



# Boston Broadside

The Boston Chapter Newsletter

March 2009

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## Your Chapter and Society Helping You During the Economic Downturn



*By Pamela Sarantos  
STC-Boston  
Chapter President*

This is a challenging period for the

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## Visit to tcworld Conference 2008

*By Joe Campo*

In November 2008, I fulfilled a longtime goal of attending and presenting at the annual tcworld Conference in Wiesbaden, Germany. Wiesbaden is a mid-sized town of approximately 270,000 people, located about 40 minutes west of Frankfurt by train. The tcworld Conference is sponsored by tekomp, the technical communication association representing predominantly Germany, Austria, and German-speaking Switzerland.



Joe outside the Rhein-Main-Hallen conference center in Wiesbaden.

This year's three-day conference with presentations, workshops, and tutorials attracted over 2,200 visitors from all over the world, making it truly an international technical communication event. A simultaneous vendor trade fair attracted over 1,100 visitors.

The conference was extremely well organized. I attended a speaker's preconference social event at the Wiesbaden Casino, which is a beautiful piece of architecture with high vaulted ceilings done in the Classical style. After we had an introductory speech from our hosts, I networked with speakers from across the globe—an incredible experience. Within an hour, I'd spoken with people from Switzerland, Japan, Siberia, Germany, and the USA via Korea.

We were given play chips to gamble within our private casino wing, where my luck held its own. When I ventured into the real casino itself, well, back to reality. Luckily I set a low limit and still had lots of fun!

It helps if you speak German, because the bulk of the presentations are in German. One of my favorite presentations was about a statistical review by tekomp, in collaboration with a technical school, about the adoption of content management systems. Because my German is not what it used to be, I understood 60% of most presentations, at best. Tekomp did have many English-speaking tracks of interest that were well attended. My only critique is that if tekomp wants tcworld to become more of an international conference, they should expand the number of presentations in English or offer an English version of the slides.

Tekomp sponsored a get-together that night to host and introduce the Japanese Technical Communication Association, the featured guest group of the conference. What a fascinating evening this was, spent discussing technical communication and other issues with the Japanese team, as well as about 25 professionals. Once again, it was truly impressive to meet people from all over the world who had the common bond of technical communication.

My presentation was the last one on the last day after a two-hour lunch, so only about 20 people attended. My talk was about how my company migrated from RoboHelp HTML to XML DITA in one year. Afterwards, I was very happy to receive positive comments from the audience. What a blast it was to finally present before an international audience! If you're looking for an international conference in an attractive town

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*Downturn, continued from page 1*

technical communications profession in our Chapter's demographic area, as well as all over the country; some states are more affected than others. We have spoken to many members and heard many stories. Contact any council member if you believe your Chapter may be able to offer assistance.

Our Program Committee has changed its focus on program topics to include another program and a workshop related to job searching. Chapter programs are listed at [www.stcboston.org](http://www.stcboston.org).

- Join us on March 18 for the program *How to Get Hired and Stay Hired in this Bad Economy*. Northeastern is hosting this program and is offering their Burlington venue to us at no charge. We are able to offer this program free to our members; there is a small fee for nonmembers.
- We are making plans for a job searching technique workshop in April, presented by Karen Giventer. The logistics are not yet finalized, but should be available in a couple of weeks.

Following are Chapter/Society resources available to members which may be helpful to you during this time:

- SIG or monthly programs through June.
- Members have access to a list of various organizations. Reference this list to find out about their program offerings. Go to <http://www.stcboston.org/resources/organizations.shtml> to view a list of the organizations.
- Volunteer on a Chapter committee to keep up with your skills, learn new skills, and to meet more people.
- Visit the Web sites of other STC chapters to learn about webinars that may be of interest to you.
- Webcasts offered by Society that provide job hunting resources. Go to [www.stc.org](http://www.stc.org) for more information about these webcasts.
- Technical writer/communicator Google, Yahoo, or Facebook groups.
- STC's Corporate Value Program and Partnerships Program. Through this program, members may receive discounts to classes, software, and books.

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*tcworld, continued from page 1*

with an opportunity to network with fellow technical communicators from all over the world, consider attending tcworld 2009. See [www.tekom.de](http://www.tekom.de) for more information.

*Joe Campo is a senior technical writer at SolidWorks Corp. in Concord, MA.*

## Shareware Reviews

*By David Sciuto and Bill Dubie*

### Is There a DocPad in the House?

We keep several Notepad replacements in our shareware utility belts, including Text-Pad, NoteTab Light, and Notepad++. We do this because one program might have a feature that the others don't; for example, multiple-file search and replace, word count, or HTML and CSS capabilities.

Our latest ersatz Notepad is DocPad, whose interface is refreshingly different from most of the other text utilities we use. Its many features include a curious "System-G," which allows you to configure the interface yourself, something that most other utilities don't offer. Few programs offer this flexibility, which means that DocPad is suitable for both newbies and techies. Newbies will find the toolbar friendly, and techies will love the configuration editor.

Calculator, calendar, and character map are among the attractive icons in the toolbar and ensure that you stay in the program if you need to do math functions or check dates quickly. The statistics feature for documents can tell you anything you ever want to know about your text file, and then some. You can also define Word-like macros, check spelling, convert cases, and alphabetize paragraphs in DocPad. A color picker is an immense help when it comes to selecting RGB and hexadecimal codes for Web pages.

Our belts are getting a little tight with utilities, but we'll make room for DocPad.

**Where to Get It:** <http://gammadyne.com/docpad.htm>

**Price:** Free

**Requirements:** Any computer running Windows 98, NT4, 2000, ME, XP, 2003, or Vista

### Help Me If You Can...

Hey, you there! Yes, you!! You're an independent developer, a.k.a. computer programmer or geek, and you need to generate Help files for your latest software project. You need to create HTML Help and Help Web sites without much of a learning curve or expense.

Instead of going with expensive commercial practices, try HelpNDoc, a free, WYSIWYG Help generator that walks you through creating a project and generating the appropriate format for your software.

The interface is Word-familiar, and the toolbar is easy to navigate. We liked how easy it was to insert images like screen captures into our docs. We generated both .chm and .html files with HelpNDoc, though the free version appends the message: "This Help file has been generated by the freeware version of HelpNDoc" to every page—understandable, from our viewpoint. Both formats were easy to use and nearly identical.

HelpNDoc also provides for code-generation formats, including Visual Basic, C++, Delphi, and Fortran. The spelling checker and background option helped us customize our sample Help file so we could use our official Shareware Report colors.

The commercial version offers more bells and whistles and is poised to compete strongly with the big guns like RoboHelp and MadCap Flare.

*Shareware Reviews, continued on page 3*

- Boston Chapter and Society job banks.
- Consider presenting a SIG program.
- Consider writing an article for the Broadside.

Feel free to share your ideas with fellow members about how to manage during this tough economic period. If you know of groups, meetings, or programs that may interest other members, send the information to me at [president@stcboston.org](mailto:president@stcboston.org).

## Chapter Social Networking

One of our goals is to continue to try new ways to reach out to members and find out what programs/topics interest them. Included in this newsletter is information about our Chapter's Twitter and Facebook plans. We invite you to join these groups and help us develop them to benefit you.

## Competitions

Before the STACIES committee members have a chance to rest from their hard work in managing the competitions and banquet, we have them off working to start preparing for the 2009–2010 competitions. Visit the Competitions site at <http://www.stcboston.org/competitions/> to learn how you can submit your entries and about judging or volunteering on one of the committees.

Included in this newsletter are pictures from the recent award banquet held at the end of February.

## Distinguished Chapter Service Awards

I would like to end this message on a celebratory note.

We are pleased to announce that the following Chapter members are awarded the Distinguished Chapter Service Award:

- Greg Bartlett
- Linda Fritz
- Bill Gruener

They are awarded for being senior members (at least five-year continued membership) and for their continued contributions to the Chapter that add value to our member benefits.

Thank you.

**Where to Get It:** <http://www.ibe-software.com/products/software/helpndoc/>

**Price:** Free for personal use (for non-profit and non-commercial uses)

**Requirements:** Any computer running Windows XP or Vista

## Putting the “E” in E-Learning

A popular buzz term among educators these days is e-learning, or electronic learning. It can encompass many forms of conveying lessons and lectures, from blogs and wikis to Flash tutorials.

With that diversity comes myriad tools, some of which can be quite expensive. Microsoft has made available a workable, easy-to-use learning system for educators, LCDS (Learning Content Development System), a free, form-based utility that teachers can use to create e-learning content. It uses Silverlight—Microsoft's response to Adobe's Flash—to construct tutorials or interactive lessons.

You begin in a pane-based window which you navigate by drop down menus and icons. These are rather self-explanatory. Any media you wish to include—video, sound, images—must reside in a proprietary media folder; so be sure to copy those files to that folder.

One of the best features is the ability to preview work before publishing it. This option allows you to see how your lesson will evolve and how your learners will interact with it. You can then post your coursework on a host system, make it available for download, or burn it to CD/DVD.

Microsoft also mentors an active learning community to guide you through the rough patches.

When you build a suitable template, you can reuse that content in future lessons or courses, ensuring consistency across your work and strengthening learner familiarity with the environment.

In this case, don't give an “Apple” to the teacher—give Windows.

**Where to Get It:** <http://www.microsoft.com/learning/tools/lcds/default.msp>

**Price:** Free (you must register to download)

**Requirements:** Any computer running Windows XP, Vista, or Vista 64 (see site for further requirements)

## A Photo Finish

Among free image editors, we like Irfanview and The GIMP, but a new player has grabbed our short attention span. Photoscape has an unusual but highly intuitive interface, and its features can compete with many commercial packages you'll find in the marketplace. Photoscape offers myriad features, including an editor, a batch editor, animated GIF creator, and a splitter (which can help you place your image in a table on a Web page).

We were impressed with the editor and its capabilities, and it took only a few minutes to navigate the many choices. The interface slightly resembled Photoshop, and its features enabled us to resize and image, frame it with one of the many frames included, annotate it with text and balloons, and even crop and create flowcharts with its objects. You'll go crazy with the available effects you can use to sharpen, brighten, and colorize. Image too dark? Check out the backlight feature to help make objects visible.

Guess what! You can also combine images to create a large montage. With the print feature, you can align your photos and choose the DPI to print it. Be sure to try the many layouts you can select.

The one feature we wished Photoscape had would be notification when an upgrade is available, but that's a quibble that won't prevent our recommendation.

## Hillary Hart Announces Her Candidacy for Second Vice-President, Society for Technical Communication

By Hillary Hart

I am a candidate for STC's second vice-president in the upcoming election (voting starts March 9, 2009). Here is why I am running.

As an active participant in STC at the local and international levels for 21 years and currently as Director at Large, I can see that STC has made some great strides in the past couple of years by:

- Extending its global reach and mission through a stronger presence in several international standards groups, such as OASIS, W3C, and ISO
- Providing more services to member communities, including the Leadership Community Resource to help communities train new community leaders
- Advancing the profession by sponsoring the industry/academic partnership that is defining a body of knowledge for technical communication
- Developing a new section of stc.org with concrete examples of the *value* of technical communication

STC is now a more transparent organization that has learned to evaluate its programs and goals through strategic planning and processes such as the Strategic Program Analysis.

On the other hand, STC must continue to evolve and do so rapidly. The Society must adjust services and processes quickly to keep pace with international economic and technological developments while at the same time maintain a long-range vision of the value of technical communication. And STC is still not as relevant to all technical communicators, particularly younger ones, as it should be.

I would work to enact these specific improvements to STC's benefit to members and the profession:

- 1) Continue to provide services to members who cannot rejoin because they are unemployed
- 2) Increase the number of free or low-fee webinars geared to professional development

*Candidacy, continued on page 5*

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Don't be a "Photoscape" goat—try out Photoscape!

**Where to Get It:** <http://www.photoscape.org/ps/main/index.php>

**Requirements:** Any computer running Windows XP, Windows Server, Windows 2000, or Vista (see site for further requirements)

**Price:** *Free* (donations appreciated)

## Networking: Give to Receive, but Give Unconditionally



By Cheryl Landes, STC Associate Fellow, Senior Member, STC-Boston and Puget Sound Chapters

As the economy continues to decline, more articles about networking are appearing in professional development organizations' publications and career development sites. Networking, the authors say, is the key to finding new jobs or contracts from clients. But often, these authors provide few, if any, tips on how we should network. Typically, these articles focus on the receiving end of the deal. Our

objective in any networking experience is to get a job or a freelance project now.

This is not how networking works, according to Mark Tranter, a recruiter and career coach at CFO Selections in Bellevue, Washington. "The most powerful thing you can do as a networker is give to get," he said at *Job Search Strategies in a Slow Economy*, the monthly meeting of the Puget Sound Chapter of the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) in Seattle on January 21. "Give to get is my motto."

Instead of approaching networking solely as receiving something from someone, ask the colleagues you meet, "How can I help you?" Be sincere in your request. If they respond with a request and you agree to help, fulfill your commitment as promptly as possible. When you're genuine about helping someone and carry out your commitment, you will be remembered for your kindness—not because you expect something in return.

"Maintaining your contacts is also important," Tranter said. Often this can be as simple as writing an e-mail to forward some information related to a colleague's interests. For example, two weeks ago, I met an entrepreneur in Seattle—a referral by a former coworker for freelance work. While we sipped coffee and munched on biscotti at Starbucks, we talked about creating tutorials in Adobe Captivate. A few days after our meeting, I saw an article that described the new features in the latest version of Captivate that was just released. I forwarded a copy of the article to her. One of the new features described in the article may help resolve a challenge her instructional design team is facing for one large project.

During the PRSA meeting, Tranter stressed that networking takes time. Don't expect results overnight. Networking is like tending a garden. When you plant the seeds and care for the seedlings as they grow, you'll produce a healthy, beautiful crop. With the same patience, cultivating leads in your network will produce the same results.

What are the best ways to network? Tranter suggested three:

- 1) Get involved in professional organizations in your field, such as STC. Joining is not enough, he said. When you volunteer for activities in these organizations, other people in your network become acquainted with your work and how you relate to others. This is a good way to get referrals and recommendations when you are looking for another job or project. Through my involvement in STC and the American Society for Indexing (ASI), I have met and become friends with a lot of wonderful colleagues and honed skills that I would never have developed elsewhere. Not only have these experiences

*Networking, continued on page 5*

3) Target even more resources to the Body of Knowledge Portal project to give members the knowledge they need to retune or refit their skills for changing economic and business conditions.

4) Plan a Summit to be held outside the United States.

5) Target more services and information to technical communicators under forty. They are the future of the profession.

As an educational association, STC can best serve its membership by providing access to knowledge and by educating the public and employers about what technical communicators really do. As an educator, I know something about reaching out to diverse audiences on a daily basis. And as co-chair of the STC Body of Knowledge (BOK) task force, I am working with a terrific team of academic and industry professionals to build a web-based portal that will make accessible the body of technical/communication knowledge.

Knowledge is power. With job layoffs, cutbacks in institutional budgets, and the disappearance of companies, the one constant that cannot be reduced is our individual and collective knowledge.

Help me empower our membership. Thanks so very much for your support.

Hillary Hart

Candidate for 2009 Second Vice-President, STC

[hart@mail.utexas.edu](mailto:hart@mail.utexas.edu)

<http://www.cace.utexas.edu/prof/hart/>

512-471-463



## STC's 2009 Chapter Renewal Challenge

It's time for chapters to warm up and enter the starting gates for STC's 2009 Chapter Renewal Challenge!

Running from February 5 to March 20, chapters with the highest renewal percentage in their category (a category is based on the

*STC Renewal, continued on page 6*

contributed greatly to my career success, but I've also had a lot of fun along the way!

2) Attend meetings outside your discipline. Often, the leads you generate there produce unexpected results. One of my successful encounters was in the spring of 1998, when I attended a trade show in Portland, Oregon, sponsored by the State of Oregon.

The show was advertised as an event where business owners could meet representatives from state agencies to promote their services. When I arrived, I quickly realized that the event was misrepresented in the ad. As I pondered what to do, I met Ted and Beverly Paul, the owners of Beautiful America Publishing, in Woodburn, Oregon. They bought a booth at the fair in hopes that they could sell their publishing services to the state. As they were setting up, they were asking themselves the same question, "Why are we here?" Our common question sparked a long conversation, when finally they asked me about my profession. I mentioned my experience as a travel writer and gave them a copy of my promotional packet.

Two weeks later, they called and asked me to update Beautiful America's *Seattle*, originally written by true crime author Ann Rule 10 years earlier. I rewrote the book, which was published in 1999. My version of the book is now in its second edition, published in 2006. One year after my first edition of Beautiful America's *Seattle* appeared in the bookstores, the Pauls hired me to update another travel book, Beautiful America's *Idaho*. They have also referred me to other potential clients seeking writers for travel projects.

3) Speak at conferences and other events. This is a great way to promote yourself and to improve your speaking skills. Communication is important in any type of work, and by speaking in front of groups, we learn about how to tailor presentations to audiences with different backgrounds and learning styles so that they will receive and understand our messages effectively.

"Relationship building is like a PR (Public Relations) campaign," Tranter concluded. We must constantly create awareness of our existence, but also be cognizant of giving over getting. When we give unconditionally, we pave the way to receive. It's a never-ending process that, with continued diligence, produces ongoing benefits.

*Cheryl Landes, an award-winning technical writer and STC Associate Fellow, is the owner of Tabby Cat Communications in Seattle. She has more than 18 years of experience as a technical writer in several industries: computer software, marine transportation, manufacturing, and the trade press. She is the past president of the Pacific Northwest Chapter of the American Society for Indexing (PNW/ASI) and is active in the Society for Technical Communication on the chapter (Boston and Puget Sound) and international levels. She speaks frequently at STC and ASI meetings throughout the United States and Canada.*

## Defining a Body of Knowledge

*By Hillary Hart*

STC has meant a lot to my professional growth over the past 20+ years as a teacher and practitioner of technical communication, and I want to help STC expand its educational mission for all technical communicators.

It is time our profession had a defined body of knowledge (BOK). Why?

1) Technical communication cannot be a profession without a defined body of knowledge.

2) We cannot define our value to business or society without a BOK.

The data that others and I have collected shows that communicators seem to be spending about the same amount of time on communication processes as they are on creating end-user documents or products. If we want to maximize our value to the business

*Body of Knowledge, continued on page 6*

### STC Renewal, continued from page 5

number of members in your chapter) will win these great prizes:

- Two free registrations to the STC's 2009 Technical Communication Summit in Atlanta, GA
- One 19" flat screen LCD television
- One Epson Stylus Multifunction Photo Printer / Copier / Scanner
- Two \$25 gift cards for [Amazon.com](http://Amazon.com)

### Ready, Set, Go!

Each chapter competes against other chapters in its category. To be eligible to compete in the challenge, the chapter must reach a qualifying renewal rate of 70 percent.

The chapter with the highest renewal percentage, in their category, wins! STC will keep track of the renewals and post rankings on [www.stc.org](http://www.stc.org) starting February 16.

### STC Retention Awards

STC will honor chapters with the highest retention rate with special recognition at the 2009 Technical Communication Summit, May 3–6 in Atlanta Georgia.

### STC Renewal Application

Renewal applications can be found online at: <http://www.stc.org/membership/join01.asp>

- Winners will be announced on March 27
- Winning percentages include all members that have renewed for 2009!
- All free registrations must be used for STC's 2009 Technical Communication Summit in Atlanta, GA.

### Help from STC

Chapter officers have 24/7 access to the LCR Web site where information about who has renewed and yet to renew can be found.

Additional renewal information and tips will be added to the LCR website.

Questions? Please contact Stacey O'Donnell at [stacey.odonnell@stc.org](mailto:stacey.odonnell@stc.org).



### Body of Knowledge, continued from page 5

functions of corporations and agencies, we need a body of knowledge that will make that value clear to employers.

The BOK task force that I co-chair with Mark Hanigan is working hard to develop a Knowledge Portal that will make accessible, in one easy-to-navigate Web-based portal, the body of technical/communication knowledge that has evolved over time.

The Knowledge Portal will fill these critical needs:

- New practitioners need to see their professional development pathways spelled out, along with concomitant educational/training opportunities.
- Veteran practitioners need a means for assessing their progress and determining what additional training they may need.
- Academic and training professionals need a source of assessment criteria for their programs.
- Executives, who may never have heard of technical communication, need a place to find out what technical communicators can do for their company.

For me, the most amazing aspect of the BOK project has been seeing how productively STC members collaborate over time and distance. The BOK “map” of domains and skills received hundreds of helpful suggestions last June at the Summit in Philadelphia. And last September, when the proposed site map for this portal was posted on the STC Web site, over 150 STC members from all over the globe provided comments. Now we are populating the map nodes with content and will showcase our progress at the upcoming Summit in Atlanta, where we hope to gain more contributors. Such collective knowledge making is powerful indeed—imagine all 13,000 STC members worldwide contributing their piece of the knowledge puzzle.

With job layoffs, cutbacks in institutional budgets, and the disappearance of companies, the one constant that cannot be reduced is your knowledge—knowledge of how to do many things in addition to writing clear documentation.

- Knowledge of what it takes to create, manage, distribute, and archive information in specific media for specific users
- Knowledge of the processes that enhance business development because they enhance internal as well as external communication
- Knowledge of the social, cultural, and even health impacts of the technologies being marketed under the name of progress
- Knowledge of how to help people use technologies safely and wisely

Your knowledge is your power—in any economic climate. Stay tuned for more BOK updates.

Hillary Hart  
STC Director at Large  
Candidate for 2009 Second Vice-President  
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<http://www.caee.utexas.edu/prof/hart/>

### Minimalism Workshop in Burlington, MA

*Receive a 10% Discount!*

JoAnn Hackos is presenting a workshop titled *Minimalism: Creating Manuals People Can Use* on April 15–16, hosted by Oracle. STC members who contact Lovonya Thomas to register receive a 10% discount:

Lovonya Thomas, *Events Coordinator*  
Comtech Services  
(303) 232-7586  
[lovonya.thomas@comtech-serv.com](mailto:lovonya.thomas@comtech-serv.com)

## Grammar, Anyone? Commas, Parentheses, and Em Dashes

By Ms. Grammar

We often include information in a sentence that needs to be set apart in some way. Typically, commas, parentheses, or em dashes are used. But which should it be? For example, in the following sentence, would you use a pair of commas, parentheses, or em dashes?

The power plug condition \_\_\_ whether it is too loose or too tight in the outlet \_\_\_ can cause several problems.

### Guidelines

According to *The Great Grammar Challenge*, the answer depends on the intent of the sentence, and in many cases, you can justify whatever you choose. *Great Grammar* suggests the following guidelines, which are easy to remember and can help you apply punctuation consistently. Of course, if your company has a style guide covering the use of these punctuation marks, you will need to follow the style guide.

- Use em dashes to **emphasize** information, or to set off a series that already includes commas. Em dashes tell the reader: Read this information—it's important!
- In general writing, use parentheses to **de-emphasize** information. Parentheses tell the reader: Skip this information if desired; it's not that important.
- In technical writing, use parentheses for **additional information** that elaborates on or clarifies the sentence. Parentheses tell the reader: Here is more information about this topic.
- Use commas for information that **goes with the flow** of the sentence. Commas tell the reader: This information is as important as anything in the sentence.

Using these guidelines, there could be two choices for the example above, depending upon the writer's intent; either commas (if the information goes along with the flow of the sentence) or parentheses (if it clarifies the sentence). Rewrote this sentence.

### More Information

As you would expect, *The Chicago Manual of Style* has much more to offer on these

*Grammar, continued on page 8*

*Minimalism, continued from page 6*

You will learn how to reduce the quantity of documentation you produce by focusing on the needs of the users, eliminating unnecessary verbiage, and aligning your documentation strategy with your company's market position.

For more information about the workshop, go to <http://www.comtech-serv.com/workshops/index.shtml>.

## Technical Editing SIG Meeting Offers Wiki Demo to Full House

By Rick Lippincott

On February 17, one of the largest Boston Chapter SIG meetings in recent memory took place when Rolfe Dlugy-Hegwer presented *Using Wikis to Write and Edit GREAT Documentation* at Middlesex Community College. Reflecting the growing interest in wiki as a technical communication tool, approximately 50 people turned out for the meeting.

Rolfe shared his experience developing and championing wikis at The MathWorks, as well as some personal wiki activity. He gave an overview of wiki development, including the origin of the word “wiki,” (Hawaiian word for “quick”) and explained how it differs from other methods of technical communication.

Rolfe stressed that wikis promote a collaborative effort and shared ownership of data, that make it evolutionary in nature and responsive to change. Rolfe also noted that the information on a wiki is consensus knowledge, which is different from authoritative knowledge, and presents an area of concern for technical communicators. Rolfe explained that it's possible for a wiki user to alter content by adding information that conventional wisdom holds true, but may actually be erroneous. If other wiki users also believe the conventional wisdom information is true and add further wiki changes in support of it, the consensus knowledge that develops can be the dominant information, and the authoritative knowledge may be overlooked.

Rolfe also discussed technical aspects, such as in-house versus hosted wikis, noting that there are advantages to each, depending on the specific needs of the user. Rolfe demonstrated wiki techniques by making live updates using the TiddlyWiki system (<http://www.tiddlywiki.com/>), and later by showing a history of updates and changes on a Wikipedia page.

Rolfe stressed that part of the success of editing a wiki is to follow some basic rules regarding input from the users: Be polite, assume good faith, avoid personal attacks, and be receptive. There was active participation by several of the audience members. A team of technical communicators from IBM shared their experiences in creating a series of wikis. Their talk led to cautions regarding the dangers of inadvertently posting copyright material on a wiki (because copy-and-paste is so easy to do). In addition to the IBM contributions to the discussion, technical communicators from Adobe, FLIR, and American Science & Engineering also offered their opinions and information.

Informal discussion on real-world wiki usage continued past the scheduled end time of the meeting. Rolfe wrapped up the evening by stating the presentation would be available for download from his Web site.

*Rick Lippincott is a senior member of the STC, currently serving as the Second Vice President and acting Treasurer of the Boston Chapter. He works as a technical writer at American Science & Engineering in Billerica, MA. He currently serves as the administrator for the Chapter' Facebook group and for the Twitter feed. He can be reached at [rjl6955@hotmail.com](mailto:rjl6955@hotmail.com). You can follow him on Twitter at [rjl6955](https://twitter.com/rjl6955) or find him on Facebook by searching his name.*

punctuation marks. Regarding the resource for this article, Ms. Grammar has mentioned *The Great Grammar Challenge* before. Written by Priscilla S. Taylor and Mary Stoughton and published by EEI Press (1997), *Great Grammar* lives up to its name. Look for it on the [EEI Communications site](#).

### Writing for the Web?

If you are preparing content for the Web, read Peter Sheerin's discussion on correct codes for special characters, [The Trouble with EM 'n EN \(and Other Shady Characters\)](#). Although written quite awhile ago, Sheerin's article is packed with information.

### Test Yourself

In the following sentences, choose em dashes, commas, or parentheses to set off the information.

- 1) Only two types of users \_\_\_ engineer or administrator \_\_\_ can access the system.
- 2) After the first day of the conference \_\_\_ December 4 \_\_\_ the venue was changed due to the storm damage at the Convention Center.
- 3) The diagram shows the five customer support stages \_\_\_ not including the initial customer inquiry \_\_\_ and identifies the employee responsible at each stage.
- 4) Hillary Brown \_\_\_ who worked at IBM before joining GoDaddy \_\_\_ has been promoted to vice president.
- 5) The start parameters \_\_\_ the original selections made in the Define Project dialog box \_\_\_ are deleted from the database after the project is run and saved.
- 6) The warning message \_\_\_ which flashes red in the status bar \_\_\_ must be acknowledged before the process will continue.

### Answers

Ms. Grammar's selections are as follows, with the reasons listed after the sentences. See if you agree.

- 1) Only two types of user—engineer or administrator—can log on to the main system. *Important information the user needs to know.*
- 2) After the first day of the conference (December 4) the venue was changed due to the storm damage at the Convention Center. *Take your pick: it either elaborates on the sentence or is information that can be skipped.*

Grammar, continued on page 9

## STC-Boston Inaugurates Facebook and Twitter Sites

By Rick Lippincott

The STC-Boston Chapter is initiating two new methods of communicating with members and nonmembers through the online/social network systems Facebook and Twitter. The two new communications channels are intended to supplement existing methods of communication, such as the Broadside, STC Info e-mails, and the Chapter's Web site.

Twitter and Facebook have both experienced explosive growth in recent months. Both were originally intended for use as relatively lightweight means of contacting friends and family. Lately, creative users have found that they have applications for professional, technical, and even political organizations.

One may ask, "What are they, and how can they help the STC-Boston Chapter with its mission?" The answer is in the paragraphs that follow.

### Twitter

The STC Boston Chapter has established a Twitter feed site at <http://twitter.com/STC-Boston>.

#### What is Twitter, and How Did It Originate?

Twitter (<http://twitter.com>) is a free web-and-cellular telephone application that utilizes the cell phone Short Message System (SMS, more commonly known as "text messages") for extremely rapid communication to a network of followers. A twitter message (or "tweet") sent out by a user will almost instantly arrive as a text message on the cell phones and/or Twitter Web pages of all those who have signed on as followers.

Although text messages are the intended delivery method for tweets, they are actually optional. One can follow and read all tweets via the Web interface.

Twitter began in 2006 as a research and development project at the San Francisco podcasting company Odeo. The developers sought to utilize the cellular telephony standard for text messages, and created a Web-based backbone to support the function. The original idea was to provide a method for individuals to instantly contact a circle of friends or relatives using one text message, eliminating the need to retype the message for each intended recipient.

Twitter was not widely known for the first two years or so of service (although there were pockets of users in the technical communication field; for example, there was a Twitter network established and used during the 2008 STC Summit in Philadelphia) but gained national attention in the second half of 2008 when it was widely utilized by both the Obama and McCain campaigns. Twitter allowed the candidates' organizations to issue rapid calls for volunteer activity as needed in specific locations. By this time, Twitter had achieved the ability to organize instant gatherings for action as envisioned by STC Summit keynote speaker Howard Rheingold in his book *Smart Mobs*.

Twitter is able to support large numbers of followers. One of the largest Twitter sites at this time is Pete Cashmore's mashable site (<http://twitter.com/mashable>), which boasted over 150,000 followers as of late February 2009.

Twitter is a free service, but the receipt of text messages by cell may incur a charge based on an individual user's service plan.

#### Boston Chapter's Twitter Feed

STC-Boston Chapter has already begun to utilize Twitter as a service to provide alerts and pings regarding upcoming events. As currently planned, the Chapter will use Twitter primarily to provide alerts and reminders, such as:

- Approaching deadlines for program meetings or SIG meeting registrations

Facebook and Twitter, continued on page 9

- 3) The diagram shows the five customer support tasks (not including the initial customer inquiry) and identifies the employee responsible for each task. *Clarifies the information.*
- 4) Hillary Brown, who worked at IBM before joining GoDaddy, has been promoted to vice president. *Goes with the flow.*
- 5) The start parameters (the original selections made in the Define Project dialog box) are deleted from the database after the project is run and saved. *Clarifies the information.*
- 6) The warning message—which flashes at the bottom of the screen—must be acknowledged before the process will continue. *Important information the user needs to know.*

**Editor's Note:** [Source: STC Phoenix Chapter Rough Draft Newsletter, January/February 2009 Issue](#)

## New Study Reconfirms Importance of Headings and Reader Preference for Information Mapping

In a recent study published in the *Journal of Information Science*, Marieke Kools, Robert A.C. Ruiter, Margaretha W.J. van de Wiel, and Gerjo Kok of the University of Maastricht in the Netherlands explored the effects of the frequency of headings on search speed and structural preferences.

### About the Study

The study compared an original version of a five-page health education text with 23 headings to three alternate versions: one with no headings and two with 44 and 41 headings respectively. The Information Mapping method (IMAP) was used to create the versions with more headings, as IMAP was “the only method known to the authors which (among other things) offers very strict and explicit guidelines on how information should be segmented and labeled with headings.” The first IMAP version reordered the information and the second version kept the original order

### Headings Increase Search Speed

While the study did not find any significant difference in search speed among the three

*Information Mapping, continued on page 10*

- Day-of-event reminders of meetings
- Announcements of new information on the Chapter Web site
- Announcements of the release of new editions of online publications such as the *Broadsider Intercom*
- Announcements of webinars or other online activity that is accessible to STC-Boston Chapter members
- “Re-tweets” (that is, forwarded tweets) of other information that may be of relevance to technical communicators
- Late urgent announcements of meeting or event changes (For example, if winter weather requires the cancellation of a program meeting, it can be sent out via Twitter and received by subscribers en route to the event.)

The messages will be brief (tweets are limited to 140 characters) and often may include a “TinyURL” or similar compressed link so that users can find more detailed information. The message volume from the Boston Chapter Twitter site will be low, usually about 5–10 messages per week.

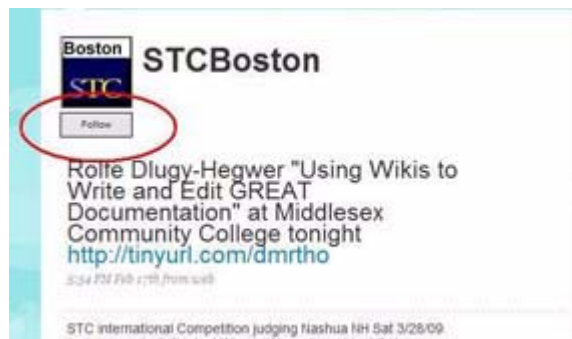
At this time, other STC chapters and SIGs have established Twitter sites. The list at this time includes the Chicago, Puget Sound, Indiana, and Houston chapters, in addition to the AccessAbility SIG.

### How to Follow Boston Chapter on Twitter

To sign up for Twitter, go to the Twitter Web site at <http://twitter.com> and follow the directions to set up a user account. You will need an active e-mail address and a cell phone number, if you opt to receive tweets via text message. Also have ready an idea for a Twitter user name (Tip: Keep it short—Twitter allows direct messages to other users but the user name counts against the 140-character tweet character limit).

When you have signed up and logged in to the service, go to the STC Boston Twitter site at <http://twitter.com/STCBoston>. Click on the **Follow** button (See Figure 1) to begin.

Figure 1



The STC-Boston Twitter page’s typical appearance, showing a number of recent tweets. Note the red circle around the **Follow** button. Twitter users click on this button to receive site updates.

STC-Boston Twitter followers are not limited to Chapter members; anyone who signs up for Twitter may follow the site. Also, it is possible to view (but not follow) the Chapter's Twitter feed simply by going to the Web page at the URL in the paragraph above.

*Facebook and Twitter, continued on page 10*

versions with headings, it did reconfirm that “participants’ search times with the texts that contained headings were shorter than with the text that had no headings.” The researchers observed that this finding is “in line with other research into the effects of headings on search speed,” and that it “strengthens the notion of headings as effective ‘signals’ of textual content.” The number of headings was not found to make a significant difference in this short example, although the researchers commented that different results might be found were a similar study to be done on longer health education texts which could require participants to use a different search strategy. In this study, participants simply scanned through the information to find what they needed and did not make use of tables of contents and other access aids provided. This search approach would not be feasible for a much longer document.

### **Participants Prefer Information Mapping**

The study also found that the participants preferred the layout of the reordered IMAP version of the text over all three other versions on several subjective evaluations. In fact, “this was the only version evaluated more positively than the ‘no-headings’ text.” The researchers conclude that “depending on the experience of readers this specific kind of explicit structuring may have advantageous effects. With everything else being equal, this may incline health education designers to opt for many headings and relatively high segmentation of text.”

### **Conclusion**

The purpose of this study was to test the effect of the frequency of headings and order on information retrieval times. It did not compare the quality and readability of the original text to the other versions, nor, as the researchers point out, did it measure the participants’ understanding of the information.

Additional information and research could help provide a better understanding of these findings and how they can be used to improve the effectiveness of health education texts.

### **Reference**

The study, originally published online July 3, 2008, is titled *The Effects of Headings in Information Mapping on Search Speed and*

*Information Mapping, continued on page 11*

Tweets for the Boston Chapter can only be sent by the page owner (currently this writer); however, Twitter subscribers can contact him via Twitter (or other methods) to request tweeting specific information.

## **Facebook**

### **Background**

Facebook (<http://www.facebook.com>) is an increasingly popular, free Web-based social network that has its origins in the Boston area. It was created in 2003 by Harvard student Mark Zuckerberg and intended as a method for college students and alumni to maintain contact with each other. Access was expanded to larger circles of students, and in September 2006 opened up to anyone age 13 or over with a valid e-mail address.

Facebook allows posting of updates and photographs, messaging between members, game playing and exchanges, and the formation of social networks. It is increasingly used as a method for groups of friends to maintain contact. Although originally aimed at students, adults age 40+ currently form the fastest-growing group of Facebook users. The primary method of communication for Facebook members is the status update, a text block that typically describes what the poster is doing at a given moment.

Facebook has been compared to blogging, but differs in that Facebook comments are typically shorter than blog posts, and blogs typically allow the inclusion of graphics and links. In Facebook, users can upload graphics but cannot display them in the status updates, and while URLs can be included in the status updates, the usage isn't as flexible as on blog pages.

One person has used a party as an analogy: Facebook users are the guests circulating, small-talking, and catching up with each other as they fetch drinks and grab snacks from the table. Bloggers are the people gathered in the corner having the intense discussion of politics and social issues. Facebook allows the creation of “groups.” These are locations that Facebook members can join to post information of mutual interest.

### **The Boston Chapter's Facebook Group**

The Boston Chapter has established a Facebook group (See Figure 2). However, unlike Twitter, it can be accessed only by persons who have signed up for Facebook. The current membership is relatively small but includes several active and former Chapter members, as well as other interested individuals located as far away as France.

Like the Chapter's Twitter feed, membership to the STC-Boston group will not be limited to either Chapter or even STC members. We view this as a method of outreach and information, and the information through the group will be the same type of information available on publicly viewable pages of the Chapter's Web site. (To be clear, neither the Chapter's job bank nor the membership database will be accessible through Facebook.)

Facebook users can post updates to Chapter activity, deadlines, and functions with more detail than they can with Twitter. When the Chapter's group page is updated, a notification goes to all Facebook members who belong to the group.

The Facebook information complements both the Chapter's Web site and STC Info, because it allows greater detail than Twitter messages, and posting to the group page is open to anyone who joins the site. A Blackberry or similar device can be used to access Facebook when away from a computer; however, the Web-based interface is the most popular method of access.



*Facebook and Twitter, continued on page 11*

Evaluation of a Brief Health Education Text and is available online at <http://jis.sagepub.com/cgi/content/abstract/34/6/833> or in the Journal of Information Science 2008; 34; 833.

**Editor's Note:** Source: [Information Mapping, News and Events, Volume 3, Issue 1, February 2009](#)

## Election Planning Underway for Boston Chapter's 2009–2010 Council

By Arun Jain, First Vice President

The day-to-day operations of the Boston Chapter are run by an elected administrative council. The council is responsible for bringing you programs, SIGs, and workshops; a bi-monthly newsletter, managing the job bank, and many other functions. Planning is now underway for elections to the 2009–2010 council.

Per the Chapter's bylaws, the STC-Boston Council has 12 voting members; six officers and six members-at-large (council Members). All officers and council members attend monthly council meetings in which we brainstorm, discuss, plan, and vote for ideas for bringing valuable programs and services to our members. In addition to voting rights, each council member leads a particular Chapter function, such as membership drives, sponsorship, programs and public relations. For a detailed description of these positions and council responsibilities, you can refer to the bylaws posted at: <http://www.stcboston.org/ftp/downloads/bylaws2006.pdf>.

### Open Council Seats

Planning is underway for the Boston Chapter's 2009–2010 council elections, to be held this April. Here is list of the open seats:

**First Vice-President:** Leads the Program Committee and the Council Nominating Committee

**Second Vice-President:** Serves as the Volunteer Coordinator who takes over the programs in the second half of the program year

*Election Planning, continued on page 12*

Figure 2



The Boston Chapter Facebook page (typical view).

Unlike Twitter or the Chapter's Web site, anyone who is a member of the group can initiate a discussion, post information, or post photographs. Currently, there are no plans to moderate the discussions.

In addition to the Boston chapter, other STC-related Facebook groups include the Houston, Montreal, and Puget Sound chapters, as well as a group page for the 2009 Summit and a *Society for Technical Communication Members on Facebook* group.

### How to Join the Group

To sign up for Facebook, go to <http://www.facebook.com> and follow the instructions to create a new account. You will need a valid e-mail address. You will be invited to fill out information about yourself, upload photos, and search for people you may know who are on Facebook. You may do as much or as little of this as you want. When your account is established, enter "STC Boston" in the search field (See Figure 3) on the right side of the blue top menu bar on the page.

Figure 3



Enter "STC Boston" in the search window to find the chapter's Facebook group page.

The search result should return a list of hits, including the Chapter's page. Click on the link for the Chapter's group, it will take you to the group page and a link to join.

### Conclusion

The STC-Boston Chapter has a long history of being at the forefront of changes in communication with its members. We have seen the transition of our Chapter newsletter from a paper to a Web-based system, the introduction and continuing upgrades to our Web site, increasing use of e-mail and other Internet methods of communication, and now the introduction of new social networking tools to increase both our visibility to the world as well as our contact with other Chapter members. The adoption of Facebook and Twitter is one more step in an ongoing process of adapting to change and adopting new tools to aid our profession.

*Rick Lippincott is a senior member of the STC, currently serving as the Second Vice President and acting Treasurer of the Boston Chapter. He works as a technical writer at American Science & Engineering in Billerica, MA. He currently serves as the administrator for the Chapter's Facebook group and for the Twitter feed. He can be*

*Facebook and Twitter, continued on page 11*

**Treasurer:** Serves as Accounting/ Finance liaison to STC

**Secretary:** Responsible for meeting minutes for council meetings

**Council Members (four seats):** Each council member will lead a particular area for the Chapter (e.g., marketing communications, sponsorship, public relations, membership, etc.)

If you are interested in learning more about participating on the council, contact Arun Jain at [lstvp@stcboston.org](mailto:lstvp@stcboston.org) or (978) 852-7019 soon to get more information. We need to get our slate together by the end of March. We look forward to hearing from you and to your joining our 2009–2010 team.



### 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](http://www.stc.org)

Boston Chapter

[www.stcboston.org](http://www.stcboston.org)

reached at [rjl6955@hotmail.com](mailto:rjl6955@hotmail.com). You can follow him on Twitter at [rjl6955](https://twitter.com/rjl6955) or find him on Facebook by searching for his name.



## And the Winner Is....

By Christine Shirey



Steve Straight (emcee)

The suspense at the ninth annual STACIES awards ceremony was accompanied by a drum roll as Best of Show trophies were awarded in three categories:

**Online Communication:** Progress Software Corporation, *Managing Operational Visibility with Actional*, Elaine Rosenberg

**Technical Art and Illustration:** Telerik Inc, *Telerik .NET Toolset Demo CD*, Dimitre Taslakov and the Telerik Documentation Team



Dimitre Taslakov with the Best of Show trophy for Technical Art and Illustration

**Technical Publications:** Bose Corporation, *LIFE-STYLE® Homewide Powered Speaker System*, Chris Dobrowolski, Ronald Wilson, Judy Higgins, and Donald Cowan



Ronald Wilson with the Best of Show trophy for Technical Publications

Neither applause nor laughter were in short supply as emcee, Steve Straight, presented the awards and the witty and talented BossTunes (Steve Jong, Taryn Light, Ed Marshall, Val Rushanan, and Fred Wersan) provided musical interludes.

*Winner, continued on page 13*

## 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. Many thanks to the following people for their contributions:

### Broadside Staff

Sharon Popovsky  
*Managing Editor*  
Karlyne Hutchings  
*Copy Editor*

.....

### This Issue's Contributors:

Joe Campo  
Bill Dubie  
Hillary Hart  
Arun Jain  
Cheryl Landes  
Rick Lippincott  
Pamela Sarantos  
David Sciuto  
Christine Shirey

### Thank you, everyone!

.....

### 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 e-mail to: [boston.broadside@gmail.com](mailto:boston.broadside@gmail.com)

*By submitting an article, you implicitly grant a license to this newsletter to run the article and for other STC publications to reprint it without permission. Copyright is held by the writer. In your cover letter, please let the editor know if this article has run elsewhere, and if it has been submitted for consideration to other publications.*



BossTunes (entertainment)

Awarded by the STC-Boston and Northern New England chapters, each STACI (STC Technical Achievement in Communicating Information) prize recognizes contributors to a winning entry in the annual STC competitions, held each fall. In addition to recognizing the fine work of all winners at the Merit, Excellence, Distinction, and Best of Show levels, the program included acknowledging the efforts of competition volunteers and judges, coordinated by Mark Decker.

To see the names of all winners recognized that evening, as well as the names of the many behind-the-scene judges and other volunteers who made the competition possible, see the [STACIES Program Booklet](#).

## The Technical Communication Summit



[The Technical Communication Summit](#), the annual conference of the Society for Technical Communication, will be held May 3–6, 2009.

**New This Year:** STC Increases the Value of Your Conference Experience Tenfold! STC will capture the content of more than 100 speaker presentations (audio and visuals) and make them available online to attendees following the conference at no additional cost. Having to choose which one of the concurrent education sessions to attend is no longer a problem. Now you can “attend” all the sessions that interest you. Hear and see every session you want. Don’t miss out on subject matter that is important to you because of overlapping sessions, or simply use the Conference@Click to refresh your memory of the points made by the speakers at the ones you did attend. Attendees will receive a unique access code to retrieve the captured sessions.