

4 Lakes

Technicalities

March 2003

Newsletter of the Four Lakes Chapter of the Society for Technical Communication

March Meeting – Instructional Design

How to Produce Training Materials that Keep Users Interested, Focused, and Motivated

By Deb McGill, Programs Chair

Do you struggle to write engaging training courses, documents, tutorials, or on-line help? This month's Four Lakes STC dinner meeting should pique your interest. We've invited instructional designer Penny Ralston-Berg from the UW-Extension Learning Innovations Center to share the latest research on adult learning styles and present models for developing effective coursework for an adult audience.

The March meeting of the Four Lakes STC will be held on **Wednesday, March 12, 2003** from **6:00 to 8:00 p.m.** at the **MG&E Innovations Center** in the **UW Research Park** on Rosa Road (driving directions are on page 9). A catered evening meal will be provided. Guests are welcome.

The cost for the evening, including dinner, is \$10.00 for members and guests, and \$5.00 for students. The presentation will begin at 6:50 p.m.

Note:

Please RSVP by Friday, March 8 by e-mailing Deb McGill at: deb.mcgill@thermo.com.

Whether you're a writer, illustrator, trainer, project manager, web designer, or usability specialist, look to the STC as a forum for learning what's happening in Madison's technical world, and use the monthly meeting to get together with your peers.

March Meeting continued on page 3

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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.

About STC

The Society for Technical Communication (STC) is the largest professional association serving the technical communication profession. More than 22,000 members belong to 144 chapters worldwide. The Four Lakes Chapter serves the South-central Wisconsin area. For more information about the Four Lakes Chapter, contact an officer or visit our web site at: <http://www.stc.ims.net>.

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Sneak Preview: April 2003 Meeting Sales Tools for the Savvy Tech Writer Candidate

By Deb McGill, Programs Chair

Dust off your resume and discover how to take it to the next level at the Four Lakes STC April meeting. We've invited Jane Roach, senior specialist in information design from Compuware Corporation, to talk to us about what makes a good technical writer candidate. Jane provides project management and contract services for Compuware and screens the company's prospective employees for appropriate skills and technical competency.

In addition, current Four Lakes STC President Amy Janczy will give us the scoop on why everybody's talking about portfolios, and STC member Barb Heidecke will demonstrate her own portfolio and tell us how she went about creating it.

This will be a catered lunch meeting at Thermo Nicolet. See the April newsletter for details.



STC Celebrates its Golden Anniversary!

In 1953, two organizations concerned with improving the practice of technical communication were founded on the East Coast: the Society of Technical Writers, and the Association of Technical Writers and Editors. These organizations merged in 1957 to form the Society of Technical Writers and Editors.

In 1960, STWE merged with the Technical Publishing Society, which had been founded in 1954 on the West Coast. The merger produced the Society of Technical Writers and Publishers.

In 1971, the organization's name was changed to the Society for Technical Communication. Today, STC is the largest professional society in the world dedicated to the advancement of the theory and practice of technical communication.

Golden Anniversary continued on page 4.

March Meeting, Continued from page 1

Penny Ralston-Berg plans to cover the following topics at the March meeting:

- How adults learn
- Adult learning styles
- Design strategies to accommodate specific learning styles in printed and on-line coursework
- Examples of design improvements to accommodate specific learning styles

About the Speaker

Penny Ralston-Berg received a B.A. with a double major in television broadcasting and studio art, and an M.S. in Instructional Technology and Telecommunications from Western Illinois University. She remained there after graduation, working in many areas of instructional technology, including television graphics, instructional video, and live satellite teleconferencing, and producing coursework for CD-ROM and the web.

Ralston-Berg joined the University of Wisconsin Extension Learning Innovations Center in 1999. As a lead instructional designer, she promotes best practices in instructional design within the organization as well as with faculty from UW-Extension Learning Innovations' partner institutions. She also designs models for developing effective coursework within a realistic timeframe.

Ralston-Berg has been designing instructional materials and on-line coursework for five years. She provides technology training and consulting for K-12, community college, higher education, and business groups on a variety of technology-related topics. Her primary focus is on meeting the needs of on-line learners with "just-in-time" training.

Please join us!

About the March Meeting

The March meeting will be a special dinner presentation on Wednesday, March 12, 2003 from 6:00 to 8:00 p.m. at the MG&E Innovations Center. For directions, see page 9.

Cool Word of the Month: Williwaw

williwaw \WIH-lih-waw\ (noun)

*1 a: a sudden violent gust of cold land air common along mountainous coasts of high latitudes b: a sudden violent wind
2 : a violent commotion

Example sentence:

The williwaw screamed down the mountains like an avalanche of air and slammed into the fishing vessel with enough force to nearly capsize her.

Did you know?

"Beware any place where they have a name for the wind." When she gave that advice in *The Anchorage Daily News* in July 1998, Dr. Jane Kelly was referring to the dangerous winds known as "williwaws" that build up on the windward side of coastal mountains in the Aleutian Islands, then suddenly surge over the top in one great gust. To unsuspecting sailors or pilots, such a wind seems to come out of nowhere— just like the wind's name did some 150 years ago. All anyone knows about the origin of "williwaw" is that it was first used by sailors in the 1840s to name fierce winds in the Strait of Magellan at the southern tip of South America.

Each month, you'll find a "cool" word the newsletter editors have stumbled upon, along with the word's definition and information about its origins. This month's cool word and information is taken directly from Merriam-Webster's "Word of the Day" at <http://www.Merriam-Webster.com>.

*Indicates the sense illustrated in the example sentence.

Volunteers Sought for 2003-4 Council

by Amy Janczy, President

Thanks to the dedication and talents of the current leadership council, the Four Lakes chapter can point to some notable successes this year:

- √ Consistently well-attended monthly meetings, with excellent audience participation and positive feedback
- √ Hosting of nationally-known technical author John Hedtke (in cooperation with Milwaukee chapter) as February speaker
- √ Attractive, well-maintained, growing Web site and active employment listserv
- √ Resolution of printing and mailing problems with the newsletter
- √ Proactive membership recruitment activities
- √ Recruitment of new members to all vacant council positions

Building on this work will be the task of next year's council, to be led by Compuware consultant Jaya Kumar.

As of this writing, new volunteers will be needed in the following leadership roles:

- **Newsletter.** Two volunteers are sought for editing and producing the monthly newsletter (Sept.-May). Good humor and "hounding" skills required!
- **Programs.** Two volunteers are preferred for the responsibility of planning and organizing monthly chapter meetings with the assistance of the chapter president. A new venue (could be your workplace) will be sought for the meetings, typically held during the noon hour on the second Wednesday of the month.
- **Vice President.** This individual assists the president and other council members as needed in preparation for the following year's automatic elevation to chapter president. Responsible for council nominations.

Volunteers may be needed in other positions if additional vacancies arise. Some council members may also be willing to switch to new roles or share responsibilities.

If you are interested in volunteering for next year's council, please contact Jaya Kumar at: jayrkay@hotmail.com for more information.

STC's Golden Anniversary, Continued from Page 2

STC has developed a special anniversary website at: <http://www.stc.org/STC@50/index.htm>.

The site features STC's history and a timeline of significant events in communications. You can also submit anecdotes and memories, and read items submitted by others.

Below are some highlights from STC's timeline:

- 1949 Joseph D. Chapline writes a user's manual for the BINAC computer and becomes the first writer of computer documentation.
- 1964 Marshall McLuhan publishes *Understanding Media*, proclaiming that electronic communication media will soon turn the world in to a "global village."
- 1975 The U.S. Government requires all product warranties to be stated clearly and unambiguously.
- 1981 Spencer Sylver of 3M Corp. invents Post-it Notes.
- 1990 Increasing incidence of carpal tunnel syndrome and other repetitive stress injuries among workers such as technical writers spurs the development of ergonomic keyboards.

Be sure to visit the web site for more timeline highlights, amusing anecdotes, and other information about STC's 50th Anniversary celebration.

The 50 year logo and timeline highlights are taken directly from STC's anniversary site at <http://www.stc.org/STC@50/index.htm>.

From the February Meeting: Rain, Rain, Come My Way...

by Andrea Schmick, Secretary

“It’s not your imagination. It’s the worst time in 20 years for technical writers.”

This is a dire pronouncement, indeed, but not an untrue one. The dismal employment climate—economic recession, corporate layoffs, and global instability—has many technical communicators worrying about the future of their own jobs. Those of us with full-time jobs wonder if the axe will fall on us; those of us who work as contractors wonder if we will survive the drought.

Fortunately, John Hedtke, an award-winning author, business consultant, and speaker who also serves as president of the Hoosier STC chapter, showed us a few new rain dances at the February Four Lakes chapter meeting. In his presentation, “Seeding the Clouds: How to Make it Rain on You Even During a Dry Spell,” Hedtke shared 21 ways to improve the chances of finding work in these tough times. His ideas, peppered with some of the anecdotes and memorable one-liners from his in-person presentation, follow:

1. Update your resume.

Most technical communicators have rotten resumes. Yours should tell a prospective employer that you are a hot commodity, dynamic, and motivated. Whatever you do, make sure it contains no typographical errors, which are the job seeker’s equivalent of having spinach in one’s teeth. Leaving the “h” out of “technical” or referring to your crackerjack “proofreading” skills is a sure-fire way to become an anecdote at a speaking engagement years from now.

2. Create a portfolio.

Only 5 percent of technical communicators have a portfolio. Coming to an interview with a portfolio may make the difference in you getting the job.

3. Build a web site.

Develop a professional marketing web site, with information on your skills, background, and current project. Don’t put your resume online, as you want to retain some control over who gets a copy of it.

4. Add some new skills.

Now is the time to absorb some new information to make you more competitive. Pick up that A+ certification, beef up your substantive editing skills, learn C++ or another technology.

5. Change your mode.

If you’re a fulltime employee, start looking for freelance work. If you’re a contractor, maybe it’s time to go back to the corporate world for a while. The key is to look for work in places where you haven’t been looking recently.

6. Change your venue.

Think about how your skills could transfer into other industries or disciplines. Perhaps you could move into curriculum development, training, or web design. Keep adding the skill sets needed to move into other types of employment.

7. Expand your geographic area.

You don’t need to necessarily move, but do consider how much further you’d be willing to go for a job. Could you stand a longer commute if you had a telecommuting option one day a week?

8. Sign up with a lot of agencies.

Get established with at least three or four employment agencies. Stay in touch with recruiters at least once a week. Do whatever is necessary to keep your name at the top of their list.

9. Evaluate what you’ve done already.

Take a critical look at your resume. Could it be pointing you in a direction you haven’t considered before? Also consider hiring an editor to review it and make suggestions for improvements.

February meeting continued on page 6

10. Write magazine articles.

Magazine articles can pay well, and they offer wonderful exposure. The book *The Complete Idiot's Guide to Publishing Magazine Articles* can help get you started down this path.

11. Network as much as possible.

Find opportunities to interact as much as possible. Give everyone your business card. Join or form a local "leads" group with people in other types of businesses. Remember, life is so much easier when you have no shame.

12. Go to every STC event you can.

The contacts you make through STC are invaluable. Don't forget to bring a copy of your resume to each and every meeting you attend.

13. Go to lots of non-STC events, too.

There are lots of other professional organizations whose members are not technical writers. Get involved with them: fewer technical writers means less competition.

14. Volunteer.

Contribute to your favorite nonprofit organization's newsletter, contact the chamber of commerce for opportunities, or give presentations at high school and college classes. Investing your time in worthwhile causes will lift your spirits and get your name out there.

15. Speak to groups.

Forty-six percent of people would rather have a root canal than do public speaking. Why? Humans are herd animals. When we're alone, especially in front of a group, we feel as if we're going to be preyed upon for food. However, it's relatively rare for a speaker to be killed and eaten by his audience, so put your biologically programmed fears aside and get up there!

16. Participate in your alumni association.

Many colleges and universities have job services for alumni, including local networking groups. Use them!

17. Consider lowering your standards.

Rethink who you're willing to work for and for how much. It's a buyer's market right now, and you may need to work for a lower rate, work for a company you don't care for, or take on

uninteresting projects. That's OK. Don't put a lot of energy into being proud, perfect, or right: what we do is work, not art.

18. Write a book.

Writing books is hard work, but it impresses people. Often, the credence you're given as a book author outweighs the energy you actually put into the project. Stick with nonfiction books; only write fiction if you feel you must.

19. Write 3rd-party books for a company.

Propose writing a book as a marketing product for a company. See Hedtke's article, "Publishing a Third-Party Book," in the July 1997 issue of *InterCOM* for more information on how to do this.

20. Don't let your employment situation affect your lifestyle.

Whatever you do, keep going with your life. Exercise more—it's good for your physical health and it staves off depression. Taking time for yourself and your personal relationships will help you withstand the emotional rigors of your employment situation.

21. Be ready when the floodgates open.

If you're a consultant, there are two states of being: too idle and too busy. Get used to it. Say "yes" to everything and be ready to scurry if you need to.

Hedtke closed the presentation with the following three points:

- **Do more.** Whatever you've been doing to be successful, do more of it.
- **Do it differently.** Try something, anything, new. What have you got to lose?
- **Have fun.** Finding work in the best of times is tough. It's natural to feel self-doubt, frustration, even anger. Keep improving your skills, but more important, relish the people you meet and the experiences you have. In the words of Bugs Bunny, "Never take life too seriously—it's gonna kill you in the end."

For more information about John Hedtke, including a complete list of his books, articles, projects, and awards, visit his web site at <http://www.hedtke.com>, or contact him by email at: john@hedtke.com.

A Letter to Members: Starting a Special Interest Group

By Andrea Schmick and Madeline Fisher

Dear Fellow STCers:

Do you struggle with the following challenges at work?

- Striking a balance between your role as a project *manager* and your duties as a project *doer*
- Advocating for your ideas in the absence of management support
- Educating your colleagues about your role as a communicator and its value to your organization
- Defining the scope of your job, setting appropriate limits
- Making your job more of what you want it to be
- Developing professionally without access to direct guidance or mentorship
- Staying motivated while working mostly alone

We do.

That's why we'd like to start a special interest group (a.k.a. a support group) within the Four Lakes STC chapter for people who want to grow in their roles as communicators, and who find themselves – for whatever reason – facing this challenge mostly on their own.

We envision meeting regularly to discuss how the issues above affect our work lives and to share our strategies and solutions for facing them more effectively and optimistically. We welcome discussions of the daily challenges people face in the areas of professional development and job satisfaction, but would prefer not to delve into the frequent technical hurdles we all encounter (e.g. how do I do X in PhotoShop?). We also see this group as a true peer-to-peer support network, rather than as a forum for pursuing new job opportunities.

If this sounds interesting to you, contact Andrea Schmick at: andrea@asiscommunications.com or Madeline Fisher at: mmfisher@warf.org. We'll then organize an initial get-together to talk about topics for discussion, format for the group, time interval between meetings, etc.

We look forward to hearing from you!

Andrea and Madeline

Upcoming Seminars and Conferences

“Making the Complex Clear and Pretty”
Presented by Phylise Banner
March 12, 2003 – Telephone Seminar

“Evaluating an Index”
Presented by Seth Maislin
March 19, 2003 – Telephone Seminar

“Developing a Strategy for Minimalism”
Presented by Dr. Joann Hackos
March 25-26, 2003 – St. Paul, MN

“Content Management Strategies”
Presented by Dr. Joann Hackos
April 28-29, 2003 – Washington, DC

STC's 50th Annual International Conference
May 18-21, 2003 – Dallas, TX

For more information about the above and other conferences and seminars, links to conference websites, and sign-up information, visit the Four Lakes STC website at: <http://stc.ims.net> and select the Conferences link.

-or-

Visit the international STC site at:
<http://www.stc.org/seminars.asp>

New Pages on Four Lakes Web Site

by Bill Fetzner, Webmaster

Check the Four Lakes website for two new pages affecting your involvement with STC: one provides information about the upcoming STC elections, and will be used for internal chapter elections as well; the other provides selected information about the Society's many Special Interest Groups.

Campaigning Page

This Spring the Society will be holding its annual election, and several positions at the national and regional levels will be filled. You'll be learning about the election and your opportunity to vote soon. Your chapter wants to give you an additional opportunity to find out about the candidates so you can make your best decisions. So far, we have heard directly from two of the candidates for Second Vice President of the society. This position is very important because the person holding the office will subsequently become the First Vice President and then eventually assume the presidency STC. We may be hearing from other candidates as the election draws near.

Take charge of your decision by going to the Four Lakes website to learn, in the words of the candidates, why they deserve your vote. See if their experience is adequate to the job in your opinion and if their vision matches yours for the Society. If you're left with any questions, contact them directly using the e-mail links on that page. I'm sure they'll be happy to tell you personally why they want to serve the Society at this high level, and you'll be happy that you've done all you can to make your vote count.

According to the Society election rules, chapters are allowed to do publish election information as long as they don't promote one candidate over another. You may find that we don't provide information about all candidates for a position. When that happens, please understand that the reason is that we're providing this service passively. The chapter does not solicit information from candidates to the Society's offices. We will

only publish such information in accordance with Society rules. Our publication of campaign information is not an endorsement by either the chapter or by any of its officers. We're providing a non-discriminatory service to our members.

Special Interest Group (SIG) Page

The second new page is for information about STC Special Interest Groups (SIGs), but not necessarily for all of them. Currently, the Society has more than twenty SIG's conceived and operated by members around their special interests, needs or concerns. Members can join one or more SIGs when they join the Society or renew their memberships. Cost is an annual fee of \$5 for each SIG selected.

We received information recently from the Special Needs SIG, and that prompted us to establish this additional web page. This relatively new SIG works to acquaint STC members with the special communications needs of individuals with disabilities and provides information about products and practices that help resolve those needs. Members of that SIG want you to know what they do and to consider joining their group if your work or interests match theirs. The information they sent is posted.

To get to the new pages, visit the Four Lakes website at www.stc.org. You'll find links to most of the pages on our website at the left of each page. Feedback to the webmaster is welcomed, as always.

Cool Site of the Month

<http://www.uwasa.fi/comm/termino/collect/>

This site contains a links to general language dictionaries (WORD-ONLINE) and glossaries in different field (TER-ONLINE). The site is maintained by Anita Nuopponen, Department of Communication Studies, University of Vaasa, Finland.

Opinions in the Cool Site of the Month are expressed solely by the editors.

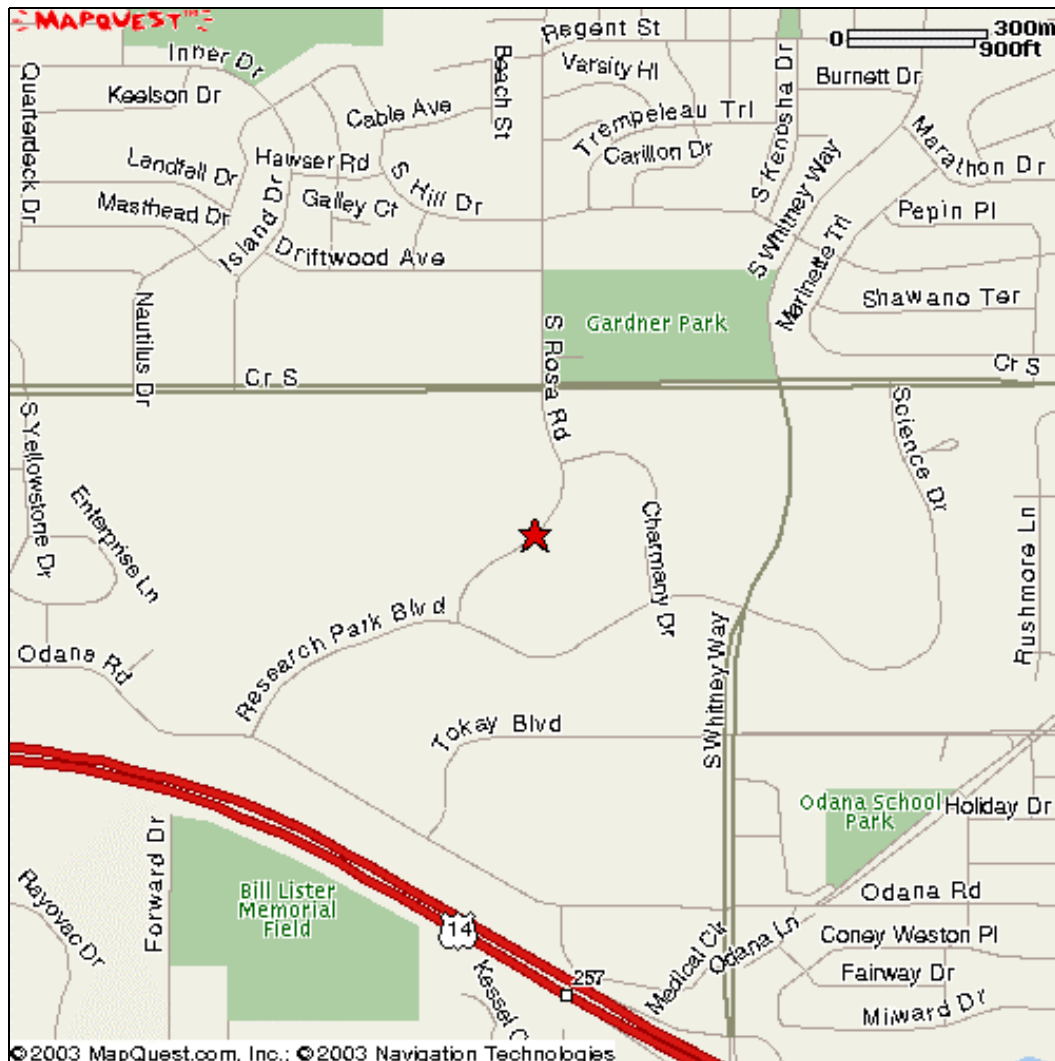
Directions to the MG&E Innovation Center

From the Beltline:

Exit the Beltline at Whitney Way and head north (towards Madison). Continue on Whitney Way past Odana Road and Tokay Blvd and then turn left at the next light onto Research Park Blvd. Go about ½ mile and then turn right onto Rosa Road. Turn right at the first drive to the parking lot for the MG&E Innovation Center. The center consists of two large buildings connected by an enclosed breezeway. Enter through the glass doors into the breezeway and look for the STC signs to the meeting room.

From University Ave.:

Take University Ave. to Whitney Way (between Madison and Middleton). Head south on Whitney Way. Continue on Whitney Way past Mineral Point Road, and then turn right at the light onto Research Park Blvd. Go about ½ mile and then turn right onto Rosa Road. Turn right at the first drive to the parking lot for the MG&E Innovation Center. The center consists of two large buildings connected by an enclosed breezeway. Enter through the glass doors into the breezeway and look for the STC signs to the meeting room.





SOCIETY FOR TECHNICAL COMMUNICATION

Four Lakes Chapter
3705 Toban Drive
Madison, WI 53704

March Meeting at MG&E Innovation Center

Please note different meeting location and time.

- Speaker:** Penny Ralston-Berg
- Topic:** Instructional Design
How to Produce Training Materials that Keep Users Interested, Focused, and Motivated
- Date:** Wednesday, March 12, 2003
- Time:** 6:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m.
- Place:** MG&E Innovation Center
(Directions on page 9)
- Cost:** \$10.00 (\$5.00 for students)

Technicalities is published monthly from September through May, and is the official newsletter of the Four Lakes Chapter of the Society for Technical Communication (STC). STC is a nonprofit membership organization serving individuals in the field of technical communications. Opinions expressed within are those of the authors and editors and not necessarily those of either STC or the Four Lakes Chapter. Neither the STC nor the Four Lakes Chapter endorses products or services, but may, as part of our educational activities, allow them to be cited in articles and notices. We welcome submissions from members or outside professions. Please contact the Newsletter Editors at stc4lakes@hotmail.com. Article submissions are due by the 15th of each month. For the online version of this newsletter, please visit the Four Lakes Chapter site at: <http://www.stc.ims.net>.