



Communiqué

MIDDLE TENNESSEE CHAPTER OF THE society for technical communication

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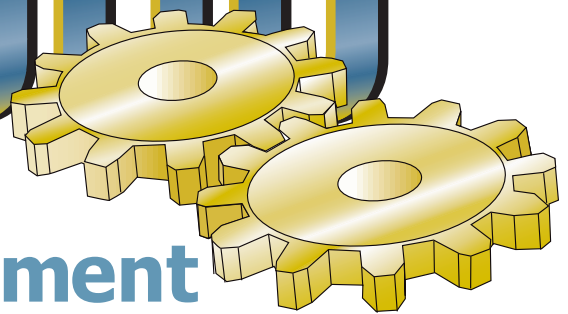
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Our Chapter Is Proud To Sponsor

WebWORKS

2000

A Web Development Seminar



Welcome to this special edition of Communiqué! What's so "special" about this issue is that it covers the upcoming conference, WebWORKS 2000, which our chapter is sponsoring. Also, this issue is the only one with some full-color pages!

As you may have noticed, I have redesigned the newsletter for a different look and feel this year: it's two pages longer, and has a new layout. Of course, I have also included articles you have come to expect in our newsletter: features, meeting information, poetry, and more. So, turn the page, read, and enjoy! ✍

VIRGINIA PRYOR
NEWSLETTER EDITOR

THE WEBWORKS 2000 LOGO WAS CREATED BY CHAPTER MEMBER JOEL BUTTS.

WHEN: September 15, 2000
WHERE: BellSouth Building
333 Commerce Avenue
Nashville
COST: \$99 for STC and Creative
Forum members; \$149
for non-members

FEATURING:
· Website Design
· Writing for the Web
· Information Architecture
· Website Critique
· Vendor Fair and Expo

REGISTER ONLINE AT WWW.WEBWORKS2000.ORG

COMMUNIQUE—c/o Tim Hunter,
President, 1010 Airpark Center
Drive, Nashville, TN 37217

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SUBMISSIONS are welcome in hard copy, on disk, or as email attachments (preferred method). Send to: Virginia Pryor, c/o Square D Company, 1010 Airpark Center Drive, Nashville, TN 37217. Email: pryorv@squared.com. The deadlines for the next two issues are September 22 and October 23, 2000.

COLOPHON—This document was designed by Virginia Pryor and created using Microsoft Word™, Adobe Photoshop™ 5.0, and Adobe PageMaker™ on a PC. Fonts used include Garamond for body copy, Book Antiqua for headlines, and Adobe Garamond for subheads and the Communiqué nameplate.

The mission of the Society for Technical Communication is to improve the quality and effectiveness of technical communication for audiences worldwide.

On Common Ground:

Why STC and Creative Forum Are Good Partners

BY VIRGINIA PRYOR

I first heard about the WebWORKS seminar at our April STC meeting in the BellSouth building, when Brad Towle of SageLion, Inc. was our guest speaker. That night was also the first time I heard the name, “Creative Forum.”

I kept asking myself, “Who is Creative Forum? And how are they connected to STC?”

Recently, I had the pleasure of discussing this question with Mary Reaves, President of Creative Forum, while having coffee at Bongo Java. My purpose for interviewing

Mary was to find out more about Creative Forum, and why our two groups had partnered to make WebWORKS a reality. However, our conversation quickly led to a discovery of the striking similarities between members of STC and Creative Forum, and the ways we can benefit from each other.

A Nashville organization of copywriters, photographers, graphic artists, illustrators, printers, engravers, filmmakers, and students, Creative Forum currently has approximately 50 to 60 members, and a total of about 200 people who

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Why I Joined STC

BY ROB HOUSER, REGION 3 DIRECTOR-SPONSOR

I became a technical writer and a member of STC almost by mistake.

I didn't go to college to study technical communication, but somehow I ended up in a technical writing class at the University of Tennessee (U.T.). I enjoyed the class, but still thought I was destined to teach literature. At the end of the term, Dr. Mike Keene suggested that I enter one of my reports from his class in an STC scholarship competition. I entered my report, and was awarded the J. Paul Blakely Memorial Scholarship from the East Tennessee Chapter.

I went to one of the East Tennessee Chapter's monthly meetings to receive my award, and everyone was friendly and eagerly talking about their work. I met people who encouraged me to get more involved in technical writing and STC. They invited me back to attend their chapter meetings, and seemed to really want me to return.

I took more classes about technical communication, and I continued to attend STC meetings. I joined the Society in 1988 because I felt that the profession was challenging and the members of STC were friendly and interesting. They won me over with their enthusiasm for their jobs and the personal invitations to visit their chapter again. But it was their openness to consider a student as a colleague and their warm manner that made me dedicated to STC.

Every time I volunteer for an activity in STC, I meet someone new who makes me glad that I became a technical communicator. Think about the positive influence you can have on others simply by inviting them to join STC, helping them network, and being friendly when they attend monthly meetings. I am excited to be your Director-Sponsor, and I look forward to meeting as many of you as possible over the next 3 years. ✍

Corporate News

On May 25, 2000, Columbia/HCA changed its name to **HCA – The Healthcare Company**. The name change, promised three years ago by Chief Executive Officer Thomas Frist Jr., is a variation on Hospital Corporation of America, which Frist co-founded in 1968.

Company leadership called the transition “a return to our heritage – a symbolic move that reflects the changes we've made during the past several years to re-establish a patients-first approach consistent with the company's founding principles.” ✍

President's Message

BY TIM HUNTER, CHAPTER PRESIDENT



Dear Members:

I know you are probably expecting me to go on and on about WebWORKs 2000, the web development seminar planned for Friday, September 15. You most likely believe I'll wax prolific about the experts who'll be presenting, including 48 oz. Web Design; Lee Honeycutt, English Professor from Iowa State University; and Kurt Klaus, Internet Lawyer; not to mention SageLion Web Design, who'll be critiquing sites all day. I should not mention the t-shirts, the vendor fair, the “Best Website Design” award, or the free lunch.

Okay. I couldn't help it. I talked about WebWORKs 2000. This will be the Middle Tennessee chapter's

first meeting of the 2000-2001 year. It won't be the only one, however! The officers are counting on this year being even better than last. Plans for some poignant meetings are already in the works. In addition to this, the officers will conduct another member survey to ascertain what topics are important to you. So, plan to attend the WebWORKs 2000 web development seminar to kick off the new season. It's sure to get you geared up for an exciting STC year and provide you with valuable skills and goodies to take back to the office.

See you there! ✍

Techniques for Successful SME Interviews

BY JENNIFER LAMBE, MEMBER & PUBLICATIONS COMPETITION MANAGER

During new product development, the technical writer gathers information that will become the content of the new product. A writer can collect information in any number of ways. On some projects, the writer may review previous versions of documentation or related background materials. Other times, the writer might rely on data collected by first-person observation or hands-on experience. But the most universal and basic method of gathering information is to interview with the subject matter expert (SME) face-to-face.

SMEs are usually the writer's primary resource when gathering content material. In optimum circumstances, the writer/SME alliance will be a cooperative, symbiotic relationship. However, in the real world, sometimes the writer/SME alliance is not a productive liaison. This can be due to any number of factors—personality clashes, lack of commitment to a project, or even inadequate communication skills. The quality and skill level of SMEs vary greatly and often the technical writer has little control over which SME is assigned to act as a resource on his or her project.

If you have limited contact with your SME, it is critical to get the right information and optimize your interview time. This article explains some of the interview techniques that I have used over the years as a technical writer and communicator.

Before the Interview

Define your objectives. What is the purpose of the interview? Are you interviewing to identify problem areas within a process? Or are you documenting the steps a user performs to complete a task? The purpose will set the scope for your interview.

Prepare for the meeting. Review any available background material before the interview. Flow charts, product data sheets, and training materials can all be valuable sources of information. Use the background information to compile a list of questions or an outline of topics you want to discuss during the interview. This keeps you on track and helps ensure that you do not forget any important items.

During the Interview

Ask open-ended questions. Open-ended questions require more detailed answers than a “yes” or “no” response. They start with words such as “how,” “why,” or “what.” An example of a closed-ended question is, “Do you implement safety checks in the manufacturing process?” An open-ended question that would prompt the SME for more detail on this issue is, “How do you implement safety checks in the manufacturing process?”

(Politely) control the interview.

Controlling the *flow* of the interview is always important, but especially so when you have tight time constraints. If the SME gets off-track, bring him or her back to the topic by asking pointed, specific questions. Be careful not to offend the SME in the process. You may need to continue to work with the person on other projects.

It is also important to control the *environment* of the interview as much as possible. If the area in which you are interviewing is distracting—for example, if the SME is receiving numerous phone calls or other employees are constantly interrupting—ask whether you can continue the interview somewhere else. You can also ask whether the interviewee can put phone calls directly into voicemail.

Paraphrase information and repeat it back to the SME. This is particularly helpful when covering complex material. Paraphrasing reinforces *your* understanding of the information. If you cannot repeat the information in your own words, you probably do not understand it well enough to write about it. This is a definite sign that you need to ask more questions about the subject matter.

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Member News

Pam Livingston, former co-editor of *Communique*, has joined Deloitte & Touche as a technical writer on its Communication Solutions team.

Congratulations to the following members, who have achieved Senior Member status this summer:

- David Dunn
- Carol Jaquith
- Pam Livingston
- M.J. Plaster
- Jim Voorhies

REMINDER: BE THINKING ABOUT YOUR ENTRIES FOR THIS YEAR'S STC COMPETITIONS. MORE INFORMATION IN AN UPCOMING EMAIL FROM THE PUBLICATIONS COMPETITION MANAGERS. ✍

Meetings

STC:

October 10 - First Quarter Business Meeting, Time & Place TBA

November 14 - Guest speaker M.J. Plaster, topic: "Rx (Help) for Your Help Authoring Tools." Time & Place TBA.

ASTD (American Society for Training and Development):

September 21 - Guest speaker Judith Hale, topic: "Performance Consulting." 4:00-6:00PM, Place TBA. For cost and other details, contact Kathryn Mastin (221-2275, kmastin@arclp.com) or Marty Nord (NordConsul@aol.com). ✍

Officers

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The Job Bank

TRANSCENDER

CONTENT DEVELOPER

The Content Developer will be responsible for the development on projects involving the creation of Transcender products.

DUTIES

- Develop content for Transcender exam simulation products
- Learn new Microsoft technologies

SKILLS & REQUIREMENTS

- Must have excellent writing and grammatical skills
- Computer Science, MIS, or English degrees preferred (GPA. 3.2 or better)
- Microsoft or Novell certification required
- Two or more years experience in education, training, consulting, or network support using Microsoft or Novell products

TECHNICAL EDITOR

Performs duties that include proofreading, basic technical screening, and citation checking of content developed for Transcender products.

DUTIES

- Reading and correcting documents for grammatical structure, sentence syntax, punctuation, and logic
- Applying internal guidelines to the editing process

SKILLS & REQUIREMENTS

- Strong analytical ability
- Effective communication ability
- Computer Science, MIS, or English degrees preferred (GPA. 3.2 or better)
- Intermediate computer skills; familiarity with Microsoft products

If you are interested in the above positions, send your resume to cmdaniel@transcender.com.

GALLAGHER FINANCIAL

TECHNICAL WRITER

Bachelor's degree or equivalent work experience in English, Communications or a related field and 3+ years experience in developing software documentation and/or technical marketing materials. Must have a strong technical aptitude, the ability to learn quickly, and proficiency in at least one desktop publishing package. Must have the ability to create thorough and well-organized technical documents such as operation, installation, and configuration manuals for software systems. The ideal candidate will have HTML, and a good sense for basic page layout and design. Candidates must be creative, self-motivated, able to adapt quickly, and work well under pressure.

If you are interested in this position, send your resume to humanresources@gogallagher.com. ✍

The Ballad of the CyBerets

(with no apologies whatsoever to Staff Sgt. Barry Sadler)

BY HOLLY QUICK, MEMBER

High-tech writers from the sky
Fearless folk who type and die
Folk who mean just what they say
The brave bards of the CyBeret.

Power strips beneath their desks
These are scribes, America's best
One hundred strong we'll test today
But only three win the CyBeret.

Trained to write both clean and quick
Scribes who live to point and click
In dotcombat by night and day
Courage take from the CyBeret.

Long into the darkest night
Monitors are burning bright
PDF, gif, zip, and wav
No file refused by the CyBeret.

Back at home a family waits.
Their CyBeret has met his/her fate,
Gone off-line, with no regrets
Leaving them this last request:

Put a power strip 'neath my
children's desk
Make them join America's best,
They'll be scribes to test one day
Have them win the CyBeret,
Yes, have them win the CyBeret. ✍

Successful SME Interviews

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 4

Use critical thinking skills to identify gaps in the information. The SME may not be able to explain the information in a logical sequence, but if you mentally (or verbally) rearrange it into a chronological or sequential order, you are more likely to spot gaps in the process flow. This technique is especially critical for task- or process-related documentation, and works well when combined with the paraphrasing technique discussed above.

Use common tools to organize your materials during the interview. You can use paper clips, binder clips, folders, sticky notes, highlighters, and pens with different colors of ink to help keep interview notes and attachments organized. During interviews, I mark areas of my notes where I need to go back and follow up or clarify information. I also use highlighters or sticky notes to mark references in my notes to forms and exhibits I need to collect after the interview.

Do not make any promises to the SME that you are not authorized to make. Do not promise a draft or a finished product to the SME by a specific date unless you have consulted with the project manager or project team. Doing so may set up unrealistic expectations.

Discuss questionable requests with your project manager. Services that fall outside the scope of the project (and budget) and may require a new contract or additional fee negotiation.

Closing the Interview

Ask for permission to follow up. This will help you determine whether the SME is open to further contact. If so, discuss how future contact and questions should be handled: by e-mail, by phone, or by embedding the questions in the appropriate location of the draft document.

Review your notes while the interview is fresh. Immediately after the interview, fill in any gaps in your interview notes and decipher any cryptic notations. If you need to better organize your materials, now is the time to match pages of notes with the relevant screen prints or exhibits.

Conclusion

An uncooperative or inarticulate SME can make your job as a writer unnecessarily difficult. However, there are some things you can do to improve the odds of success, including preparation, forethought, organization, and proper management of the interview process. Not all of the techniques presented in this article will apply to every interview situation; however, most will apply to the average interview. Some of these techniques are certain to work for you! ✍

*This is an abridged version of an article that appeared in the March 2000 issue of **Intercom**. Jennifer Lambe is a technical communicator with Tanner Corporate Services, Inc.*

On Common Ground

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 2

are actively involved with the group.

Like STC, members of Creative Forum have diverse backgrounds and interests. Similar to our chapter, it is striving to become more active and visible in the community, and to gain more members.

Both organizations have members who work for a commercial industry by day, and do their personal, more creative work in their free time. Though most STC members use words as their key tool, and most CF members use pictures, all of us know that the most effective communication—regardless of our audience—usually requires an artful combination of both. Further, all of us are learning how to adapt our crafts to the Internet's pace, style, and audience.

STC and CF have much to benefit from an alliance; thankfully, WebWORKS presents us with unique opportunities for knowledge-sharing, networking, and collaboration. While you're at the conference, take the time to introduce yourself to a Creative Forum member. You may find that you have more in common than you realize at first glance. Or, you may find that the graphic talent you've been searching for is standing right in front of you. At the very least, you will find that you both have something in common: your expertise is clear communication, through a combination of text and graphics. ✍

WebWORKS 2000 Presenters



MICHAEL CONNELL is an E-Commerce Solutions Specialist at 48 oz. (formerly GreyMatter Productions), and has been creating websites since the introduction of the World Wide Web. Over the past decade, Michael has received international recognition for design and innovation, and is credited with several Internet "firsts."

PHILIP WILSON is the Chief Technology Officer at 48 oz. Under his leadership, 48 oz. has continually broken new ground in the E-Commerce world and developed numerous Internet-based applications that were not even possible two years ago. His R&D team is also receiving recognition for breakthroughs in the utilization of Java, XML, JDBC, database driven projects, and real-time Internet connectivity with mainframe systems.



LEE HONEYCUTT is an assistant professor in the English Department at Iowa State University, specializing in computer pedagogy and computer-mediated communication. He teaches courses in first-year composition, technical communication, and website design. His main areas of interest are composition research, rhetorical theory, and computer-supported cooperative work.

KURT R. KLAUS is an attorney based in Nashville. His practice includes providing legal services and business advice to individuals and companies operating in the entertainment industry. Typically, Kurt counsels clients regarding Internet, music, motion picture, licensing, copyright, trademark, contract, small business, and employment issues.



BRAD TOWLE is a Senior Partner and Executive Producer of Websites at SageLion Inc., Web Design and Development. Brad has been developing websites since 1994. Previously, he held numerous high-level management positions in sales, marketing, and operations. He has a broad base of expertise in market positioning, sales techniques, and operational management.

MIKE GOLDBERG is a Senior Partner at SageLion Inc., Web Design and Development, where he manages all aspects of web design. He coordinates artists, designers, programmers, and software purchases. His areas of expertise are financial management, operational management, human resources, and legal issues. ✍



WebWORKS 2000 Schedule

WHEN	WHAT	WHERE
8:00 AM – 8:30 AM	REGISTRATION	ATRIUM
8:30 AM – 9:00 AM	OPENING REMARKS	MAIN AUDITORIUM
9:00 AM – 10:15 AM	DEVELOPING A WEBSITE (PART 1)	MAIN AUDITORIUM
10:15 AM – 10:30 AM	BREAK	
10:30 AM – 12:00 PM	DEVELOPING A WEBSITE (PART 2)	MAIN AUDITORIUM
12:00 PM - 1:00 PM	LUNCH	ATRIUM
1:00 PM – 2:45 PM	WRITING FOR THE WEB	MAIN AUDITORIUM
2:45 PM – 3:00 PM	BREAK	
3:00 PM – 4:00 PM	LEGAL CONCERNS FOR WEBSITE DESIGN	MAIN AUDITORIUM
4:00 PM – 4:15 PM	PRESENTATION OF WINNER FOR BEST WEBSITE	MAIN AUDITORIUM
<u>ALL DAY EVENTS</u>		
8:00 AM - 5:00 PM	VENDOR SHOWCASE	ATRIUM
9:00 AM – 4:00 PM	WEBSITE CRITIQUES	CRITIQUE ROOM
9:00 AM – 3:00 PM	LEGAL CONSIDERATIONS Q&A	CONFERENCE ROOM



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