



Boston Broadside

The Boston Chapter Newsletter

October 2006

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From the Chapter President

by Mike Ball
STC-Boston Chapter President



Our current STC year—through next June—we have a few changes in the works. There are new meeting locations and chances for you to get more out of your membership.

The change that affects most of us is that our long-time meeting location in Lexington (the Sheraton) is closing for extended rebuilding. This means:

"Chapter President (continued on page 2)"

Gearing Up for a Great Year!

by Cindy Currie
STC Fellow and Region 1 Director



Have some fun, grow your skills, and expand your network

Welcome to a brand new STC year! Many communities have their planning for this year well underway and are in need of fresh faces to bring some of these plans to fruition. If you have received a call for volunteers from your community leaders, please seriously consider moving into an active role in your community.

Many communities are looking for program managers, competition managers, newsletter editors and / or webmasters, and to fill other positions. Role sharing might be possible if you're interested in a role, but you may have some constraints that make it unrealistic for you to assume 100% responsibility for it. Ask your community leaders how you can participate in a way that meets both your needs and those of the community.

Sure, I know, volunteering means you need to make a (sometimes big) commitment, but with the benefits available to you by doing so — new skills, new contacts, new friends, great sense of accomplishment, and valuable experience to add to your résumé or CV — how can you afford not to? Truthfully, very often the more you put into something, the more you get out of it. So, now is the time to go for it and send that "I want to volunteer!" email to your chapter leaders!

New monthly email message from STC President

Have you seen News and Notes from the STC President, the new email publication from STC President Paula Berger? To keep you current on STC happenings, Paula began sending a monthly email communiqué to all STC members over the summer. These messages go out at the end of each month (shortly after the monthly Board of Directors teleconferences — also new this STC year!) to ensure that you are always in the know. There's a lot happening in STC these days!

To review recent messages, visit <http://www.stc.org/stcmembers/presNewsAug06.asp>. (Note: The August issue is current as of this writing, but you should be able to access all recent issues — July, August, and beyond — from this page.) And, be sure to watch your inbox for Paula's next message.

Two not-to-be-missed conference / educational opportunities this fall

Region 2 will host Making Cents of Making Sense: Technical Communication and Business (www.stcuk.org/R2conf) in London, England, 13-14 October 2006. This conference is aimed at companies in need of technical communication and the people who produce it. The program includes top-notch speakers who can show the business value of quality technical communication.

Region 5 will host 50 Facets of Technical Communication (www.region5conf.com/) in Addison, Texas, 02-04 November 2006. This conference is the perfect place to polish every facet of your technical communication portfolio! In addition, the Lone Star chapter will be celebrating its 50th anniversary at this conference.

"Implementing Web Site...(continued on page 2)"

"...Chapter President"

- Monthly program meetings will be at a new venue in Burlington.
- Our Council meetings will be in the same new venue.
- SIGs may meet in various locations but will start in a generous member's building this fall.
- The Program fees will go up slightly, \$5 a meeting for members and others.

Our location and prices have been stable for a long time. In the years we were at the Lexington Sheraton, we got very used to, even spoiled by, having all meetings in one place. We also stored our projector and other equipment there. They were able to accommodate even our smallest SIGs.

New Digs

After October, the Program meetings will be at the Hilton Garden Inn in Burlington. It is around the corner from Tweeter off exit 32B of Rte. 128 at 5 Wheeler Road. When you register for meetings, you can find directions and a map on the STC-Boston website.

The Hilton Garden Inn is similar to and a little nicer than the Lexington one. After a frantic search in the summer by several of us, we found the Hilton to be the most accommodating in both price and meeting dates.

As with everyplace else we checked, the Hilton was too pricey for SIGs. We had a great deal at the Lexington Sheraton before and cannot replicate it. As with Programs, the SIG locations for the rest of the year will be announced at meetings and will appear on the STC-Boston Website.

Meanwhile, OpenWave in Burlington under the good graces of Member (and Online Competitions Co-Chair) Steve Straight will very generously host several SIG meetings.

Price Bump

We were able to move the Programs to a new location with only a modest \$5 increase in cost. The new price for the monthly meeting is \$25 for members and \$30 for non-members. The Council approved this at the September meeting.

The price does not quite cover member costs. We expect to continue to augment

"Chapter President (continued on page 3)"

Implementing Web Site ...

It's time to honor deserving members

This is the time of year to think about who you would like to nominate for the honorary rank of STC Associate Fellow and get this process underway. Any member or community in STC can submit a nomination packet. For more information, visit www.stc.org/recog/honors01.asp.

Completed nomination forms must be email to the STC Office (peg@stc.org) no later than 21 October 2006. For questions or concerns, contact Associate Fellow Committee Chair, Mark Hanigan, at onwritetrk@aol.com.

Making life easy!

Mark your calendars for the second annual World Usability Day (WUD), 14 November 2006. World Usability Day 2006 promotes the value of usability engineering and user-centered design and the belief that every user has the responsibility to ask for things that work better. The Usability Professionals' Association (UPA) (www.usabilityprofessionals.org) is doing that by encouraging, organizing, and sponsoring 36 hours of activities at the local level around the globe, all occurring on this day. The UPA, UPA chapters, and allied organizations (of which STC is one!) will all hold events revolving around the common theme, "Making life easy!" The focus this year is on accessibility and inclusion.

Organizing STC's participation in this event are Rahel Bailie and Jerome Ryckborst. As we get closer to the day, look for more information about how STC is participating and for events in your area. For more information about WUD in general, visit www.worldusabilityday.org.

Seeking new organizational partnerships

Forming partnerships with other professional organizations (both for-profit and non-profit) is a strategic priority this year. STC has recently rejoined INTECOM (International Council for Technical Communication, www.intecom.org) and has entered into a formal agreement with LISA (Localization Industry Standards Association, www.lisa.org) that provides a framework for the exchange of membership privileges and project collaboration. If any of you have thoughts about organizations that STC should have as partners, please email Mark Clifford at 2vp@stc.org or Andrea Ames at aames@pobox.com.

Out and About

My chapter visit plans for this year are beginning to take shape and look like this at the moment:

- Connecticut Chapter Strategic Planning (Recharting) Workshop, Nov. (date TBD)
- Tech Valley Chapter, Nov. (date TBD)
- Northern New England Chapter, January (date TBD)
- Eastern Ontario Chapter, March (date TBD)

Please let me know what your program plans and events are for this STC year and if you'd like to me to visit your chapter or attend a special event. I will continue my visits as your interest and my finances and schedule permit.

Greetings from the STC Board Newbies

Let Us Hear From You

By Mark Clifford, Char James-Tanny, Mike Murray, and Jeff Staples, members of the STC Board of Directors

With this year's STC elections, the four of us now have the opportunity to represent you

the fee with corporate sponsorships per meeting. The sponsorships helped a lot last year, and this year, Council Member Linda Fritz is keeping up in sponsors. Leads on other sponsors are always welcome.

If you have any comments or complaints about the locations or fees, direct your comments to any of us on Council. If you have complaints, send them to me at: president@stcboston.org.

Use the Chapter

Keep sending any of us on the Council your other suggestions. We are producing programs and workshops that you have told us are most meaningful professionally, particularly for skill building.

Do read the stcinfo emails that let you know what we are offering. Between these and the networking that is always part of our activities, you can get the most out of your membership, including:

Programs

One evening a month, with very low-cost education tailored to your profession.

Workshops

One day or partial day with in-depth information that would cost much more elsewhere.

SIGs

One evening of narrow and deep work on essential topics.

Competitions

Very inexpensive peer evaluations with specific suggestions, and for judges, a chance to see what others are doing while networking.

Volunteering

You pick the opportunity—skill building, managing, resume building or more networking.

We have specific goals for this STC year. At the least, check the Broadside, stcinfo emails and the Website regularly.

on STC's International Board of Directors. This is an exciting time for STC with a host of initiatives being formulated to keep the Society moving forward and to enhance an open dialog between all members of the Society.

This article provides a brief introduction for each of us, including our duties on the Board and a bit of personal insight. Photos are included so you will recognize us at STC events.

Mark Clifford, STC Second Vice President

Hello one and all.

After ten years on the administrative council of the UK chapter, and last year as an assistant to the STC President (Suzanna Laurent) for Global Affairs, I have to admit to some trepidation when running for second vice president! Yes, you can change the world, but STC? Well, the next three years will be interesting!

Work Activities

Since completing my engineering publications apprenticeship with British Aircraft Corp. (BAC) in the mid-70s, I have worked as editor, writer, manager, and recruiter, primarily with publications consultancies and service companies. I have lived and worked across Europe, working with Dutch, Belgian, French, and Swedish companies, holding board-level positions with three of them. Somewhere in there, I graduated from the University of Luton's Business Program.



I currently run my own information design and recruitment company, which provides consultancy, resource, and ID solutions for European clients from offices in the UK and France.

STC Duties

As this year's Second Vice President, my responsibility is leading the Marketing area initiatives.

Marketing STC and our members to the world is one of our key strategic goals. STC is poised to put technical communication, both for its practices and its practitioners, firmly back on the business agenda. The new STC strategic plan is designed to market our profession by communicating directly to those that use or buy our services. At the same time, it addresses the individual need for continuing professional growth.

I have committees working on developing interests with a variety of other organizations, gaining society-level sponsors, and publicising our achievements. All of these have a huge impact on getting our message out.

Personal Bits

When I'm not involved at work or with STC, I like to escape by going bird watching, especially in coastal areas and wetlands. It's a very relaxing and fascinating hobby. I'm not "a twitcher," so you won't find me dropping everything and rushing off to find a rare bird!

In quieter moments, I'm an armchair historian. I read military histories and biographies. My passion is the Napoleonic period in Europe, in particular Wellington's campaigns in Portugal and Spain.

I have three grown children and a six year-old granddaughter, who has me wrapped completely round her little finger.

Cheers!

Contact Mark at 2vp@stc.org or mark@cliffordsells.com.

"Chapter President"

You can get a lot out of the membership if you devote an evening a month or even a few hours volunteering.

About the Society for Technical Communication

Mission: *Creating and supporting a forum for communities of practice in the profession of technical communication.*

For more information, visit us online at:

Society for Technical Communication

www.stc.org

Boston Chapter

www.stcboston.org

Volunteering is All About You!

When you choose to volunteer, you:

- use your professional skills
- meet new people
- gain new relationships
- learn about new technologies
- sharpen your skills
- learn about job opportunities
- teach others from your experiences
- help keep STC successful

Please consider working with us! Learn how volunteering can fit into your schedule.

Contact us:

Michael Ball at:

president@stcboston.org, or

Pamela Sarantos at:

2ndvp@stcboston.org; or, visit the STC

Volunteer page at: www.stcboston.org and click on "Getting Involved."

"Greetings from ..."

Char James-Tanny, STC Secretary



Hi. I'm Char James-Tanny, the new Secretary for the STC, and I'm really excited about the things the board has planned for the upcoming year.

At last year's conference, I decided that I would invest two years in making STC a premier organization—one that every technical communicator would want to belong to. With my election, that's been extended a bit, as the Secretary has a two-year term. (This just gives me more time!)

Work Tasks

I'm basically the geek on the board. I want technology to make my life easier, and I plan on bringing it to the board to make their lives easier.

Last year's board did some amazing groundwork for us by creating the Interim Strategic Plan and new organizational chart (both available at www.stc.org). We get to take it to the next step by implementing those pieces.

STC Duties

My job as Secretary is to record the minutes, notes, action items from all meetings, and support all committees. I have big shoes to fill: Lori Fisher did an awesome job during her term, and she also paved the way for some of the changes I want to make.

One of the things that I'm going to implement is a Web-based Communication System (or, as I fondly refer to it, the WCS). WCS will initially be available for board and committee members, but I hope to eventually open it to the membership. (It will probably take us a couple of months to get it installed and set up correctly.)

I'm one of the proponents of certification, at least until we get more information. I think that certification could be a valuable benefit for members, and I'm in favor of anything that brings value.

Personal Bits

Because I run my company out of my home, I tend to keep fairly weird work hours. I'm online as soon as I wake up, and I tend to work nights after my son has gone to bed. I am typically not available most weekdays from 3:30 pm until 8 pm, because my son, Jesse, has a life. ;-)

He is a member of the North Shore Swim Club, and he's been swimming competitively for two years. He also plays soccer and belongs to two teams: one travel and one intramural (that I coach). He's my joy in life, even as our house fills with pets of all kinds, including dogs, a cat, parakeets, a cockatoo, a parrot, and a fish tank. Because my husband works nights (in addition to running the other half of our company), Jesse and I spend a lot of time together, and I wouldn't miss it for the world.

Greetings from ... (continued on page 5)

Greetings from ...

Mike Murray, STC Director

An enthusiastic "Hi" to all of my STC teammates around the world. Several folks asked me to run for Director, and I am extremely glad that I did. My best friends are in STC. I love this organization.

Work Activities



In my 28th year with Lockheed Martin, my current role is as the principal writer in the corporation's Enterprise Information Systems (EIS) organization, the only virtual organization in the company. I specifically support the marketing activities for these products and services. Many years of virtual communications experience add another important qualification to my STC

resume.

My years at Lockheed Martin follow 10-1/2 years in the U.S. Air Force, which also exposed me to international cultures.

STC Duties

I am a strong "people person," and I was pleased when STC President Paula Berger assigned me to the Communities area along with fellow directors Sherry Michaels and Beau Cain. The Communities committee includes the Leadership Community Resource (LCR), Virtual Communities, and Community Recognition.

In addition, Paula asked me to be the Board of Directors representative on a task force that will develop a new community business model. The task force will consist of 10-12 leaders from communities of various sizes and types around the world AND our new Executive Director Susan Burton, an amazing lady!

I do a lot of mentoring, both individuals and groups, and am especially good at examining an organization and zeroing in on what its leaders need to do to strengthen it.

Personal Bits

Outside of work and STC, I love sports announcing. I regularly announce for various organizations, including Dr. Phillips High School (football and basketball) and Rollins College (volleyball and basketball). I am especially proud of my support of Dr. Phillips High School, where I have announced for the entire 20 years of its existence. The school inducted me into its Hall of Fame in 2001. I am also the part-time stadium announcer for the Osceola Outlaws, a professional team in the National Indoor Football League.

Greetings from ... (continued on page 6)

Under New Management



Hello and welcome to the latest edition of the *Boston Broadside* newsletter. The October, 2006 issue is the first under the guidance of the newsletter's new managing editor, Bryan Davis, and I thought I would take a moment to introduce myself.

First, I want to thank the Broadside's previous managing editor, Jon Harvey. He did a great job providing timely content and I hope our readers continue to see that same level of excellence under my watch.

A bit about myself: I am the Senior Editor of the Education Division at Progress Software. As Senior Editor, I am responsible for editing all training we develop in all formats, including traditional instructor-led training, computer-based training and web-based training. I also oversee the production of our courseware and serve as managing editor for our quarterly newsletter sent to over 3,000 world-wide subscribers. I also support our Documentation group by editing their books, as well.

Also, I am a member of the STC-Boston Chapter's Council and serve on the Online Communication Competition's Committee.

While we have a great volunteer staff here at the Broadside, it is important to remember that the newsletter is what **you** make of it. The Broadside is by and about you, our readers, and the STC. If you have an idea for an article (or better yet, have written an article), please send me an email at boston.broadside@gmail.com.

I look forward to hearing from you.

- Bryan Davis

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UPCOMING COURSES:

Designing for the Global Community
November 9 & 10

Information Architecture in Web Design
December 7 & 8

Human Factors in Information Design
December 13 & 14

REGISTER TODAY!


www.bentley.edu

Greetings from ...

For several years in a row, I have received the national President's Volunteer Service Award, which goes to individuals who demonstrate a sustained commitment to volunteer service each year. My service in Central Florida has involved restructuring and strengthening youth organizations such as Pop Warner Football, Little League Baseball, and Cub Scouts.

I have been married for 38 wonderful years to my best friend Kay. We live in Orlando with our delightful dog, Butterscotch, a Schnauzer-Poodle mix. She cuddles, hugs, kisses, loves to play and have her belly rubbed, and loves to swim in our pool. Wait, maybe that's Kay I just described. No, it's definitely Butterscotch. We have two adult sons and five wonderful grandchildren.

I love people and would love to hear from you at dirmm@stc.org.

Jeff Staples, STC Director

Hello, Members. After much deliberation (and extreme indecisiveness), I submitted my "packet" for nomination for Director. Needless, to say I was surprised to win the election, and wondered if it was the right decision/result. However, once I began reading/hearing all the activity with the STC leadership, I became excited and was happy to learn that everything wasn't just "status quo." Everything is basically wide open, and it's an opportunity for the members and the STC leadership/management to continue and enhance this organization as the premier leader in technical communication.



Work Activities

In my career life, I am generally a "commodity" writer, often focusing on formatting and making the document "look pretty." But that's okay, because this type of writer is still in demand. And in whatever we do, being professional and good at our work brings recognition to our profession. And, in with the basic writing tasks do come some exciting tasks, such as working on a safety survey and then formulating the mechanics to get it live on the web.

STC Duties

I am one of the first two directors to be elected from the entire STC membership. This kind of created a gray area in what my responsibilities as Director would be. However, STC President Paula Berger took care of that.

The new STC org structure assigns each Director to a strategic area. I consider myself fortunate to have landed in the Communications area along with Director Cindy Currie.

In December '05, I began what has become a regular yoga practice. I originally began practicing for back problems and overall mental health, and it has helped in those areas. However, I have come to learn that yoga helps basically all parts of the body. For example, when you perform a twist, toxins are squeezed out of your internal organs (similar to squeezing water out of a sponge). Then, when you release out of the twist, the organs are ready to absorb fresh blood.

Greetings from ... (continued on page 7)

Putting the "Job" in "Job Search"

September STC-Boston Program

by Bill Gruener

Karen Giventer, our September speaker, was "dynamic" and "inspiring" (according to reviewers) as she presented the season opener of the 2006-2007 STC-Boston year. Karen is a Senior Member of STC and a career contractor who's not afraid of cold-calling prospective employers about jobs. In a presentation that received across-the-board enthusiastic reviews, she laid out her step-by-step strategy for seeking and winning job offers.

"The job search can be an enjoyable experience," says Karen. She points out that we, as job searchers, are part of the "fabric of life—participating in the economy and embracing its challenges."

Karen encourages job searchers to emphasize a positive end result and not get enmeshed in examining the process of job searching. "Put the 'job' in the job search," says Karen. For example, if a staffing agency tells you that you did not get a particular job, immediately ask the recruiter "what other jobs are you working on?" In other words, stay focused on the job search without looking back.

Karen suggests that job searchers combat their feelings of self-doubt by reminding themselves that job searching is a respectable activity. "We are simply seeking to do an honest day's work for an honest day's pay. That's something to be proud of," says Karen. "As technical communicators, we help companies reduce support costs, attract customers, and retain customers. We offer important benefits to potential employers and clients."

Four activities of job searching

Karen covered four activities of job searching which she calls "buckets of time." She says we should make withdrawals from each bucket every day or at least every week. These four buckets of time are:

- Active job search: cold calling managers at companies that interest you
- Reactive job search: responding to announced jobs and posting your resume on job boards
- Staffing agency job search: working with companies that connect candidates with hiring companies
- Networking: calling contacts and attending professional meetings where the topic is about business or technology

Active job search

Karen presented a sample cold-call by reading through a script she wrote. Karen played the part of a job candidate and Mike Ball, president of STC-Boston, played the role of a manager of a startup company. The audience learned step-by-step how to gear up for a cold-call and what to say. "Try it; it works," says Karen, and also reminded us of a tried-and-true sales maxim, "Every no brings me closer to a yes."

September Program ... (continued on page 7)

This area holds great potential in all areas of STC communication, but especially in the areas of Member Communication and the STC website and publications.

Personal Bits

In December '05, I began what has become a regular yoga practice. I originally began practicing for back problems and overall mental health, and it has helped in those areas. However, I have come to learn that yoga helps basically all parts of the body. For example, when you perform a twist, toxins are squeezed out of your internal organs (similar to squeezing water out of a sponge). Then, when you release out of the twist, the organs are ready to absorb fresh blood.

In addition, I enjoy independent and foreign films and books out of the normal fare, such as those by Ayn Rand and Philip Roth.

Drop me a line at dirjs@stc.org.

What Is Flare?

By Ed Marshall

Flare is a new help authoring tool, produced by many of the former eHelp people. Its basis is XML for all its output formats. It was just recently released and is available for purchase.

You should keep in mind that although many of the people involved in creating Flare worked on RoboHelp, this is not RoboHelp X6! The RoboHelp products are owned by Adobe at this point. The people who started Madcap Software did not have access to the old RoboHelp code on which to base their new product. Flare is a brand-new product, using current technologies, such as XML and .NET Framework. At last year's Pubsnet Conference, I heard Mike Hamilton, long-time RoboHelp Product Manager, talk about the genesis of Flare and how it differs from RoboHelp.

Many features in RoboHelp never worked well such as generating printed documentation. Consider the RoboHelp code base is almost 15 years old. Very likely, some of that code was written for or by technologies that are also old. Mike used the analogy of dragging 15 years of back luggage with you in describing the current state of the underlying code of RoboHelp.

Importing Documents / Help Projects into Flare and Required Components

You can import either RoboHTML projects or Microsoft Word 2003 documents into Flare. When importing a project, you select one of those two options and a wizard guides you through the import process.

The word is that "future versions of Flare will support importing some version of FrameMaker files". My guess is that they will support importing .MIF files, which are ASCII files you can generate from FrameMaker, that contain all the formatting instructions in text format.

Reactive job search

Reactive job searching is where we are all most comfortable. It's certainly easier to respond to an ad on Monster than cold-call a manager you've never met. Karen cautioned us that although the job boards are a necessary part of the job search, they can be extremely seductive, keeping you online for the better part of the day. Karen reminded us that job boards exist for the purpose of making job hunting more efficient and less time consuming. "I like to be on and off the job boards by 8:30 in the morning," says Karen.

Staffing agencies

Staffing agencies can be a helpful part of a job search for both contractors and applicants seeking permanent employment. When working with staffing agencies, "help them help you," says Karen. For example, if you have the perfect experience listed on the second page of your resume, point that out to the recruiter. It is also very important to keep a log of your communication with the staffing agency. In a flurry of activity, it's easy to forget what you said or who said what to whom.

Networking

Networking consists of calling contacts, letting people know that you are job searching, and attending professional meetings such as programs offered by STC-Boston. "Don't confuse professional meetings with support groups," cautions Karen. Support groups, which can be very helpful, focus on job search activities such as resume writing. However, it is more important to attend professional meetings that focus on technology and business. "Be sure to follow up with the people you meet at the program," advises Karen. Networking only works if you remain connected with your new contacts.

When you're stuck

"Sometimes, we just feel stuck and we can't think of anything else to do," laughs Karen. She gave the audience a one-question quiz and the question was, "What do you do when you absolutely feel you've done everything?" The answer, according to Karen, is to start again with the Active (cold-calling) job search. "This will generate more contacts and ideas and keep you moving forward," she asserts.

If you really need a break, Karen suggests getting some fresh air or helping someone. For example, you can drive an elderly neighbor to an appointment or write a letter to anyone you know who's serving overseas. Karen reminds us that "mail means a lot to a soldier."

Once you're refreshed, get moving on the job search again. Start with the cold-call and don't worry about any lost job offers, bad phone calls, or awkward interviews. "Move on," says Karen, and "keep me posted about your activities." Karen encouraged the audience to keep in touch with her by emailing her at karenxxxz@hotmail.com.

Flare does not support WinHelp, JavaHelp, or Oracle Help, nor will it.

If you have RoboHelp WinHelp projects and want to work with them in Flare, you will need to convert them to RoboHTML HTML Help projects, and then import those into Flare.

To use Flare as a help authoring tool, you need the following components on your system:

- Microsoft .NET Framework 2.0, the released version (Users with Windows XP have the .NET Framework as part of the operating system. Users with Windows 2000 will have it if they have installed service patches to the operating system.)
- Madcap Flare 1.0
- Microsoft Word 2003 - You can only import Word 2003 documents and Flare only produces Word 2003 files for the printed documentation output. This is due to Flare being XML-based. Word 2003 is the first version of Word to fully and correctly implement XML.

Supported Output Formats for Flare

The supported output types work similar to the way their counterparts did when output from RoboHTML, with the same operating system and browser requirements. To recap:

- HTMLHelp: The output is a single .CHM file. Runs only on Windows and requires Internet Explorer (V4.0 or later, 5.0 or later recommended).
- Printed documentation: The output is a Microsoft Word 2003 file.
- WebHelp: The output is a collection of HTML files. Runs on multiple platforms such as Unix and Linux systems, as well as Windows. Can be viewed on Unix platforms with Netscape or other browsers that run on those platforms.
- .NET Help: The output is a collection of HTML files. Uses a freely distributable Help viewer provided by Madcap Software. Useful for applications that run in the Microsoft .NET environment. Probably the least likely help format for most technical writers.

Users viewing the .NET Help output need Microsoft .NET Framework 2.0 and a free viewer for the .NET Help from Flare. Flare provides a freely distributable viewer that you can ship with .NET Help files (and this is documented in the Flare help).

Working with the UI

Possibly, one of the most jarring features of Flare is its new UI. I liken it to the UI of Microsoft Visual Studio. Others have compared it to Outlook 2003.

Note there are similarities and differences between the old RoboHTML interface and Flare's interface:

- You still have a project navigation pane on the left.
- Your selected topic is still displayed on the right.
- A key difference is the use of tabs in Flare. For example, you can have multiple topics open and each of them is overlaid on the right, with a tab you can select.
- Another difference is that you don't have tabs on the left pane anymore. Instead, you have a view that Madcap calls an "accordion view, of the opened views you can select. In this case, the Project Organizer, Content Explorer, and Help TOC options are listed and selectable. Madcap has split the project entries and the contents entries (the actual topics contained in your project) into two views, which now appear at the bottom of the left pane. Previously, in RoboHTML, both sets of information appeared in the Project tab.

As with RoboHTML, you can generate tables of contents (TOCs) and indexes. How and where you generate them is different in Flare. For TOCs, there is a batch generator but it is buried in the UI and doesn't work very well in V1. The main difference for indexes is that you create the index entries directly in the topic and the index entry is stored in the topic. There is no <project-name>.hhk file in Flare. Other than these differences, they appear to the user very similar to the way they did in RoboHTML.

To help you get started, Madcap provides several online tutorials in the form of Captivate videos that you can view to see how to create, build, and test help files with Flare.

Sample Tests

As a disclaimer, I was a beta tester for Flare and provided several sample projects for them to test as well as testing the software through several Betas. My projects are primarily reference information on Application Programming Interfaces (APIs) or document developer tools, such as Software Developer Kits (SDKs). That is, the format is very boilerplate with minimal graphics other than screenshots of the UI.

Flare ...

I found it very quick to import RoboHTML projects into Flare; I also found it to be very accurate. In my testing of the product, I had minimal to no clean-up on the results of Flare's import process. The resulting output was almost identical to the HTML Help files I got from RoboHTML. A very minor difference I noticed is that bullets in lists were a slightly different shape, but it was a very fine difference. As with RoboHTML, Flare uses the same HTML Help compiler we've been using. Compile times seemed comparable to that of using RoboHTML to compile my projects. The size of the output file was very close to the size produced by RoboHTML.

The importing of Word files works pretty well. And the printed output format from Flare works much better than it did in RoboHTML.

Thoughts on Beta

I've been a long-time user of RoboHelp products and beta tester for several versions. I was very impressed with the level of support provided by Madcap during the Betas. They provided very effective means of communicating issues to and from beta testers to Madcap, and provided an open forum for beta testers to post problems. So, everyone involved could see what experiences the various beta testers were having. I was pleasantly surprised at how well the product functioned, even from beta 1. Keep in mind, this product was only an idea about a year ago! I was also very impressed with the responsiveness of the Madcap personnel to issues reported by beta testers. The Madcap people seemed very knowledgeable, helpful, and timely with their assistance.

Closing Thoughts

Should you migrate to Flare from RoboHTML now or wait? That is a decision affected by many of the same factors you need to answer before deciding on any tool:

- What do you need to produce?
- What is the timeframe for your next deliverable? Do you have time to learn a new tool?
- How well is your current tool meeting your needs?

If you are currently using RoboHTML to produce HTMLHelp, WebHelp, printed documentation, or .NET Help, keep in mind that RoboHTML is not dead. Although support appears to be minimal and further development is unlikely at this point, it still works as well (or poorly, depending on your viewpoint), as it ever did. Some potential future snags for RoboHTML:

- The biggest problem on the horizon is that the registration process for the RoboHelp X3 to X5n releases could be discontinued by Adobe, without notice to registered users. Starting with the Xn releases, you had to register the product when you installed it, either over the Internet or by phone. We have no way of knowing how long Adobe will continue to maintain the servers that process the registrations. This doesn't mean your existing installation will fail. It just means that if you have to reinstall RoboHelp because you get a new machine or motherboard, or for other reasons and Adobe has stopped supporting the registration process, you can only use that new installation for 30 days.
- Microsoft security patches might continue to cause problems for HTML Help. Already, it is problematic to deploy and view HTML Help over a network. The files still work fine on a user's local system.
- Changes to Internet Explorer might break WebHelp.
- HTML Help might not be supported in future versions of Windows.
- If you are producing WinHelp, you might want to consider migrating to another format. Latest reports are that the WinHelp display engine will not be included in Vista, the next version of Windows. According to a report on the HATT listserv, Microsoft told this to a customer. According to the report, they will continue to provide the display engine as a free download for some time.

In summary, Flare seems to be on the leading edge of new technologies coming our way. One big ramification of Flare is that is XML-based. This means that there are standards enforced at the code level. Writers can no longer go into the "True Code" and hack HTML code to customize the tool's output. You must follow the rules set forth in the Schema or DTD (Document Type Definition). If you don't, the tool will not process your code. Additionally, we are moving into a new age in which single-sourcing and structured writing look to be emphasized more. Writers are likely to be more restricted in terms of following templates, Schema rules, etc. The days of hand-coding seem to be going away.

Along with these changes, old formats such as WinHelp, JavaHelp, and Oracle Help might be going away faster than people using them had thought. Although some tools such as WebWorks ePublisher currently support these formats, they might well drop that support if Flare becomes widely adopted. Since Flare does not and is not going to support those formats and the percentage of people using them is relatively low anyway, the vendors of these tools might well decide that there isn't much justification to continue supporting these formats and might drop support also.

For more information, visit Madcap Software at: www.madcapsoftware.com.

STC Technical Art Competition Open Now!

The Boston and Northern New England chapters of the Society for Technical Communication invite all technical writers and artists to submit entries to the annual STC Competition. Consider also becoming a judge.



For entrants, this is a unique opportunity to showcase your best work and get feedback from your peers. For judges, the Competition offers a window to view the work of your peers (and maybe get some fresh ideas to bring to your own work), and a chance to form valuable connections with your peers in the Communications field.

Although the deadlines for entries for the Technical Publications and

Online Communication have passed, the deadline for the Technical Art deadline is Oct. 27.

Some entries earn an award from the STC. The awards represent levels of accomplishment based on STC standards, as follows:

- **Distinguished** - Clearly superior in all areas. There are no major flaws, and few, if any, minor flaws. It is an outstanding example of technical communication principles.
- **Excellence** - Consistently meets high standards in all areas. There may be a single major flaw and a few minor flaws. The entry clearly, though slightly imperfectly, exemplifies and exceptional understanding of technical communication principles.
- **Merit** - Consistently meets high standards in most areas. There may be a number of major or minor flaws, but the entry still exemplifies proficient technical communication.

Entries that receive the Distinguished award are automatically entered into the STC's International Competition, where they compete with entries from around the world. Imagine receiving feedback from your peers around the world.

For more information about the Competition, whether to enter it or to become involved as a judge, please visit <http://www.stc.boston.org> and click the Competitions link.

If you need more information than is offered on the website, please send e-mail to Mark Decker at msdhusker@comcast.net or to Steve Straight at steve.straight@openwave.com.



The Broadside Staff

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