STC

Communiqué

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Scenes from Our Seminar at BELLSOUTH®

PHOTOGRAPHS COURTESY OF TIM HUNTER, PRESIDENT, AND AMANDA SANDERS, EVENTS COORDINATOR

PHOTOS (CLOCKWISE FROM TOP RIGHT):

1) Scott Saul (left) at the Tanner Corporate Services, Inc. vendor booth.
2) Kurt Klaus (right) discusses Web legal considerations with an attendee.
3) Mary Reaves (right) displays the Creative Forum vendor booth.
4) Richard Hoehn, the winner of the "Best Website" award. Check out his site at www.koaxial.com/becky/becky.shtml.
5) Winner of the SageLion, Inc. plush lion toy.
6) Brad Towle and Mike Goldberg of SageLion, Inc. conduct website critiques.
7) Enjoying the fabulous breakfast spread donated by BellSouth. ✍

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

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"It's Not Just Writing Anymore:"

Structured Writing as a Single-Sourcing Technique

BY VIRGINIA PRYOR, NEWSLETTER EDITOR

Last month, I was fortunate enough to attend a training class in Raleigh, North Carolina, sponsored by my company (Square D). The training consisted of two parts: two days of "Structured Writing" followed by two more intense days of FrameMaker 6.0 with WebWorks Publisher. This article is the first in a two-part series, and covers tips, tricks, and thought-provoking ideas gained from the first two days of training.

The "Structured Writing" training was conducted by Jerilynne Sander, who owns a small technical communications consulting company, Simply Written, Inc. She is based in Indianapolis, Indiana, and specializes in single-sourcing using the structured writing technique.

First, a few definitions. S*ingle-sourcing* is an unattainable ideal, and the process takes so much tweaking that it's really a misnomer. Well, that has been the experience of most—if not all—of us in the past. However, the combination of a powerful conversion tool, adequate planning, and expert content organization can produce a streamlined process whereby we can create a document *only once* in order to produce multiple output

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Submit Your Work to the 2000–2001 Technical Publications Competition

BY JENNIFER LAMBE, PUBLICATIONS COMPETITION MANAGER

For the fifth consecutive year, the Middle Tennessee Chapter (MTC) is hosting the Technical Publications Competition. This article addresses common questions about the competition. If you need more information, go to the *Call for Entries* link on the local chapter website (*www.stc.org/region3/mtc/www)*. Or, contact one of the Publications Competition Managers (see the *Chapter Officers* list on page 2).

What is the Technical Publications Competition?

The technical publication entries are rated on four factors—writing, editing, design and graphics, and overall integration. Judging is conducted in the context of the purpose, content, and organization of the document. The categories in the Technical Publications Competition are:

- Promotional Materials
- Informational Materials
- Quick Reference Guides
- Software Guides
- Hardware/Software Combination Guides
- Computer Hardware Guides
- Noncomputer Equipment Guides
- Organizational Manuals
- Training Materials
- Annual Reports
- Magazines
- Newsletters
- Technical Reports
- Trade/News Articles
- Scholarly/Professional Articles
- Scholarly/Professional Journals
- Books

This year, MTC is exchanging competition entries with the Austin, Texas Chapter. In other words, we will judge their entries, and they will judge ours.

What are the benefits?

The competition is an excellent opportunity to receive recognition for your work. You will also receive written feedback from judges, regardless of whether or not you win an award. In addition, the entry fees increase our chapter revenues, enabling MTC to sponsor more activities, such as the recent WebWORKS seminar. Also, the interest and publicity generated by the competition raise visibility for the profession. But perhaps the best reason for entering—as well as volunteering to judge—is that the competition provides a forum for sharing ideas and approaches to new technologies.

> *"THE COMPETITION PROVIDES A FORUM FOR SHARING IDEAS, LEARNING NEW APPROACHES, AND VIEWING WORK PRODUCED IN OTHER REGIONS."*

Who is eligible?

Anyone is eligible to submit entries. You do not have to be a member of STC. You may enter work as an individual, or on behalf of a colleague or subordinate. However, all entries *must* be received by **October 20, 2000**.

What are the requirements?

You may enter more than one publication, but all entries must meet the following requirements:

- Entries must contain sufficient technical, scientific, medical, or similar content to qualify as technical communication.
- Entries can be multilingual, but one of the languages must be English. All entries will be judged in English.
- Entries must have been produced or substantially revised since September 1, 1998.
- Entries must not have been entered in any previous STC competition.
- Entries must have originally been prepared for and accepted for publication by a client, employer, or publisher. *NOTE:* Student entries are exempt from this rule.

Any cautions?

Entries must be suitable for public display and perusal. The submitter, not STC, is responsible for ensuring that the entry contains no classified or proprietary information, and that the holder of all copyrights has granted permission for the entry's submission. Neither STC nor anyone associated with the competition can be held responsible for loss of or damage to an entry.

What are the awards?

Any entry that meets the standard for an award level will receive that award. Entries do not compete with each other. Rather, they are judged by how well they meet published evaluation guidelines. Three levels of recognition may be awarded in each category. These awards, in descending order, are:

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"It's Not Just Writing Anymore"

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 2

forms, at the snap of our fingers. *Structured writing* is a method of planning and organization we can use in combination with our tools to make single-sourcing a reality.

Challenges

Single-sourcing presents us with several challenges, especially in our increasingly multinational, hi-tech world of technical communications. The most common challenges to single-sourcing are:

1) **Variability.** That is, we are often tasked with creating documents to meet the needs of multiple audiences. This can result in a variety of needed information, output media, languages, product types, and document structure.
2) **Non-linear.** Creating a true single-sourced document does not mean converting a paper document to PDF format, and sticking it on the Web or your company's Intranet. It means organizing the document based on types of information, and defining each type. This way, when a document formatted for print is converted to, say, HTML or Help, your *organization*—not the linear order of items in your print piece—determines the format.

Important Elements

The most crucial elements in single-sourcing are **structure, planning,** and **audience analysis**.

Structure *defines* information in a document. Single-sourcing uses that information to easily format multiple outputs of that documentation. Structure is not simply defining and applying tags or styles to the content of a document (that is simply formatting). It is creating as many tags as there are types of information, and identifying the type of information for each heading, body paragraph, and so on. For example, introductory/overview material might have a tag for its heading. "How to" steps will have headings also (for example, "Saving a Document in the ABC System"). Although they might be in the same font and have the exact same leading, indents, and tabs, the two types of headings would have different tags.

The 5 C's of Good Documentation:

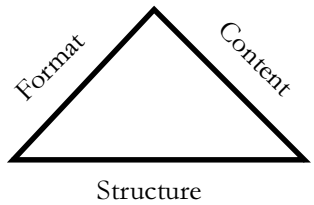
- **C**lear
- **C**oncise
- **C**orrect
- **C**omplete
- **C**onsistent

Thus, structured writing is both a tag- and content-based system, and is primarily an organizational tool.

In the ideal world, it is best to plan your structure by accounting for 85% of possible types of information in a document, and in what order they should fall. In this context, order signifies what should appear first in, say, a TOC, even if the user is allowed to browse through the contents in any order he or she chooses (such as is the case with HTML or a Help system).

Planning includes designing templates (structure and formatting), as well as information. For all types of documents, either for a particular client or for your company, try to account for as many types of information as possible that you might encounter.

The Documentation Triangle: the 3 Components of Every Document



Finally, **audience analysis** is critical. Depending on your tool, you might be able to structure documents in such a way that each type of information has a particular audience, and one source document could become four different ones, each custom-tailored to the intended audience. To do this, divide your audience into the top three or four primary categories (for example, manager, executive, electrician, sales representative).

Conduct your analysis using questionnaires, interviewing several representatives (if possible) from each category. Ask open-ended, feeling questions. Listen more than you speak. Try to conduct interviews in person, and do not ask the end users to write. Instead, take notes from what they tell you. Most importantly, for each category, assign a real person's name to that category if you know someone who fits it. Think of his or her needs as you write for that audience. If you don't know someone who fits into that group, be creative, and construct one. Give that fictional person a name, characteristics, a background, hobbies, a family, and so on.

Obviously, taking on the task of analyzing the organization, audience, and structure of your documentation is a big investment in dollars and time. However, to truly single-source, these are necessary steps. ✍

President's Message

BY TIM HUNTER, CHAPTER PRESIDENT

When I was a kid growing up in a small town in South Carolina, one of my worst fears was hearing my dad announce from the pulpit on a Sunday morning that the following Saturday would be "door-knocking day." It was a day that 15 of the church's 18 or so members would take to the streets with pamphlets written to literally scare the hell out of people so that they'd be at church the following day, and possibly even become members.

Regardless of their worthiness, membership drives are rarely fun, whether you're working one, or on the receiving end of one. When National Public Radio hits the airwaves asking its listeners to become members, I methodically switch to MTSU's jazz station for the entire week. (I am a WPLN member. I just don't like hearing Rebecca Bain ask for money five days in a row.)

Now that I have painted such a lovely picture of how fun membership drives can be, let me introduce a few thoughts. As a member of STC, you and I have valuable resources at our fingertips. It starts at *Communiqué* and our award-winning Middle Tennessee chapter website. Resources constantly flow from STC Headquarters in the many printed and online materials. Perhaps the most valuable rewards STC membership offers are the professional and social connections we make with people who have similar jobs, and who share common hobbies and interests.

In a few months, our chapter will have its own door-knocking day. We won't actually go from door to door with an eternal message, but we will have a campaign to increase our numbers. It won't be for monetary reasons or for prestige. The main reason will be to expand our web of contacts. The more people we know in our field, the better our chances are to learn, share, and possibly make relationships that will help us in job or employee searches.

Please get involved, either by providing ideas, or as an errand runner or event worker. My lines are always open, so e-mail or call me.

Tim ✍

From the Director-Sponsor

BY ROB HOUSER, REGION 3 DIRECTOR-SPONSOR

Do you have someone in your chapter who has been a strong contributor to chapter leadership, either through an elected or volunteer position? Have you officially recognized this person? If not, the Distinguished Chapter Service Award (DCSA) may be a good way to do it.

What is DCSA?

The DCSA is a Society-level award that recognizes a member's exemplary contributions to the Society through his or her chapter.

The qualifications for this award are broad. The official guidelines recommend that you consider length of membership, variety of service, and consistency of service over time. One important restriction is that a nominee cannot be a current elected officer.

Number of Nominees

Chapters—such as ours—with fewer than 100 members, may make one recommendation per year (two with special permission from your Director-Sponsor).

How to Nominate

Send an e-mail to your chapter president that contains the following information:

- the nominee's name
- a brief explanation of why the member should be nominated, and
- an inscription that can be used on the award.

Each chapter's officers (also referred to as "Executive Council") make nominations. The Society Board of Directors approve nominations at the Winter board meeting in January.

Deadline

The Director-Sponsor must receive all nominations before **November 30**.

Details

For more details, visit the STC website at *www.stc-va.org*. Click the *Honors and Awards* link; then click the *Guidelines for Distinguished Chapter Service Award* link, and download the appropriate PDF file.

Don't miss this great opportunity to recognize your strongest contributors! ✍

2000–2001 Technical Publications Competition

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- Distinguished Technical Communication (DTC)
- Excellence
- Merit

One Best of Show award is presented in each category. Winners of the DTC award in each category qualify for automatic submission to STC's international competition.

How do I enter?

- Submit three copies of each publication.
- Complete the entry form (a PDF version is available for download on the chapter website at *www.stc.org/region3/mtc/www*). Attach a copy of the entry form to *each* copy of the publication.
- On a separate sheet, provide detailed information about the purpose and audience of your entry, as described on the form.
- Send the entry fee with each entry.

What are the entry fees?

Make checks payable to Middle Tennessee Chapter, STC. The fees for each publication are:

- $40 for Entrant 1, and $10 for each additional entrant
- $10 for Entrant 1 who is a student, and $5 for each additional student entrant

When is the deadline?

All entries *must* be received by **October 20, 2000**.

Where do I send my entry?

Mail entries to:

Rita Johnson
Tanner Corporate Services, Inc.
2323 Hillsboro Road, Suite 301
Nashville, TN 37212

Can I volunteer to judge?

Yes. Judges are still needed for the competition (we think we will need about 20 judges). No prerequisite skills are required, other than an analytical mind, and an interest in seeing what other technical communicators are producing.

To date, the following STC members have volunteered to judge: Laura Liles (HCA); Holly Quick, Pat Cosky, Nancy Garrett, and Jennifer Lambe (Tanner Corporate Services); Miles Kimball (Murray State University); and Kathy Collins (Square D). ✍

Meeting Notice

"Rx for Your Help"

PRESENTED BY M.J. PLASTER, MTC SENIOR MEMBER

WHEN: .....November 14

WHERE: ..... TBA

DETAILS: To create help files, we need a great help authoring tool (HAT). But who among us doesn't have a long wish list for our help tool of choice? If you need strategies and solutions for dealing with the bugs in your HAT, you won't want to miss this session. Join us for an evening of dissection, diagnosis, prescription, and cure. We'll explore quick, easy, and inexpensive solutions to all our small problems.

The session will begin with a review and update of HTML-based technologies and tools. It will primarily consist of demonstration, and will close with Q&A and discussion. ✍

Praise for WebWORKS 2000

"Job well done. It was great to get a broader perspective on web issues. Since I do a lot of support, it was also good to spend time with folks who are at the more knowledgeable end of the spectrum."

—*SCOTT CONDER, MEMBER*

"The presenters were great..., and were much more to the point for what I need to hear, than those at other seminars I've attended in the past. And having SageLion there to critique our sites was a very nice bonus."

—*SHARON SMITH, MEMBER*

The Job Bank

Aspect Communications

TECHNICAL WRITER—SENIOR INFORMATION DEVELOPER

Aspect Communications is the leading provider of customer relationship portals, a software platform for building and deploying eCRM applications.

DUTIES
- Review product requirements, design specifications, and other documents for clarity, consistency, and usability
- Identify, plan, and create technical information for a variety of user audiences
- Coach and mentor team members

SKILLS & REQUIREMENTS
- BA/BS degree or equivalent; degree in Technical Writing, English, Journalism, or Computer Science preferred
- Five to eight years of related experience
- Experience with FrameMaker, Word, HTML, and WinHelp preferred
- Possess project management, communication, and analytical skills
- Takes initiative, innovative, is direct, and a team player

Visit our career opportunities at www.aspect.com.

If you are interested in this position, please reply to Katie.lamb@aspect.com, and include NAKL/TWR001 in the subject line.

Gallagher Financial

TECHNICAL WRITER

SKILLS & REQUIREMENTS
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 experience, 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.

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, Novell, or Cisco certification required
- Two or more years experience in education, training, consulting, or network support using Microsoft or Novell products

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

"TO BE GREAT IS TO BE MISUNDERSTOOD."
—RALPH WALDO EMERSON

"I HATE QUOTATIONS."
—RALPH WALDO EMERSON

Member News

Congratulations!

CAMILLE JERNIGAN will marry fiancé Gordon Dunn on October 28, in Richmond, VA. She is moving to Charlotte, NC, due to Gordon's job transfer as an RF Manager with Verizon Wireless. Camille will continue to work as Program Developer with Square D, telecommuting to the Raleigh facility. Her duties as our Chapter Treasurer will be filled by Jennifer Heflin, who is Technical Writing Team Leader at Inforum in Franklin.

ED GREGORY and his wife, Ellen, are now twice-blessed grandparents. On August 12, Ellen's daughter, Alena, gave birth to Lauren Elise Ballinger. On August 19, Ed's daughter, Lorien, gave birth to Brianna Nicole Carroll. Ed is a technical writer at Deloitte & Touche, and is our Chapter Website Manager. Ellen is a court reporter. ✍

Do you have any news you'd like to share with our Chapter? Promotions, publications, moves? Are you a new member who would like to be profiled in Communique? Please e-mail or telephone any news to Virginia Pryor (see page 2 for contact info.).

Currents 2001: The Odyssey Continues

March 16 and 17, 2001: Mercer University, Atlanta

BY GENE LARSON—MANAGER, PUBLIC RELATIONS, STC ATLANTA CHAPTER

The STC Atlanta Chapter is proud to announce its annual conference—Currents—on March 16 and 17, 2001, at the Atlanta campus of Mercer University.

Our theme for Currents 2001, "The Odyssey Continues," embraces the ongoing evolution of our profession and implies the need to keep abreast of changes. A feature of Currents 2001 is the inclusion of the Region 3 student conference.

Currents begins with a full-day workshop on Friday, March 16. At the conference on Saturday, March 17, you can choose sessions from our topic stems that focus on:

- learning new skills and tools,
- contracting,
- expanding your roles,
- satisfying users,
- education/professional development, and
- management.

Currents 2001 is the premier way for technical communicators to interact with colleagues and learn the theories, technologies, and tools of the profession.

For conference information, contact Conference Manager Cheri Pullar at pullarc@cs.com, or access our Chapter website at www.pobox.com/~stc-atlanta. ✍

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