content
- Documentation and online help
- If the design satisfies user requirements and functionality
- Screen layout
- Branding

Understanding the strengths and weaknesses of paper prototyping is essential to managing the expectations of proponents and opponents. Snyder describes how using paper is a valid and professional technique in response to concerns from skeptics.

4. "Broadening the Focus" consists of case studies that Snyder collected from usability specialists from The MathWorks, IBM, and Dictaphone companies. The case studies reveal how paper prototyping is one of several techniques to conduct task analysis and evaluate product design.

I learned that index cards are a useful tool for smaller prototype pieces like dialog boxes, pop-up messages, and drop-down menus. Snyder describes how a team at The MathWorks corporation created a method for capturing and managing information about screen design. During prototyping and design sessions, team decisions about how the prototype would behave were recorded on index cards. The index

cards were also used to track problems to be solved. Some members of the team used the cards to create a test plan. The technical writer used the index cards to create a first draft of the tool's documentation.

What I like best about *Paper Prototyping* is that each topic is supported by case studies and testimonials. Illustrations and photographs of exhibits enhance thorough descriptions of concepts and instructions. I wondered how Snyder could cover product design with profound insight, and then I read her credentials: software engineer, project manager, student, teacher, and consultant—she is an astute observer of all facets of product design.

*Paper Prototyping* is particularly useful for people testing print documentation. The techniques of testing paper prototypes apply to any situation in which the test facilitator sits in the room with the participant. "Introduction to Usability Test Facilitation" is one of the best discussions of the advantages of working in the room with the participant, and the human and logistical issues that might arise.

Yes, I am convinced that paper prototyping is the fast and easy way to design and refine user interfaces and you will too. If you buy the book and have questions that you would like to ask the author, you will be happy to learn that Carolyn Snyder will be at the conference in Baltimore (May 2004). You can also visit her website at <http://www.synderconsulting.net> for more information.

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Carolyn Snyder, *Paper Prototyping, The Fast and Easy Way to Design and Refine User Interfaces*, 2003, Morgan Kaufmann Publishers, San Francisco, ISBN: 1-55860-870-2.



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