



Boston Broadside

The Boston Chapter Newsletter

March 2006

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From the President's Desk

Run for Council -- Exercise Your Leadership Skills

by Greg Bartlett,
Boston Chapter President

It's hard for me to believe that the election for the STC-Boston Council is fast approaching. As the saying goes, "Time flies when you're having fun."

Join a Great Team!

It really is fun being on the Council. We've got a great team of talented and interesting Council members who generously dedicate an evening a month for Council meetings, as well as contributing in other leadership roles for the chapter.

The Council is a dynamic team (in more ways than one). It gets re-energized and refocused each year as new members join the Council. New members bring with them their own experience, skills,

"...President's Desk (continued on page 2)"

Good News for the Upcoming Year!

by Cindy Currie,
STC Region 1 Director



I've recently returned from the Board of Directors' meeting in Atlanta, GA, where we spent most of our three-day face-to-face time working on the strategic direction for the next 12 to 18 months. Among the areas of focus are: (1) Raising global awareness of the technical communications profession;

(2) Pursuing new revenue streams at both the Society and community levels that provide more value for members, as well as enticing non-members to join our ranks; (3) Growing relationships and choosing partners that support and enable new and enhanced services and programs; and (4) Restructuring our infrastructure to support and enable our strategic (rather than tactical) focus. Much more on this to come....

Vote! The STC elections will soon be upon us, and it is your opportunity to participate in choosing the leaders that will take us all forward into the future of STC and continue to shape the profession of technical communications! For detailed information about all the candidates on this year's slate, visit <http://www.stc.org/candidatesFAQ/index.asp>. All candidates are very willing to be contacted for further discussion about their views, so please take advantage of this opportunity to ask and receive answers to your questions. The election opens in early March and closes mid-April.

Transform! There are still lots of folks asking questions about Transformation. (Visit <http://www.stc.org/transformation> for myriad articles on this initiative.) My colleague, Region 7 Director, John Hedtke, has written an article that offers a quick look at Transformation and its impact thus far. I've quickly summarized John's article below, but for the full text, please visit <http://www.stcregion.org/region>, as I've requested that the article be posted there as well for all to access.

Here's a thumbnail sketch of Transformation: It's all about making changes that allow us to provide "more value for more members." And, it provides a great litmus test for all leaders for decision-making in STC: if a strategy, initiative, or program doesn't provide "more value for more members," then it's not the right thing to do. The way in which we are approaching the goal of providing "more value for more members" is to remove obstacles to our success and provide support and infrastructure for future growth. The following lists the key changes so far:

- 1) Improved communications at all levels
- 2) Changes in governance and the make-up of the Board
- 3) Becoming more strategic
- 4) Changes in office operations
- 5) Becoming more global
- 6) Offering more membership packages
- 7) Improved education offerings
- 8) New general discussion forum (First ASK STC, then STC Forum)
- 9) Technology upgrade (in progress)

And, last, but definitely not least, is our migrating of the "sponsor" role out into the member communities to get active support closer to those who need it. The role of Director-Sponsor is changing to one of Director over the next several years. (It should

"Good News...(continued on page 2)"

perspective, and personality that strengthen the Council.

What’s Involved?

The Council makes decisions throughout the year (September through June) that shape the direction the chapter will take (e.g., the rechartering effort this year), as well as make sure the chapter runs well. The Council consists of executive officers and at-large members. The First Vice President, Second Vice President, and at-large Council members each traditionally take on a leadership role for one of the committees that run chapter activities.

Positions Up For Election

Three at-large Council positions are up for election this year. At-large Council members serve two-year terms.

Three executive Council positions are up for election this spring:

- Second Vice President
- Treasurer
- Secretary

To help ensure continuity and to groom folks for the role of President, three roles are part of a presidential progression and run unopposed.

This year’s...	Becomes next year’s...
Second Vice President	First Vice President
First Vice President	President
President	Immediate Past President
Immediate Past President	Inductee into the Council Hall of Fame :-)

For details about the Council positions, see the Chapter Bylaws. (On <http://www.stcboston.org/>, hover over “About Us” in the top navigation bar, and then select “Bylaws” from the list of links that appears.)

Who Can Run?

You must be a member of the Boston Chapter to run. That’s the only requirement!

be noted that the Directors are still very much performing the Sponsor role now!) A new entity called the Leadership Community Resource (LCR) is taking over the “Sponsor” role and using STC’s highly talented members with a wide range of expertise to provide more local and more accessible sponsorship and support to communities. The STC’s Transformation web page contains several articles on this initiative (visit <http://www.stc.org/transformation/article16.asp> for one such article). Judy Glick-Smith (STC Fellow and former President) is the initiative lead. Please feel free to contact Judy at judy@glicksmithgroup.com for as much more LCR information as you’d like.

Rechartering! Congratulations to the Boston Chapter on its recently approved rechartering document! That makes about half of the chapters in region 1 that have completed the rechartering process. Who’s going to be next? Again, I am available to assist you in the rechartering process in a number of potential ways, including leading a workshop with your admin council either in person or virtually, to help ensure that you can focus on providing the appropriate content. Many chapters are willing to share their rechartering experiences with others, so all you need do is ask for support, and it’s yours!

New Honors! Region 1 celebrates a number of Society honors this year:

- First, the elevation of one very well-known STC Associate Fellow, Ann Wiley (Rochester Chapter), to the rank of STC Fellow! Bravo Ann!
- Second, the elevation of three well-known senior members to the rank of STC Associate Fellow. They are:
 - Hans Fenstermacher (Boston Chapter)
 - John Garison (Boston, Northern New England, and Vermont Chapters)
 - Steve Murphy (Northern New England Chapter)

Congratulations to these long-standing members on these significant achievements! A full list of Fellows and Associate Fellows is available on the Society website. Be sure to check them out at http://www.stc.org/PDF_Files/2005_Fellows.pdf and http://www.stc.org/PDF_Files/2005_AFellows.pdf (but consider giving it a few weeks to be sure that the lists are updated to reflect the 2006 additions).

Third, three Distinguished Chapter Service Awards (DCSAs) are being given to recipients from the Southwestern Ontario (1) and Philadelphia Metro (2) chapters. I’m not going to recognize these individuals by name in this article as their chapters likely have special plans to recognize them publicly, and I don’t want to spoil the surprise for anyone. Congratulations also to these individuals for embodying the true spirit of volunteerism and providing significant leadership to their respective chapters!

And, a full list of DCSA award recipients is available on the Society website. Check it out at http://www.stc.org/PDF_Files/STC_Distinguished.pdf. It may take some time before this list is updated to reflect the 2006 honorees, so check back often.

New Pins! There are also several new ways to honor those who excel in leadership and volunteerism. Two new STC lapel pins are now available. The Community Leader pin (STC logo with a lavender bar) is a great way to honor contributors who exhibit exemplary community leadership. The Volunteer pin (STC logo with a yellow bar) is designed to honor members who embody the spirit of volunteerism. Consider giving these pins to your community’s most valuable players! The pins are priced at \$10.00 (USD). Visit http://www.stc.org/PDF_Files/specialtyGifts.pdf for ordering information.

Note: Awarding one of these pins could be a great way to recognize a member who may already have received a Distinguished Chapter Service Award (DCSA), but who may continue to make outstanding contributions to the community or region, or for those whose contributions are noteworthy, but perhaps not quite as broad or long-standing enough to be recognized with a DCSA.

“...President’s Desk”

How to Run

Simply send an e-mail to Mike Ball (1stvp@stcboston.org) indicating the position for which you want to be a candidate.

You must enter yourself as a candidate by March 22.

You must provide a very brief statement (less than 250 words) indicating who you are and, if you want, why you are running. This will be included as part of the electronic ballot.

Mike will send out an STC-info with all the information you need to become a candidate.

What You Get Out of Being on the Council

Of course, there’s the free dinner at each Council meeting! :-)

But wait, there’s more...

- Time to network and socialize with a nice group of fellow professionals, whom you’ll get to know well in the course of the year
- An opportunity to steer the chapter in directions you’d like to see it go
- A chance to develop your leadership skills
- An impressive addition to your resume that says to potential employers that you’re actively engaged in professional development and that you have taken on a leadership role.

Here are a couple of quotes from current Council members about serving on the Council:

- Michael Ball, First Vice President
“The Council means great networking with top-notch doc managers and tech writers. Perhaps even more meaningful is the high level of planning and policy making. At work, it can be frustrating to plan, propose, justify, and then wait and wait. With this group dedicated to what’s best for the chapter membership, we can make our impact strongly, effectively, and quickly.
That’s satisfaction.”

“...President’s Desk (continued on page 4)”

“Good News...”

Out and About! My chapter visits for this winter/spring include the following:

- **Boston Chapter’s Competition Awards Banquet** (The STACIES), February 15
- **Northern New England Chapter Meeting**, March 8
- **Philadelphia Metro Chapter’s Conference**, March 11
- **Rochester Chapter’s Spectrum Conference**, March 31
- **Vermont Chapter Meeting**, April 19 (or thereabouts)

I would like to visit all chapters in Region 1 during my three-year tenure as Director, and I can potentially schedule several more visits this year (April / May / June time frame). Please let me know what your program plans are for the remainder of this STC year and if you’d like to me to visit your chapter!

XML Tools Presented at the January Program

by *Bill Gruener*
Boston Broadside Staff

At the January program, Bill Rabkin of Idiom Technologies and Jerry Silver of Blast Radius presented the benefits of using powerful tools such as DITA and XMetaL.

Markup Languages and DITA

SGML, an acronym for the Standard Graphic Markup Language developed by IBM around 1980, is the grandfather of the markup languages such as HTML and XML. XML identifies types of information; SGML/HTML formats information. XML enhances single-sourcing efforts, but without a formatting language most content (information) coded in XML would be unreadable and of little value to an end user. XML code looks like HTML code, but, as noted, the intent is different. The code identifies the type of information such as an interoffice memo, current bank balance, or new cars available on a dealer’s lot. For a friendly, informative introduction to XML, read the W3C introduction at http://www.w3schools.com/xml/xml_whatIs.asp.

XML alone is arcane and leaves many savvy technical people with a so-what-now feeling. Developed in the early to mid-90’s, XML never enjoyed the popular success of HTML. XML is powerful, but it needed a larger framework, a framework that makes XML usable. Enter DITA and XMetaL. DITA looks at information as topics; XMetaL is a tool for coding XML. For those familiar with Information Mapping, DITA correlates with Information Mapping, and for those familiar with BBEdit (Mac) or Homesite (Windows), XMetaL correlates with BBEdit/Homesite.

IBM developed DITA, an acronym that represents Darwin Information Typing Architecture. DITA is a new XML standard that promises to change the way you create, exchange, and distribute technical information. Unlike a chapter and page or book-oriented approaches to organizing information, DITA uses a topic-oriented approach to organizing information. A topic is a small chunk of information that can be easily reused across various contexts and deliverables.

DITA also has built-in extensible support, meaning that you can customize the docu-

“XML Tools...(continued on page 4)”

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

“...President’s Desk”

- Steve Greffenius, SIG Coordinator
“Two years ago I wrote to Steven Jong about running for council, to check out the possibility. Next thing I knew I was on the ballot! I’m glad Steve took the initiative, because the council has been an outstanding opportunity to get involved with the chapter. I’m thankful for what I’ve learned, and for the chance to contribute. The contributions are clearly valuable, and that makes the time spent clearly worthwhile.”

Talking Points for New Member Reception

Join us on March 22!

By Virginia Adams,
Membership Committee Manager

Event: Reception for new Boston Chapter members

Where/When: Lexington Sheraton Inn/March 22 at 5:30, before the regular chapter program meeting.

Who can attend: New STC members and members who have transferred from other chapters

This event will be held before the regular chapter program, which starts at 6:30. This is an excellent opportunity to meet the chapter leadership to find out more about our chapter and meet to other members of the chapter. Also, *if you are attending the reception and the program, the chapter will pay your program fee for that night.*

When you register for the program, select check as the method of payment. After registering, email Cindy Cookson (cindy@architext-usa.com) indicating that you will be attending the program as a guest under the new member reception offer. New members who plan to attend the reception must reply to the Evite.

We hope you can attend and look forward to meeting you.

“XML Tools...”

ment type definitions (DTDs), without breaking compatibility with existing applications and processes. DITA is information typing. Therefore, DITA exceeds any previous approach to using XML. DITA helps you reduce information redundancies and overcome the barriers to XML adoption.

DITA benefits you by

- Increasing content reuse
- Lowering development and training costs
- Simplifying information exchange
- Creating shorter delivery times
- Allowing XML teams to work better, faster, cheaper
- Promoting topic-oriented writing

XMetaL (Blast Radius) and DITA

XML is a markup language that describes the type of content — not how to format content. XML, as HTML, can be coded in and read from Notepad. However, coding in and reading from Notepad is not a friendly task, and the conceptual effort needed to handle the XML code and the resulting output is demanding. Therefore, tools can be very helpful. One such tool is XMetaL, an XML authoring tool, by Blast Radius, a software developer headquartered in Vancouver, B.C.

XMetaL has five components: (1) “XMetaL Author,” a desktop XML authoring tool; (2) “XMetaL Author DITA Edition,” a topic-based XML authoring tool; (3) “XMetaL Reviewer,” a Web-based XML reviewing and collaboration tool; (4) “XMAX,” a Web-based XML authoring tool; and (5) “XMetaL Developer,” a development tool. All five feed content to a content manager, which feeds the same content to output devices such as PDAs, Web browsers, cell phones, and other output devices.

XMetaL is a tool for creating the content, and XMetaL Author DITA Edition is the first XML editor that implements the DITA authoring standard. In a demonstration of XMetaL Author DITA Edition, Jerry Silver of Blast Radius created a user guide for a printer by taking a file originally formatted with FrameMaker+SGML. The interface is familiar. A classic Windows tool bar displays at the top of the screen and the window displays a left pane, used for navigation, and a right pane, used for the work area. The user enters the raw content. The tool formats that content into both coded and displayed content.



Idiom Technologies, Blast Radius, and Other DITA Resources

<http://www.idiominc.com/>

<http://www.blastradius.com/index.jsp>

<http://www-128.ibm.com/developerworks/library/x-dita1/>

<http://xml.coverpages.org/dita.html>

<http://www.rockley.com/index.html>

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/dita-users/>

Looking for a HAT?

Join your fellow STC members in Burlington, Vermont to meet representatives and watch presentations of the latest Help Authoring Tools (HAT) on the market.

We're exploring new and improved authoring tools because of

- Advances in software, like single-sourcing facilitation
- The ever-increasing demand for XML-backed documentation
- the purported demise of an industry leader
- The drive to meet customers' expectations for accurate, concise, and easy-to-find information

Help Authoring Tool Vendors

This industry is always changing. The explosion of online information has created more opportunities for toolmakers. We've invited the following vendors:

- Component One: Doc-2-Help
- Author IT: Author It
- Olson Software: HyperText Studio
- Quadralay: WebWorks Publisher
- Omni Systems: Mif2Go
- JG Soft: HelpScribble
- MadCap Software: Flare
- RWD Technologies: Info Pak
- EC Software: Help & Manual
- Sevensteps: Sevensteps
- Deva Tools for Dreamweaver
- Virtual Media: XDK/HDK
- 4.ST Diamond Software: HelpServer

Logistics

When: May 16, 2005, 4:30 to 8:00 P.M.

Location: GE Healthcare, Burlington, VT

4:30 to 6:00 P.M. Exhibition and Light Refreshments —Vendors will set up an exhibition of their products and meet informally with participants

6:00 to 8:00 P.M. Presentations —Vendors will make a 10 to 15 minute presentation to all

For more details visit our website:
www.stc-vermont.org

** Some hotel discounts are available



Remembering Peter Hartman

*By Steven Jong
Immediate Past President, Boston Chapter*

Peter J. Hartman of Arlington, MA, a well-known senior member of the Boston chapter, passed away on Sunday, February 12, 2006 at the Lahey Clinic in Burlington after a long illness. He is survived by his wife, Joanna Walsh, and their son, Alex.

Peter was a respected member of the profession for over 25 years as a contractor, writer, and manager of documentation, training, quality assurance, and marketing communications groups. His employers included Data General, Atex, Imaging Technology, Pilot Software, Easel Corporation, FTP Software, Implicit Software, Riverton Software, and most recently Convoq. He specialized in starting or rebuilding groups for start-ups and other small companies, and his ability to understand the nuts and bolts of corporate life drove him to remain a truly hands-on manager.

Peter wrote over 80 manuals and revised or edited countless others. In addition, he published articles in various journals, including Computer Graphics World and DE Magazine. He contributed to Intercom, InterChange, and the Annual Conference, and was the author of two books: "Junior Citizens: An Owners Manual" (1991), a humorous parody of both technical manuals and child-care books, and the influential "Starting a Documentation Group: A Hands-On Guide" (1999).

Peter was a welcome member of the Small Doc group, whose members meet for breakfast. Lisa Dames says: "Peter brought his gentle sense of humor and his incredible wealth of knowledge. Peter was the one you could count on to tell you about which tools were good for what and how to use them, how to make your web site better, what would improve your resume, where to find job sites, or anything else you needed help with. He was always supportive and shared his knowledge willingly and without ego." Another example: When he went through one of his layoffs (an occupational hazard of small-company employment), he responded by writing "Surviving a Layoff," which appeared in the Boston Broadside in January 2002.

Marilyn Keane, who worked with Peter at Implicit Software, says: "He was a great writer/manager and he brought joy, laughter, kindness, and common sense to organizations." Sarah Hage of Implicit adds: "He was ... the paragon of managers — intelligent, rational, involved in the work, but hands-off — shielding his [writers and editors] from upper management."

Away from work, Peter loved music. He was a founding member of several bands, including the blues band Geezer and the STC-based Rough Drafts. He patiently played bass for anyone who wanted to perform at the Open Mike nights at recent Annual Conferences. A search of Amazon.com yields both his books and Geezer's latest CD, "Blues Around The Clock."

Donations in Peter's memory may be made to the American Cancer Society, 30 Speen St., Framingham, MA 01701, or Recording for the Blind and Dyslexic, National Headquarters, 20 Roszel Rd, Princeton, NJ 08540 (<http://www.discoveret.org/dyslexia/Enrolling.html>).

You can leave online condolences for Peter's family at the Keefe Funeral Home Web site (<http://www.keefefuneralhome.com/>).

You can sign the Boston.com guest book:

http://www.legacy.com/Script/CounterRedirect.asp?Name=GBLink_Top&Jump=/bostonglobe/Guestbook.asp&Page=GuestBook&PersonID=16739619

We hope to organize a fundraising event to benefit Peter's charities and the Boston Chapter.

Identify the “Pain”: Answering the Technical Documentation Need

by Bill Pacino

Editor’s Note: This article originally appeared in the May-June 2005 issue of the STC-Nashua chapter newsletter.

As a technical writer, I am quite aware of the principles in a book that would seem to be far removed from technical writing. That book is “Solution Selling” by Keith Eades of Sales Performance International.

In each of the many technical writing assignments I have had over the years, I try to analyze each new situation that I am hired into and identify the “Pain,” a concept that the decision to hire me is because of some driving need, and that a proper understanding of the hiring client’s “pain” (that driving need) is critical to me meeting the technical documentation requirements of the hiring client.

In this article, I present three technical documentation jobs. Each job had a different need (or “pain”). What I have detailed, in a staccato style, is the approach (pre-writing) and the writing/editing/publishing methodology I took to ease the “pain” of the hiring client.

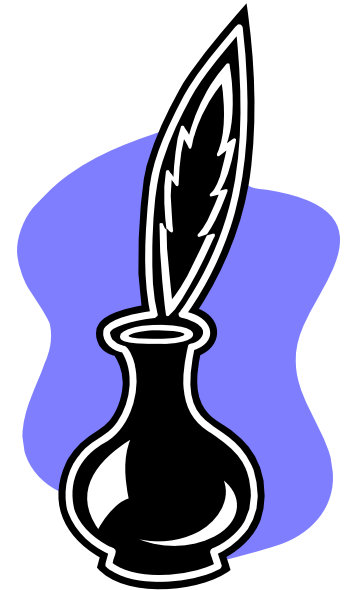
Scenario #1

An automated test equipment unit of a large semiconductor company with a need for a hardware and software technical writer.

The Solution Selling “pain” or the reason a technical writer was called in: A document on a new product is half-started, but has stalled with unsatisfactory results.

Steps of discovery (pre-writing)

- 1) Examine what exists already.
- 2) Find out who are the “go-to” people.
- 3) Who is the audience for this work?
- 4) What is the purpose of this documentation?
- 5) Where do I find information about this product (old/new, hard-copy/electronic)?
- 6) Take a look to see if other parts of this large company have a particular style or usage.
- 7) Create an organizational structure or outline. Once an outline has been agreed upon, the entire documentation effort flows from a systematic approach to populating the outline with the required information.
- 8) Create a documentation plan (quickly produce a first deliverable so the client has a feeling of getting their money’s worth). Create an aggressive but realistic schedule.



Details of write/ edit/ publish

- Develop an overall system architecture diagram – how do the systems and sub-systems fit together?
- Seek to obtain hardware faceplate diagrams, line drawings, photos of test equipment, front and rear panel views of equipment.
- Look for/ develop any and all graphics, illustrations, diagrams, photos, flow charts, logic diagrams, block diagrams.
- Recycle information from PowerPoint presentations.
- Recycle older information that is still valid from any and all legacy documents.
- Search intranet of company for old electronic documents that can be converted to new uses.
- Obtain examples of software code and programming syntax, usually by running the appropriate programs from a command line prompt or a GUI.
- Seek out application notes – find out how legacy products were used in the past with the idea of recycling this information for use by the newer product.
- Take a look at test scripts or test plans. Sometimes an application note can be constructed out of the test plan procedures.
- Always focus on procedures – action; how-to; system set-up; power and environmental requirements. The user needs a problem solved: that is, how to use this piece of equipment to accomplish a task.
- Concentrate on getting the user the information (as terse as possible) to accomplish these designated tasks.
- Format the documentation simply. Create documentation that is easy to maintain. Avoid document tricks that others do not understand or mistrust (like macros, hidden text, and conditional text).

“Identify the ‘Pain’...(continued on page 7)”

“Identify the ‘Pain’...”

- Use a template (in Word, a .dot file; Framemaker templates). When you save content documents for archiving, save the template file as well for those saved documents.
- If artwork is detailed, complex or stuffed with information, make the artwork bigger by using turn pages.

Scenario #2

An optical telecommunications switch/ optical test measurement start-up company with a need for a hardware and software technical writer.

The Solution Selling “pain” or the reason a technical writer was called in: The Company faces an upcoming delivery of equipment to a prospective customer for a lab test, and the old guides/ manuals and instructions do not match the current state of the product.

In this case, technical documentation was needed to demonstrate how to install, provision and configure the system for the prospective customer. This situation included previously prepared documents, thus the focus of the technical writer was to update the existing documents and add further value.

Steps of discovery (pre-writing)

- 1) Create an outline from earlier documents. What did previous technical writers focus their efforts on? Where can I add new value?
- 2) Where do I find information about this product (old/new, hard-copy/electronic)?
- 3) Read through all engineering documentation – functional requirements, marketing requirements, meeting minutes.

Details of write/ edit/ publish

- Present a great deal of information as concisely as possible – tables, illustrations, bullet lists, break up long descriptions with shorter paragraphs. If necessary, use one-sentence paragraphs. Have major headings (heading 1 and heading 2) always begin on a new page (unless previous page is really, really short).
- Recycle information (already reviewed and validated) from previous documentation (company or industry).
- Come up with some initial task that the product can do and then write it up in a step procedure. It is important that a new product “do something” that the prospective needs or can understand.
- With Framemaker, cross-references are easy to set-up and maintain. Use this Framemaker feature extensively.
- Add color to the document (graphics, headings) that will show up when the document is converted to Acrobat PDF.
- In a hardware product, concentrate on illustrations and diagrams.
- Emphasize how-tos and procedures.
- In documenting software and online help, work through software screen by screen, write up procedural on how to get from opening screen to every other function accessible from main software screen.
- Devise a short tutorial on a user task. Do not forget that the beauty of the software is not seen by the user. The user needs to do something with the product. Help the user get to that sense of achievement as fast as possible.

Scenario #3

A software design and development group of a large telecommunications company with a need for a software technical writer.

The Solution Selling “pain” or the reason a technical writer was hired: A new and complex Network Management System (NMS) is going online and the system administrators (users) are demanding full documentation (from the system software developers) on how to use this system.

A further “pain” is that without written information and instructions, the system administrators will not permit the new NMS to reach production, that is operating, mode.

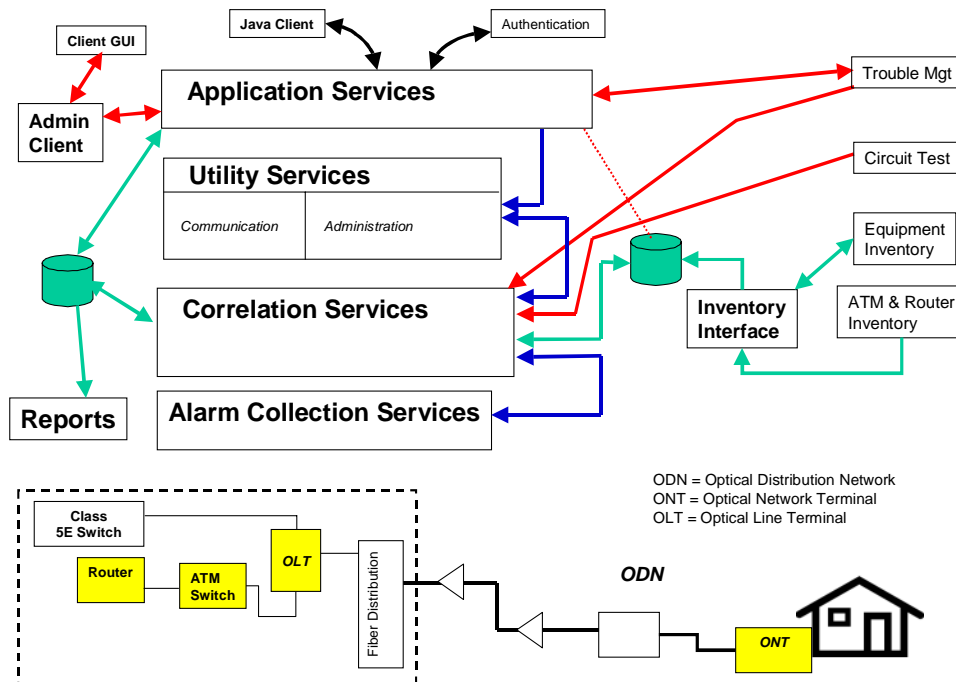
Steps of discovery (pre-writing)

- 1) The first discovery was that there was no existing documentation specific to the administration of this product.
- 2) In the same way that the Scenario #1 project flowed from the creation of the detailed organizational structure for the work, the foundation of the entire technical writing assignment in Scenario #3 was a system architecture drawing by the project technical leader on a whiteboard.

“Identify the ‘Pain’...(continued on page 8)”

“Identify the ‘Pain’...”

The following illustration became the foundation of the Scenario #3 writing effort.



- 3) After copying down the whiteboard graphic, I used it like an outline to keep my vision clear on what content I had to develop for the user audience.
- 4) Examine all the component software pieces identified in the system architecture diagram and then build the documentation piece-by-piece into a complete book. Account for all software components (processes), services, sub-services, command syntax and GUI-based menu screens.
- 5) Define the audience. What is the purpose of the document?
- 6) Create an outline and keep adding detail to the whiteboard graphic as the writer learns more about the product. Recycle information from any and all legacy documents. Software from earlier products is reused as much as the information from earlier documents.
- 7) In the outline and in the document, be aware of the need for parallelism. What is presented for one component must be presented for every other component.

Details of write/ edit/ publish

- Create a systems description (architecture document) of the product that evolved later into a chapter of the administration guide.
- It is an iterative process when trying to developing content when all the development and engineering information is in people’s heads.
- It is an iterative process when developing content with subject matter experts whose native language is not English.
- A deliberate, systematic approach and mindset is called to develop content when little is written down (no functional specifications, no marketing or engineering requirements).
- For the best success in getting answers to your questions, do not ask busy people open-ended questions. They rarely will answer. Show the software developers what you know and ask help in filling in the specific blanks.

To sum up the approach (pre-writing) and writing/editing/publishing methodology I have presented:

Step 1 — Create an outline, and progressively fill in the holes in the outline.

Step 2 — Present technical information in a user-friendly and ordered manner for the designated audience. Knowing whom you are writing for is fundamental to the success of the work.

Step 3 — Read, edit, rewrite, condense, especially the really dense information. If something is unreadable, but “it has to be there,” move it to an appendix.

About the Author

William Pacino currently works as a solo technical writer in a start-up optical telecommunications company. His ideal writing situation would be an opportunity in the automated measurement and test industry, where his previous work experiences with Tektronix and Analog Devices could add much value. He is a Senior member of the STC and lives in Chelmsford, MA. He can be reached at william.pacino@verizon.net

Ask the President

by Greg Bartlett, STC-Boston President

Editor's Note: Buffy Bennett, Steve Greffenius, Maureen Hern, Ed Marshall, Rob Moran, Carol Pennewill, Neil Perlin, and Susan Sarkes also contributed to this article.

“Are we considering the option of having remote access to our meetings?”

Judy Stitt, who leads our Technical Editing SIG, has sparked an e-mail thread and had conversations with several folks about the idea of providing remote access to our SIG and/or program meetings. In that thread, Neil Perlin and several other folks have shared much information about various options.

Judy and I met earlier this month to explore this topic (as well as several other great ideas Judy had). The Council discussed this topic at our February meeting.

The bottom line is that if our members have significant interest in the idea, we should seriously explore this initiative. However, I want to set expectations realistically: even if there is significant interest, for the health of the chapter we need to make sure the benefits outweigh the risks and that there are no show-stopper kinds of issues.

This article summarizes my initial thinking on the topic; we're very interested in hearing your thoughts (see below). The benefits and risks/challenges listed here are all speculation on my part because we don't have much real data at this point. If there is general interest, these (and I'm sure other) benefits and risks would need to be explored in more depth.

Range of Remote Access Technologies

There is a wide range of degrees to which meetings could be made accessible, depending on the technology used. At the low end, we could set up a conference call, where you call in and hear the speaker. At the high end is a Webcast, where remote attendees can interact electronically to ask questions or respond to exercises.

Benefits

- Expand the number of our members who are able to have access to the valuable information presented in SIG and program meetings; many of our members live pretty far from where we hold meetings (Lexington) or have issues that preclude their attending meetings in person.
- Make members who live outside of the Lexington area feel more connected to the chapter
- Help to attract top-flight presenters by offering a larger audience
- Help to attract sponsors by offering a larger audience



Risks/Challenges

- Reduce live attendance at meetings; networking is a very important reason for many folks to be members of the chapter, and face-to-face conversations at meetings is probably the best networking mechanism
- Lose money at meetings because the cost of providing remote access proves to be greater than what we can cover
- Require a technical specialist to be at every meeting to make the remote access happen
- Disrupt meetings by having to accommodate remote access requirements
- Make unreasonable special demands on presenters or meeting coordinators

Web Poll

In the relatively near future, we will send an STC-info email to our members announcing a Web Poll, which will give you an opportunity to indicate your level of interest in remotely accessing meetings.

At any point, of course, feel free to send me an email or talk with me at a program meeting about your thoughts on this topic.

Judging Their Peers

Behind the scenes of the STC's annual competitions

By Bryan Davis

It's 6 a.m. on a Saturday in early November and people are shuffling into the Hewlett-Packard facility in Nashua, NH, arms loaded down with a myriad of office supplies, laptop computers, and coffee — lots of coffee. Others are carting boxes of cookies, doughnuts, muffins, locally-grown apples and, of course, more coffee.

The building is quiet now, but soon many of the conference rooms in this part of the facility will be bustling with people gathered around laptops, judging sheets in hand, having animated and intense discussions about the entries they are judging in the 2005 New England Chapter STC Online Communication Competition.

Whether new to the event or a veteran, the day-long event is a way for judges to see various training titles produced by their peers. This year, subjects ranged from database management to building servers to training soldiers on how to use a tank's targeting system.

Those who donate their time to judge or serve on any one of the several committees needed to handle the various logistics of the competitions do so for a number of reasons, including peer review of their work and networking opportunities.

“(Judging) provides an opportunity to work with other technical writers from the region, it allows me to get an in-depth look at the work others are producing, and it's fun,” said Andrew Harrington, a Senior Technical Writer at Avid Technology in Tewksbury, MA, and veteran judge of six years. “I always leave the judging with ideas for how to improve my own work, and with my sense of technical writing standards reinforced.”

Susan Franklin, a Principal Technical Writer with EqualLogic in Nashua, NH, agreed, saying her experience as a second-year judge in the latest competition helped her see what others are doing in her field.

“I'm one of only a few writers for a small company and in that kind of situation, one can easily lose sight of what others are doing in technical writing,” Franklin said. “You can become very insular and devoted to your own ideas about how to do things. I'm amazed at the level of work being done by others in my field.”

Judging entries is an intense process that is done with careful consideration and much deliberation, as I found out when pressed into service as a rookie judge at this year's NE Chapter Online Communication Competition (another judge had to bow out at the last minute). Fortunately, I was helping to set up for the day as a member of the Competition Committee and was more than happy to fill in as a reviewer.

Once officially registered as a judge via the STC's website, I was handed a sheaf of papers containing information on the three entries my team would be evaluating over the course of the day. I then received a crash course in how the competition works.

For the Online Communication Competition, the judges are split into three-member teams, each having at least one veteran judge. Teams consider three to four entries each, with members rotating the duties of one navigating through the entry, another capturing the comments of the judges in the competition forms and the third reading and reviewing the entry form filed by the entrants in support of their work.

After their careful deliberations, the team members decide whether or not to give an award in one of three levels: Distinguished (the highest), Excellence or Merit, or no award. Entries garnering a Distinguished-level award are automatically considered for the local chapter's coveted Best of Show award.

At the end of the competition day, judges come together as a group and, for those teams who granted a Distinguished award, one person from the team presents the case for why their nominated entry should receive the Best of Show honor. After all presentations are made, the entire judging group votes by a show of hands for the top award.

Entries garnering a Distinguished award also are eligible to be entered into the STC's International Competition, at which they vie with winners from all local contests for the International Best of Show honor.

But entering the competitions is not just about the awards and accolades, say judges and entrants alike. While award recognition is a great morale booster, it is the feedback from peer reviews that makes the annual event worth entering.

“The competition allows you to get beyond the specific demands and restrictions placed upon your work by the needs and limitations of your company and/or client,” said Avid's

Tip of the Month

In Flare 1.0, you can customize the default layout to the way you work.

Use the Float and Auto Hide features to move windows to where you want them. Save your custom layout when you are finished.

“Judging...(continued on page 11)”

“Judging...”

Harrington. “Your work gets evaluated from a different perspective and in a different light, which means that you yourself end up seeing it differently and having a chance to make it better.”

Sue Franklin of EqualLogic agreed, saying she feels fortunate that her company sees the value in entering the competitions.

“We get a lot of feedback that is valuable because of the amount of time judges put in reading, reviewing, writing up comments, and discussing the entries,” she said. “I think the feedback is valuable for those reasons but also because the feedback is from reviewers outside (your) company and the internal pressures you face during the development process.”

OK, so you have spent all this time reading technical publications or clicking through online training as a judge and have taken the time to carefully document your group’s consensus on what does and doesn’t work. Now what? Does anyone even read or use your feedback?

Well, in the case of Progress Software ... yes, very much so.

As Senior Editor at Progress, I compile all of information from the judges’ Entry Consensus Reports into a detailed report for every writer and developer in my department. The report lists the feedback received in each of the competition’s respective categories and sub-categories.

Regardless of whether or not their entries receive an award, the writers and developers I work with say the judges’ feedback can be yet another tool they use to improve their work.

“The biggest influence the STC judges have had on my work in the past has been to write lesson reviews and answers that relate directly back to the lesson objectives,” said Peter Tran, a Senior Course Developer at Progress. “That alone has improved my work enormously.”

Craig VanDerAa, a Principle eLearning Developer at Progress, added that one of the most valuable aspects of the thorough judges’ feedback is that it shows potential areas for improvement.

“Last year, several judges recommended making it easier to see the students’ location within our online courses,” VanDerAa said. “So, we since have added a page-level course map to all of our eLearning courses to make it easier for students to navigate through a course and quickly find the topics they need to learn. In this year’s competition, we saw that several judges made note of this improvement.”

Both Harrington and Franklin readily agreed that being a judge in any of the competitions is a rewarding experience whose time commitments vary – just one evening of orientation plus one day of the event itself is needed for the Online Communication Competition. The Technical Publications Competition requires reading through entries and therefore requires more time.

And to those who have never entered a competition, everyone involved suggests entering, not only for the potential accolades, but for a verification from peers that you’re doing a good job. Just be sure to check your ego when you receive the feedback forms.

“For someone considering entering, I would check that my skin is thick because the judges will say so when they don’t like something,” Franklin said. “But, getting an award is great! And the feedback is well-worth it in any case.”

Bryan Davis is the Senior Editor of Knowledge Services at Progress Software in Nashua, NH.



Chapter Membership Report

By Virginia Adams,
Membership Committee Manager

We would like to welcome the following people, who joined the Boston Chapter in December 2005/January 2006.

New Members	Transferred Members
Donna E. Allman	Prudence Brighton
William Balint	Jill N. Clay
Robin Bjorgan	Mark S. Decker
Anne L. Boas	Pam Drucker
James B. Brinton, Jr.	Katherine Haramundanis
Lynn M. Chesler	Patricia M. Lyga
Kathleen Chick	Maryjane Long
Rosemary T. Donnelly	Judith E. Plummer
Mitch Feldhandler	William D. Rizer
Charlyn M. Hart	Chauncey E. Wilson
Lisa M. Hood	Nancy A. Zacks
Marge L. Iannuzzo	
Anthony B. Ioven	
Jean Josephs	
Jean M. Jesensky	
Janet S. Jones	
Thomas L. Kilmartin, Jr.	
Roberta C. King	
Judy A. McConarty	
Erin McNamee	
Penelop H. Najjar	
Karyn A. Nickelsberg	
Kyle Nitzsche	
Eric R. Petersen	
Denise A. Pooler	
Michael J. Rainey	
Joseph D. Rousseau	
Everett C. Ribel	
Sowmini Sampath	
Paul J. Sitko	
Kelly Parr Soli	
Joan Travis	
Donna P. Weinberg	
Sarah Williams	

The Broadside Staff

The *Boston Broadside* is published six times throughout the calendar year and would not be possible without the hard work of dedicated volunteers. I would like to thank the following people for their contributions.

Broadside Staff

Donna Ayres,
Publishing Editor
Karen Giventer,
Copy Editor
Bill Gruener,
Columnist/Photographer

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Authors

Virginia Adams
Greg Bartlett
Cindy Currie
Bryan Davis
Bill Gruener
Steven Jong

Bill Pacino, thanks a bunch!

Jon Harvey
Managing Editor
Boston Broadside

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Write for the Broadside

The *Boston Broadside* encourages Chapter members to share their skills, thoughts, and ideas with other professionals in the Chapter.

If you would like to write for an upcoming issue of the *Boston Broadside*, send an email message to bostonbroadside@comcast.net.

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