

Next meeting

April 14
7:00 pm

North York Memorial
Community Hall
Burgundy Room A
North York Civic Centre
5110 Yonge St.

Topic:

Pushing the
Information Envelope

This meeting examines
new information retrieval
technologies—push
technology and network
computers.

How will we manage
information retrieval in
the future?

Next Month

Creative Communications
at the Bell Centre for
Creative Communications

New media writing

by Nate Horowitz, Co-ordinator, New Media Education, Centennial College

New Media Writing is a new, part-time certificate program at Centennial College, the Bell Centre for Creative Communications.

This program was created for those who have a background in writing for technical communications, corporate communications, advertising copywriting, or traditional forms of non-fiction.

The New Media Writing Certificate is for those who have some writing background or want to focus on writing for traditional media and new media.

This certificate, which started in January 1998, will enable the learner to work in the growing field of technical, promotional, and informational writing for business,

see New media, on page 6.

Review: Making Money in Technical Writing

by Keith Soltys, Senior Member

Most technical writers would like more money and more respect. Reading this book may help you get both. It could certainly help you to earn more and the respect will probably go along with that.

Making Money in Technical Writing is an updated edition of Peter Kent's *Technical Writer's Freelancing Guide*. According to the introduction: "The main topic of this book is how to use your technical writing skills to build a freelance career, but I will also explain how to get those skills in the first place. You will find out how much money technical writers make, what they

do, and how they came to be technical writers (it's remarkably easy for a determined newcomer to enter the profession). If you are not already a technical writer, you will learn how to become one. If you are a technical writer, you will learn how to double or triple your income."

That's a pretty strong promise, but Kent makes it sound, if not easy, at least possible.

The first section of the book provides an overview of the technical writing profession, describes how to get started as a

see Review, on page 4.

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communication
TIMES

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communication TIMES is the official newsletter of the Toronto chapter of the Society for Technical Communication. Opinions expressed are those of the author.

We publish nine times a year and distribute to all local STC members. Non-member subscription rates are \$27 a year.

We welcome submissions via email or diskette. We reserve the right to edit copy. Deadline for submissions is the monthly meeting. Articles may be reprinted, provided the Toronto Chapter and the author are acknowledged.

Advertisements:

Full page:

single issue = \$300
per issue for 3 issues = \$150
per issue for 6 issues = \$275
per issue for 9 issues = \$225

Half page:

single issue = \$175
per issue for 3 issues = \$150
per issue for 6 issues = \$275
per issue for 9 issues = \$225

Quarter page:

per issue for 3 issues = \$150
per issue for 6 issues = \$275
per issue for 9 issues = \$225

Eighth page:

per issue for 3 issues = \$150
per issue for 6 issues = \$275
per issue for 9 issues = \$225

Business card: (members only)

per issue = \$15

Clip art taken from Task Force, Word, and Corel.

RSVP

The opinions in RSVP are the author's alone. Please feel free to respond to the editor...

Everyday lessons

by Lori Nurse, Newsletter editor

Recently, I had one of those unpleasant experiences that all contractors dread—the demanding clients who, at the end of the project, would rather not pay the bill. Alas, after many weeks of sleepless nights and an upset household, I finally did get some money (the key word here being some) and the association with the clients is over.

What I have learned from this adventure, besides the importance of contracts, is the difficulty of finding the time for professional development, so crucial to those of us new to the profession. During the lifecycle of the contract there isn't time, and as soon as the contract ends you're hustling for the next one.

Technical writing is undergoing a major transformation, which began about 10 years ago. Not only do we need to be good writers, but we also need to be expert desktop publishers, quasi developers, webmasters, etc. Technology is changing at an alarming rate and the workplace demands proficiency in the latest "industry standard." FrameMaker is a good example of the catch-22 in which I have found myself. The software is expensive, the training is expensive, and when does the independent contractor find the time or resources to learn the application, so crucial to securing the next contract?

If anyone has any ideas, I'd love to hear about them.

STC society for technical communication

The Society for Technical Communication (STC) is the world's largest professional organization dedicated to the advancement of the theory and practice of technical communication. The STC has more than 20,000 members worldwide.

1997-98 Toronto chapter leaders

Officers

<i>President</i> , Jane Aronovitch	545-0495	<i>Program</i> , Cindy Bowman	929-4085
<i>Vice-President</i> , Carla Salvador	463-8479	<i>Publicity</i> , Hugh Graham	(905) 629-1288
<i>Secretary</i> , Sara Durning	461-8900	<i>Volunteers</i> ,	
<i>Treasurer</i> , Anne Shannon	467-0750	Kim Van Rooy	535-2181,x2382
		<i>Web</i> , Alison Hartshorn	512-9100, x231

Activity Managers

<i>Archive</i> , Lindsey Hartshorn	340-1200
<i>Competition</i> ,	
Mary-Ann Wilson	(905) 476-8511
<i>Education</i> , Gay Merrill	(905) 665-9208
<i>Employment</i> , Robert Milkovich	588-2450
<i>Hospitality</i> , Tina Dallas	465-3669
<i>Information</i> , Laurie Pearce	398-6596
<i>Membership</i> , Mona Albano	469-1384
<i>Newsletter</i> , Lori Nurse	(905) 471-4537

Special Interest Groups (SIGs)

<i>Online</i> , Benjamin Keevil	
bkeevil@sympatico.ca	
<i>Corel-Ventura</i> , David Gow	322-0096
<i>Consulting/Freelancers/Contractors</i> ,	
Mara Glebovs	925-7417
<i>ISO 9000</i> ,	
Ralph Robinson	(905) 608-6000x2266

Website: www.myna.com/torontostc/

Note: Unspecified area codes are 416.

Sez the prez

By Jane Aronovitch, Chapter President

Does MS rule the world?

"Most people use folders and call them folders," I told the client. "Well, we don't. We don't like techie talk and we think trays or baskets work better. So we called it the "Basket Screen." (Instead of the name that appeared at the top of the "window.")"

This was the substance of a conversation I had with a client last week.

"Have I lost my objectivity?" I thought to myself. The client had a point. In fact, my role is usually to champion the user, and here I was pushing MicroSpeak.

The problem is that I like standards. And Microsoft has established several—interface as well as nomenclature and a host of other standards and guidelines. The other issue was that we needed a reference point, a way of describing the objects the user would see in the application.

When it comes to reference points, I also think it is important not to confuse the user. In this case, the developer had named the window, and the client (who worked in the training department) chose to call the "screen" by another, albeit descriptive, name.

My inclination would have been to ask the developer to change the name at an earlier stage in the development process. Another option would have been to use the name given to the window and perhaps use the descriptive version as a way of characterizing the window if it needed clarification.

So in answer to the question I posed at the start, it's more a matter of consistency than of ruling the world.

Tying one on

Among the many things that are sent to the chapter are a few copies of each issue of Tieline, a newsletter for the chapter leaders.

Does that sound a bit elitist? Sorry. But we do only get a few copies of each issue. I took a look at the last one before I passed it on to other members of the executive.

One of the articles that caught my eye was about the Atlanta chapter and how it was cutting down its paper newsletter (which I had just judged in the international newsletter competition) in favour of providing a variety of other services including email messages from the President, faxback job bank services (we're already looking into this one) and, of course, a Web site. Interesting and exciting stuff. In fact, that's the kind of information all of us should get a chance to see.

So I sent an email suggesting that Tieline should go on the STC Web site so everyone could see it, not just executive members.

The reply from the editor: "Each issue of Tieline for the last two years has been put on the STC office Web site. We're way ahead of you!"

Typically Canadian, eh?—about two years behind the times...and really plugged in!

But Tieline is still worth checking out!

New members



A hearty welcome to:

Elizabeth T. Alexander
David C. Arkilander
Suzanne M. Baal
Bettie Dondertman
Ian J. Donen
Mena A. Fallone
Diane Martin Godfrey
Connie Jeske
Susan M. Mattine
Kim T. Murray
Glen J. Strom
Rebecca Taylor
Joe C. Vaira

Re-instating:

Harrison T.S. Cheung
David F. Shenton

Transferring in:

Michele D. Gannet
Brenda A. Hayman

Transferring out:

Celine M.G. Deguire
Laurie L. Holtby

We now have 599 members!

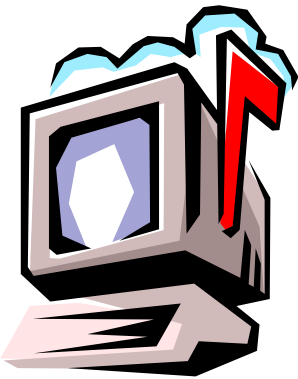
WWWWeb world

by Stephanie Copp,
Senior Member

Search Engine Watch

Search Engine Watch uncovers the secrets of popular search engines. The site explains how you can use search engines like InfoSeek and AltaVista, and how each engine finds, categorizes, and uses information on the Web. I've used Danny Sullivan's tips to optimize sites and HTML to shape how search engines represent sites and point to their information. Considering that most users explore the Web with a search engine, webmasters can make sure readers continue to find their sites by bookmarking Search Engine Watch.

The address is <http://www.searchenginewatch.com/>



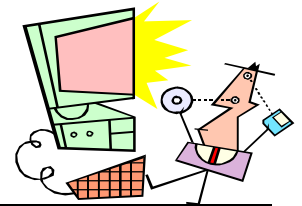
Meeting summary

by Lori Nurse, Newsletter editor

At the March 10th meeting, Ann Rockley spoke about electronic document management. Ann very kindly put together an interesting and informative presentation on rather short notice. After briefly surveying those present to determine the general level of awareness about the topic, Ann began by saying that more and more of her business is devoted to consulting in the area of document management.

The Internet, intranets, and desktop publishing all produce or make available an

unbelievable amount of information that needs to be managed. Security and accessibility of the information are the biggest issues to consider in designing and maintaining document management systems. As information proliferates, the tools to manage the information need to develop, and in turn the capacity to manage more information can grow.



Review, continued from page 1

technical writer, discusses the advantages and disadvantages of freelancing, and shows how to calculate how much you should be billing based on your existing salary.

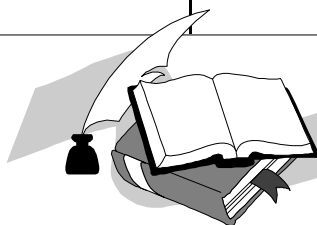
The following sections outline Kent's three-step process for becoming a successful freelancer: use the agencies, cut out the middleman, and become a consultant.

There is much advice about working with agencies. Kent provides descriptions of the different types of agencies, tips on getting and negotiating contracts, and advice on how to make sure that you're getting the best rate. The final section explains how to make the jump from being a contractor to being a consultant, at which point you can define your projects and work for top dollar. As well, there are chapters about working online and breaking into the magazine and book markets.

I found the book highly readable and interesting. It's logically organized and covers its material quite thoroughly. Kent has strong opinions on some subjects, but he backs them up with facts and experience.

Canadian readers will find that about one third of the book is going to be useless or irrelevant, in particular the discussion of taxes, benefits, health and disability insurance, and employment standards. An appendix dealing with Canadian issues would have made this book more useful for those of us north of the border. I would also have liked to see a discussion of the issues involved in working across borders; this would have been useful to both American and Canadian readers.

That aside, it's hard to imagine a technical writer who couldn't find something useful and worthwhile in this book.



Please forward any correspondence to the editor:
Lori Nurse: lnurse@sympatico.ca
The deadline for submissions is the general meeting.

Up from the archives

Dusting off the directory, part two

by Lindsey Hartshorn, Archive Manager

Last month, I issued a challenge. This month, I'm giving you the answers.

1 How many people have been selected as honorary fellows? Twenty-two (p. 31).

2 What year did the current organization adopt the name Society for Technical Communication? In 1971, the current name was adopted. From 1960 until 1971, the Society was known as Society for Technical Writers and Publishers (p. 13).

3 The Bylaws state that retired members may get a 50% discount as long as they fulfill two requirements. What are they? Retired members must have been a member for 10 years and be over 60 years old (p. 37).

4 How many vice-presidents serve on the Board of Directors? Two. The first assumes the duties of the president in the absence or incapacity of the president, and performs duties as assigned by the president or board. The second acts for the first as needed and co-ordinates the Society's chapters by assigning the directors to sponsor specific chapters (p. 38).

5 When can you request a specific chapter affiliation? Only when you reside within the boundaries of two chapters. Then, you can specify the one to which you wish to belong (p. 44).



6 What is the minimum number of program meetings a chapter must schedule in a year? Five. However, the Toronto Chapter usually schedules 10. Way to go program committee! (p. 45).

7 Which chapters do these chapter codes represent: IS, ROC, MON, and SWO? Israel, Republic of China, Montreal, and Southwestern Ohio (our buddies, Southwestern Ontario, have the code SOC) (p. 48).

8 What is the role of the Executive Director? To meet administrative and operation requirements of the Society (p. 40).

9 What are Standing Committees? Standing Committees take charge of a specific piece of work. Currently, there are 16 Standing Committees (p. 40).

10 What positions are required at the Chapter level? President, vice president, treasurer, secretary, and past-president.

The bonus question: How many STC members are in the Hartshorn SIG? Currently, there are five paying members with the surname Hartshorn. Our plan for world domination is well underway!

Passages

By Jane Aronovitch, Chapter president

We regret to announce that Morgan (a.k.a. Sandi) White passed away on Sunday, March 1, 1998 after a short illness.

The principal of Dial A-1 Resources, Morgan was a vital and active member of our community. Not only did she help countless numbers of us find jobs at one time or another, she also found time to talk to people, find out what they wanted, match them with the right employer, make sure their rights were protected. She

donated back issues of the Communication Times to our archives, attended meetings, led discussions at various programs, and taught classes on job search skills for some of our technical communication instructors.

We will miss her greatly.

In Morgan's memory, the Toronto Chapter made a donation to the Palliative Care Unit of the York County Hospital in Newmarket, (905) 895-4521.

Writing contest

By Jon Russel,
Senior member,
Washington DC chapter

Are you a technical writer? Wish you were? Just look like one? Tell us your true-life, Dilbertesque tales from the cubicle.

Submit your funniest, most nightmarish, hilarious, fantasmagoric workplace stories in about 20 pages, double-spaced (maximum). Specially formatted submissions will not get extra points, but well conceived, good writing will.

Prizes

First prize: \$250

Second prize: \$100

Third prize: \$50

Send your submissions, with a short bio of yourself and a return address by email to: veritas@erols.com. If your submission is hardcopy, send snail mail with a SASE to:

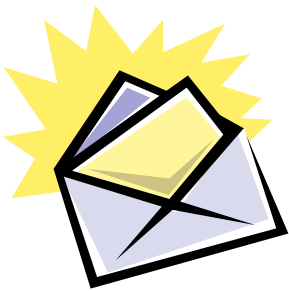
True Life Tales From
the Cubicle
50 D Street
Vallejo, California 94590
Attention: Russel

Deadline

All submissions must be received by midnight, January 1, 1999. All winning entries will be posted on February 15, 1999 at <http://www.erols.com/veritas>.

Survey results— short version

By Lori Nurse,
Newsletter editor



Approximately 600 copies of the questionnaire were distributed with the newsletter sent out in late January. In addition, the questionnaire was made available on the Web site. Only 40 questionnaires were returned.

The most popular service was the newsletter, followed by monthly meetings, professional development days, the Web site, and the online job bank. Competitions were valued by barely half of this group, slightly more than the number who valued volunteering and socializing. The telephone job bank was the least valued service.

More survey results will be available soon.

SIG meetings

By Mara Glebovs, Senior member

The following two Consulting/Freelancing/Contracting SIG meetings have been arranged for the remainder of the 97-98 year:

Contracts for Freelancers/Contractors: Tuesday, April 28, from 6:30-9:00 p.m. Ronauld Walton of Walton Advocates will talk about the importance of contracts to consultants, freelancers, and contractors. We plan to review an actual contract and a letter of agreement to highlight their strengths and weaknesses. We'll also discuss what you can and cannot change in contracts.

Accounting for Small Business:

Tuesday, June 23 from 6:00-9:00. Bill A. Innes C.G.A. of Innes, Abrams Chartered Accountants will discuss the accounting requirements of a small business. Come and find out: how to set up your accounting system, what expenses you can and cannot claim, the pros and cons of incorporation, and the financial implications of working as an employee vs. a contractor.

Both meetings will take place in Meeting Room 2 of the North York Central Public Library, 5110 Yonge Street. Please note that Meeting Room 2 is on the second floor of the library, not in Memorial Hall where the monthly meetings are held.

New media, continued from page 1

education, and entertainment. Ever evolving career opportunities now exist in online documentation, multimedia, and online journalism.

Various new forms of online writing can be combined with web management and design for a new millenium career. The graduate will be a new media writing generalist able to write for CD-ROM, the Internet, and other forms of networked communications.

A total of six courses are required for this certificate. It's expected that most students would be able to complete the certificate within two years.

Completion Requirements:

Core Courses:

CG-111: Writing for Multimedia
CG-097: Intro to Technical Writing
CG-184: On-Line Writing

Select three courses from the list:

CG-105: Copywriting Basics
CG-151: Screenwriting
CG-117: Project Management for Interactive Media
CG-137: Video Reporting Level One
CG-153: Writing for Animation
CG-173: Planning and Producing Multimedia
CG-185: On-Line Journalism
CG-186: Non-Linear Fiction

For more information about this new part-time certificate or courses, please call, or send an email to, Nate Horowitz, Co-ordinator, New Media Education, Centennial College, the Bell Centre for Creative Communications in Toronto.

Tel: 416-289-5103
Email: nateh@bccc.com