

## My Virtual Reference Desk

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

by Liz W. Tompkins

[Reprinted with author's permission from the Navigate! online magazine, at <http://www.netscapepress.com/zine/9605/exploring/site>]

Anyone who is easily lured into expanding his or her intellect with as much reference material as is electronically available will want to place this library at the top of his or her bookmark file. As you already know, the Internet is swiftly becoming the world's largest library. It houses—among a great many other items—millions of books, artifacts, images, documents, maps, and real-time news. Due to this complexity, some brave soul felt the need to organize the most useful of this information. Thus, My Virtual Reference Desk was born.

Upon first arrival, you can pick and choose from two menus. Although the graphics version takes longer to load, it's well worth the extra time. Why? The animated graphics hold your interest in this full-of-text world and provide an extremely user-friendly menu. If you wish to skip the visually appealing, opt for the text version for materials retrievable at a quicker, though not as easy to read, clip.

What will you find inside the desk? 5,345 links to reference materials increasing at warp speeds. You name it, it's here, categorized fundamentally into three centers of information.

The first center is the Virtual Facts on File—an online cabinet with organized shelves containing the likes of encyclopedias, dictionaries, language translators, thesauri, quotes, libraries, maps, phone books, and electronic texts, to name just a few. This is where you'll want to stop for literary-oriented materials.

Seeking more humanly appealing materials in the arts, business, software, health, humor, music, or political fields? Then you'll most likely wish to stop at the second center, My Virtual Encyclopedia.

The third gold nugget of information can be found at My Virtual Newspaper. You'll be greeted with instantly attainable weather reports that are updated every four hours from the Weather Channel. Scroll down and you'll find the freshest of news headlines

from around the world. Whether you're looking for college news or papers from Africa, Asia, Canada, Europe, Australia, South America, or the United States, you will undoubtedly find them here. In the miscellaneous news section you'll find technical reports, the latest sports scores, new Web site announcements, right down to everyone's favorite—the funnies!

What about the ability to search this massive stockpile of information?

see "Virtual" on page 5

## Around the Table

### Succeeding as a contract technical writer

by Mike Uhl

At this year's summer conference, three groups of technical communicators sat around a large round table and enthusiastically discussed how to work successfully through contracting agencies. We agreed on several important issues:

1. Beware of the agency that offers you "benefits." Often these benefits are merely statutory, the ones they have to offer. In any case, calculate the difference in the salary they offer you and the hourly rate you'd like and then ask yourself if the "benefits" are worth the reduction in cash. Keep in mind that you can buy your own health insurance, disability insurance, etc.
2. If you see something unacceptable in the contract document the agency is asking you to sign, cross out the specific parts and write in any text you feel is needed. The agency can always tear up the document if your changes are unacceptable. Attorneys frequently use this simple change technique.

3. Some agencies lie to their clients and employees. This is unacceptable. Do not do business with dishonest agencies.
4. Focus on satisfying the client; that's where the money is, and possibly a long-term relationship. The agency is

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The Carolina Chapter publishes the *Carolina Communiqué* bimonthly to provide reliable and timely information to Chapter and Society members. We encourage other STC chapters to reprint the material in this publication (with the exception of the cartoon) as long as they credit us and send a copy of the reprint.

We also invite our readers to submit material for consideration in the *Carolina Communiqué*. E-mail articles and letters to the editors or send snailmail to:

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## Submission Deadlines

Nov./Dec. issue: Oct. 7, 1996

Jan./Feb. issue: Dec. 2, 1996

Mar./Apr. issue: Feb. 5, 1997

May/June issue: Apr. 1, 1997

# Her Nichols Worth

So, what do you think? (No, this is not a rhetorical question, I am asking you all what you think about the newsletter!) Seriously, I really want to know. What do you like? What don't you like? Anyone who sends me an e-mail message ([tigger@vnet.net](mailto:tigger@vnet.net)) or calls me at home (481-2287) and tells me one good thing and one bad thing about the newsletter will have their name put in a drawing for a prize. ("I bet they don't think I'm serious, do they?" Try me!)

To the contributors of this issue of the *Carolina Communiqué*, THANK YOU! Thank you, Kat, Mike, Julie, Ann-Marie, Mary, Bill, Doug, Randy, and Dr. Couth. Who is Dr.

Couth you might ask? In an attempt to lift your spirits, we have sought wisdom from our resident guru Dr. Couth, who answers burning questions about any aspect of our field.

Hopefully, the cartoons of Randy Glasbergen, a nationally syndicated cartoonist, will also bring some smiles to your faces.

("And you didn't even have to beg, Michelle. You networked and talked it up. Maybe someone else will join the fray, eh? I wonder if they are tired of you talking to yourself in your column. I wonder if anyone will write or call and tell you to stop. I wonder.....") ❀

## STC Manager's PIC—Meeting Notes

*[Synopsisized by Kat Turk from author Charles Good's report]*

The STC Manager's PIC meets monthly. The topic of the July luncheon meeting, held at The Kelton Group, was "Working with and Understanding Consulting & Contracting." The difference between consultants and contractors was defined, as follows:

Consultant. Usually a senior-level expert in a particular field, retained to analyze a situation and provide suggestions for dealing with the situation.

Contractor. Supplemental work resource for peak periods, meeting deadlines, or staffing special projects.

Though the Triangle has more work than contractors, it has enough contractors to satisfy most needs.

Most people enter contracting and consulting due to corporate downsizing or being between jobs. No particular age group, gender, or credentials dominate the market. Many times contractors or consultants send their resume to every agency or contract vendor willing to represent or use them.

*see "PIC" on page 6*

## Job Bank Information

The number of jobs available for weekly posting on the telephone messaging service (a.k.a. the Job Bank phone line) has exceeded the recording capacity, forcing us to rely on our Web pages. The Web has no such limits and will serve our members better—offering more jobs, timely updates, and greater detail about each job listing.

You can reach the Web page at <http://stc.org/region2/ncc/www/weeklyjobs.html>.

If you do not have Web access, you can request to have a hard copy sent to you by U.S. mail or by fax. We on the job bank committee hope you find this new arrangement satisfactory and invite your comments or suggestions. Send requests or comments to [NCSTCJobs@aol.com](mailto:NCSTCJobs@aol.com) or call (919) 406-6600.

For comments about specific parts of the Carolina Chapter Job Bank Web pages:

- Lee Bumgarner, Committee Chair and Resume Page Contact ([jlbumgar@aol.com](mailto:jlbumgar@aol.com))
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# Help with Online Help

by Ann-Marie Grissino

Are you a media maverick, a hopelessly hung-up-on-help author, or maybe an electronic documentation demon? Here's your chance to find out. Answer these questions. (You don't have to show anyone your answers.)

1. Do you always turn on the hidden text or reveal codes if using Word or WordPerfect because you want to see what's "under the hood?"
2. Are you always adding just one more "neat" thing in your help projects?
3. Are you someone who just can't do the same thing repeatedly? Are you driven to do something different the next time—with greater efficiency, better aesthetics, or more functionality?
4. Are you someone who, if you can't tie your shoes, will wear loafers?

If you answered "yes" to any two of these questions, then you are definitely a driven person and this article is for you. If not, turn the page.

This article, and others in the electronic documentation series we will provide this year, attempt to bring you tips, tricks, and techniques for online help development. To gauge whether or not we're on target, take a moment to respond to the statements in this article's sidebar on page 4.

## Embedding Buttons in Secondary Windows

Many of you already use secondary windows to augment your Windows 3.1 online help files. Secondary windows are useful for displaying glossary topics, standalone topics, or graphics that you don't want displayed in your "main" window. (For example, we've used large secondary windows to display and explain sample reports.)

"Unadorned" secondary windows don't contain a button bar or standard main window menu options. Your users can't print information from them and must use the Control bar to close the window—how tacky. However, you can "dress up" your secondary window by adding buttons. (You can make buttons with Excel, which has a button drawing tool.)

This article describes how to add Close and Print buttons to a secondary window. Blue Sky's RoboHelp 3.0 is used as the help authoring tool.

## Defining Your Secondary Window

First, you need to tell RoboHelp that you want a type of window other than the standard main one. Let's call this new window type "secwndw."

1. Click on the Setup Project tool in RoboHelp's Tool Palette.
2. Click on Advanced.
3. Double-click on the [Windows] Secondary Windows option.
4. From the Define Help Window Attributes dialog box, click on Add.
5. Type "secwndw" as the name of the new window type.
6. In the Caption box, type a name that you want to appear in the secondary window's title bar.
7. Optionally, change the position, size, or colors of your scrolling regions. (A pale yellow in the non-scrolling region is helpful to differentiate the secondary from the main window.)
8. Click OK. *Voila.* A new window type.

Ahh, but wait! There's a trick to get your help topics to show in "secwndw."

While creating your jump from one topic to the next and displaying the Create Hypertext Jump window, look at the bottom right for the "Into Window" field. (Somewhat obscure.) Type "secwndw" here; the jump will display the topic in a secondary window.

## Pointing to Button Graphics

See Figure 1 for the buttons you'll add to the secondary window.

You now need to tell RoboHelp where these files are located.

1. Place the .bmp graphic file for each button in the directory with your help file.
2. Click on the Help Project Setup option in RoboHelp's Tool Palette.
3. Double-click on the BMROOT=Graphics Directories option. Locate the directory containing the graphics.
4. Click Add. You've just told RoboHelp where you stashed your Close and Print button graphics.

see "Help" on page 4

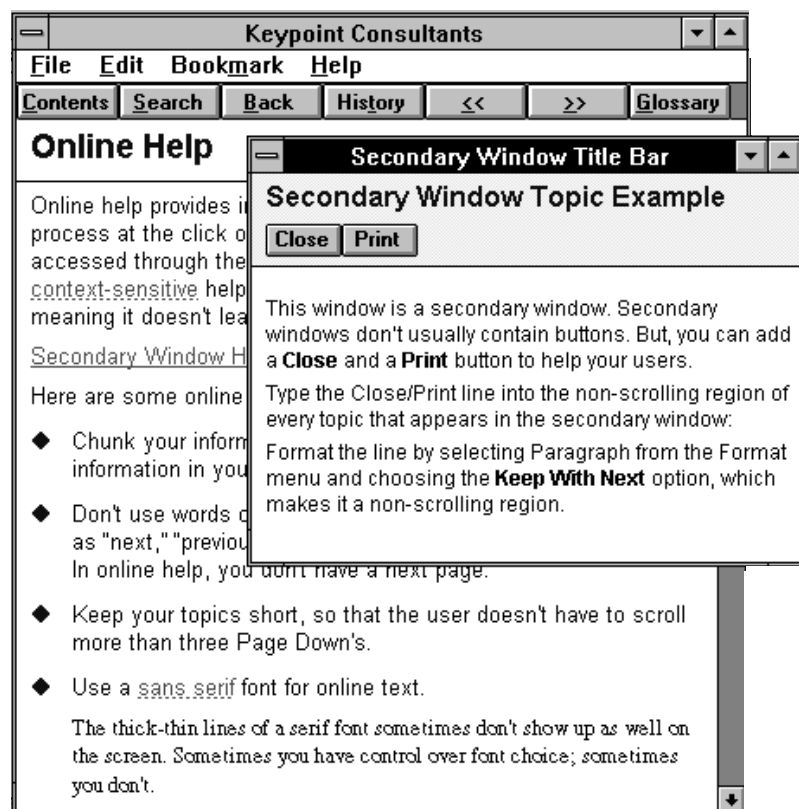


Figure 1. Embedding Buttons in Secondary Windows

"Help" from page 3

### Working in Your Secondary Window Topic

Create the topic that will appear in the secondary window.

1. Type the following line on the line after the topic title. (You can put it all on one line; the following example was wrapped due to space limitations.) This line assumes that you named your buttons "close.bmp" and "print.bmp."  
`{bmc close.bmp}  
!CloseWindow("secwndw")  
{bmc print.bmp}!Print()`
2. Double-underline "bmc close.bmp" and "bmc print.bmp."

3. Place your cursor in the line. From the Format menu, choose Paragraph.
4. Choose the Text Flow tab.
5. Click (enable) the Keep with Next option. (The Keep with Next option makes the non-scrolling region.)

### Finishing Up

That's it. Save your file as an .RTF file and generate the help file. Look at the two new buttons in the secondary window. Try printing with the button you created!

### About the Author

Ann-Marie Grissino is Principal of Keypoint Consultants, a documentation and media design firm. Ann-Marie can be reached at [keypoint@ral.mindspring.com](mailto:keypoint@ral.mindspring.com). ☼

## Beyond Software Technical Writing in Other Fields

by Julie Davis, Job Bank Committee Member

Some members have complained that STC overemphasizes the software industry and ignores other areas. To correct that, we wanted to find out what writers in other fields are doing. This article profiles Judith Powers, who is a Senior Marketing Writer in Telecommunications at Northern Telecom.

Judith writes about the telecommunications industry, delivering documents that range from 4-5 pages up to 60-70. She has to have a lot of product knowledge, which she gains by attending training sessions and reading mountains of material. Using this highly technical material, she describes the benefits and applications of a particular product in terms the average person can understand.

While she gets feedback from the engineers, she creates a lot of her material from scratch, based on her own knowledge of the product. In addition to marketing pieces, she also writes for trade journals and customer magazines.

Exactly what does she write? As Judith says, Nortel isn't "just about telephones anymore." She writes about asynchronous transfer switches, transmission systems, central office switches, multimedia products and networking solutions.

Judith has been with Nortel for 15 years. She started in sales support, then went into training. Writing user documentation led to sales and marketing training and proposal work, which led to her current job.

Judith enjoys her current position, which lets her blend technological writing with the creative aspects of marketing. ☼

### We Want Your News!

Let us know whether we've piqued your interest or bored you to tears! Then fax this page to 919-562-2467 or email your responses to [keypoint@ral.mindspring.com](mailto:keypoint@ral.mindspring.com).

Circle your answer from 1 (Don't Agree) to 3 (Agree).

	Don't Agree		Agree
1. The expertise level of this article was too easy.	1	2	3
2. The use of RoboHelp as the authoring tool was good.	1	2	3
3. I'd like to see the following articles:			
• Comparing Help authoring tools	1	2	3
• Showing a Visual Basic form in Help	1	2	3
• Embedding recorded screen movements in Help	1	2	3
• Employing the new Microsoft "minimalist" approach in Win '95 Help	1	2	3
• Coding Win '95 Help	1	2	3
• Spinning into HTML	1	2	3
• Moving toward Adobe Acrobat	1	2	3

Comment or questions (we'll try our best to respond or answer in the next newsletter):

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## little known facts . . . reprinted from an anonymous email submission

- If an infinite number of rednecks in an infinite number of pickup trucks fire an infinite number of shotgun rounds at an infinite number of highway signs, they will eventually produce all the world's great literary works in Braille.
- Communist China is technologically under-developed because they have no alphabet and therefore cannot use acronyms to communicate ideas at a faster rate.
- Why Is Yawning Contagious? You yawn to equalize the pressure on your eardrums. This pressure change outside your eardrums unbalances other people's ear pressures, so they must yawn to even it out.
- The earth may spin faster on its axis due to deforestation. Just as a figure skater's rate of spin increases when the arms are brought in close to the body, the cutting of tall trees may cause our planet to spin dangerously fast.
- Birds take off at sunrise. On the opposite side of the world, they are landing at sunset. This causes the earth to spin on its axis.
- The quantity of consonants in the English language is constant. If omitted in one place, they turn up in another. When a Bostonian "pahks" his "cah," the lost r's migrate southwest, causing a Texan to "warsh" his car and invest in "erl wells." ☼

## "Virtual" from page 1

Piece o' cake! Choose the "Search MVRD" link and presto! you're off and running. Putting the search engine to the maximum of tests, we searched for *Internet*. Expecting a long wait on the broadest of online topics, we were pleasantly surprised at 366 returns in only 2 seconds on a 28.8 modem. Granted, the returns weren't usefully organized and were a bit time-consuming to weed through; they were, however, the cream-of-the-crop currently available online, including the infamous 24 Hours in Cyberspace, The Internet Beatles Album, and the newly released NetGlos, a multilingual glossary of Internet terminology.

We then decided to test the engine with a less common word, *chocolate*. Must have been a more puzzling search because that one took a mere five seconds to return four items, including The Chocolate Club and a luscious Chocolate Pizza. In short, it's all pretty tasty at My Virtual Reference Desk. You simply cannot beat its contents if you're scouting for a central source for online reference materials.

*Liz is Editor of the NBNSOFT Content Awards (<http://www.tricky.com/liz>). She is also a freelance Internet writer, journalist, and content developer. Her email address is [liz@kersur.net](mailto:liz@kersur.net).*

# Networking Tips for Shy People

by Julie Davis

Does the very word "networking" set your teeth on edge? Would you rather undergo a root canal than phone someone you've never met? Do you routinely leave conferences early to avoid the dreaded "cocktail hour," where everybody but you seems to be making connections?

Take heart. We shy people don't have to turn ourselves into Joe Isuzu to make connections.

Here are a few tips:

1. Don't think about "networking" or "making connections." Think instead of meeting interesting people with whom you already have something in common.
2. Volunteer to work on an STC committee. Working with a small group of people who're focused on getting something done, you'll feel less

self-conscious about telling someone you're looking for a job.

3. Take a computer class at Wake Tech or NCSU. Chances are you'll meet a lot of people in your field while you gain some new skills.
4. Surf the Net. STC has its own web pages, including one with job listings (See page 2). Some businesses even offer email addresses.
5. Attend local STC meetings. During the announcements period, people who are looking for both jobs and employees get up to identify themselves. If other people can get up and say they're looking for something, then, by golly, so can you! (Bring a copy of your resume, just in case.)
6. Then, there's the information interview. While it's still scary to call someone you've never met, at least you're calling to get more information about their profession, not to ask for a job. Richard Bolles' "What Color is Your Parachute" offers tips for this process.

Finally, remember you don't need the personality of a political candidate to get a job. As a matter of fact, if you try to act like one, you'll probably turn people off. Just remember that shy people make excellent employees.

*Julie Davis, a very shy person, is a member of the STC Job Bank committee.*



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# Escaping the Activity Trap

by Kat Turk

“It’s incredibly easy to get caught up in an activity trap, in the busyness of life—to work harder & harder at climbing the ladder of success, only to discover it’s leaning against the wrong wall.” — Steven Covey, *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*

Ever feel exhausted at the end of the day, and yet you don’t feel as though you’ve really done anything? We—and others around us—often say there’s so much to do in so little time. Of course, the time we have is constant, yet because we’re thinking about everything we have to do, it just *feels* like we need more time.

Frequently, we get so caught up in everyday tasks, daily requests, and immediate demands that we forget *we* are in control! We can be so busy, we can barely see or remember what’s *really* important. That’s when it’s crucial to stop and really think about what we’re doing now and what we want to be doing.

So, how can we actually “find the time” we need for everything?

By regularly reviewing what’s most important to us—what we really want and need to accomplish—we can establish priorities and plan ahead. Some things we *want* to do, and other tasks are required. Because *both* are important, we need to find a way to work both into our busy schedules.

Here’s how:

1. Identify and set long-term goals
2. Break big tasks down into smaller, more manageable steps
3. Plan weekly and daily goals and tasks in advance
4. Review, reassess, and readjust at every stage

## Viewing the Bigger Picture

Review the things you’ve always wanted to do but never seem to get around to (or can’t seem to afford). Chances are, they’re long-term goals: returning to college for a degree, taking a tropical vacation, turning a hobby into a career, spending more quality time with family or friends.

The old adages, “Where there’s a will, there’s a way” and “If you can think it, you can do it,” certainly apply here! The very first step is attitude: Tell yourself you can...and you *will*!

Visualize the goal in detail. Picture yourself doing or having accomplished it, and how it makes you feel. Once you have a good idea of what’s involved, start breaking it into short-term goals. And think about it *often*!

## Break Bigger Goals and Tasks into Smaller Ones

To get from “here” (where you are) to “there” (where you want to be), you need a map that contains a series of smaller, more immediately attainable routes to help you. Visualize your long-term goal again, thinking more about the higher level steps you’ll need to attain that goal.

For example, if you someday want to be regional manager for the branch office you work in, one of your short-term goals might be to return to college for an MBA. Lower level tasks might entail calling or stopping by area colleges to find out when classes start, how much they cost, and which will fit your needs. After that, you’ll need to register, pay for the classes, buy the necessary books and supplies, and find out when and where the classes will be held. You might also need to rearrange your schedule in the

evenings so you’re free to attend classes and do the required assignments. You’ll repeat some of the same steps each semester until you complete all course requirements.

## Plan Your Weeks and Days Ahead, and Review

Once you’ve identified short-term goals, determine what weekly and daily steps, tasks, or actions are needed. Choose one day per week to review your long- and short-term goals, and identify the goals and tasks you want to accomplish that week. Then schedule daily activities to achieve your weekly goals.

So, when you invest more time in advance—to determine what’s most important to you, you actually save time in the long-run. By reflecting on and deciding what you really want, it’s easy to identify specific actions that move you quickly through your short-term goals. Each time you accomplish small tasks and goals, you feel the accomplishment. This in turn motivates you to do more, and before you know it, you’ve done something you’ve always wanted to! ❁

## “PIC” from page 2

Most agencies typically provide an individual contractor, not a team of them. Clients need contractors with specific skills and experience, and expect the agency to screen credentials and handle background checks, so they need only decide among a selected few.

Screening contractors is difficult. Frequently, contractors list skills to draw prospective employers or clients but might have little or outdated experience in the desired skill areas. Personal habits and idiosyncrasies, personality traits, and global or cultural differences can also interfere with the selection process.

The following topics about contractors were discussed:

- Rules of conduct
- Project duration
- Economics of contracting
- Roles of contractors

- Confidentiality
- Contractor right to publish.

Related books and resources are available from local libraries and bookstores. Where known, prices are listed below.

*The Consulting Handbook*, by Howard L. Shenson

*Inside the Technical Consulting Business: Launching and Building Your Independent Practice*, by Harvey Kaye (\$40.75)

*Million Dollar Consulting*, by Allen Weiss (\$12.95)

*Managing Your Documentation Projects*, by JoAnne Hackos (\$39.95)

*The Technical Writer’s Freelancing Guide*, by Peter Kent

*The Tech Writing Game*, by Janet Van Wicklen

*Computer Money: Making It in High-Tech Consulting*, by Alan Canton (\$29.95) ❁

# Director's Chair

by Mary R. Wise

Fall again! Time to get back to school and to work! I had a great summer: starting with the STC Annual Conference in May and including an anniversary trip to a wonderful inn in Shepherdstown, WV; a great weekend at the Carolina Summer Conference in Research Triangle Park, NC; and a week at the beach in Ocean City, MD. The best surprise: I was promoted to Manager of Instructional Design at Manugistics, Inc.

Ack! What now? How do I develop the skills I need to be a really good manager? How do I lead the talented people who now work for, not with, me?

I think I apply a lot of the skills I've learned through my involvement with STC. Although I did have some opportunities to learn leadership skills at my company, I had plenty of opportunities to learn them through STC. Guess what? You do, too.

"Fooyey!" I hear you scoff. "I'm just a technical writer. I don't need leadership skills! I don't intend to ever be a manager; I just want to write."

Well, what will you do when your company outsources technical communication? How will you cope if you decide to be an independent contractor? What happens when writing is not enough anymore?

Technical communicators also need to be leaders, both on a business level and on a personal level. If we do not lead ourselves, our companies, and our profession, we risk being left behind or being led in the wrong direction!

Now, assuredly, we cannot all be great leaders; after all, someone has to follow. But, if we have our personal leadership acts together, we can choose the people we want to follow: the people who will benefit our lives. We can also make intelligent decisions about our careers and our lives.

How can STC help? Oh, let me count the ways! Your local chapter meetings can inform and educate you on the latest trends in technology, technical communication practices, and essential skills. Society-level publications can keep you up to date on research, tools, and techniques. Of course, volunteering at the chapter or Society level lets you acquire and practice the very

leadership skills you need to survive: assertiveness, delegation, project management, people management; and (of course) writing, editing, and information design.

On October 19 in Raleigh, North Carolina, you can learn the basics. The Region 2 conference this year has a special theme: Leadership and Personal Development. We will spend the day learning how to identify

our personal leadership skills, set and attain goals, and begin the journey toward effective leadership. Lance Gelein, the STC Second Vice President, will lead the workshop. We're busy planning the details, and you will hear more about the workshop soon.

I am looking forward to serving you this year! Feel free to contact me at [Mary\\_Wise@manu.com](mailto:Mary_Wise@manu.com). ☛

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## The Prez Sez . . .

by Bill Albing

As always, the debates go on about what makes a technical communicator. Discussions abound about knowledge management and its role in an organization. Still, we are a disorganized group, lacking certification and offering disparate talents. We publish a manual here, an online help there, but no standards exist across the profession. Such is the life of the technical communicator.

To organize all this would smack too much of power, mean responsibility, and thus real work. But our talents are creative, and like our literary cousin the writer, we cling to irresponsibility, complaining about our lowly role and surviving until the next contract, the next technology.

Like the Republicans rally in San Diego, I think about our own ability to find consensus on professional issues. While we probably won't agree anytime soon on certification or standards, we can agree that we all need to be more Internet-literate and have more of a Web presence as an association. With that in mind, I propose a goal for the end of my term as president: to give every member the chance to create a resume in HTML and a place to publish it.

Beyond our Summer Conference, our Publications Competition, and our monthly meetings, I propose a virtual enterprise—a gathering of information in electronic form that can be available all over the world. We have several members already involved in creating Web pages, online job listings, and program announcements. Perhaps our membership listing will contain email addresses for all of us one day.

We have a lot going on this year. Besides a full slate of monthly programs, there is the Annual Kick-Off Picnic in September and the Pubs Competition starting in October. Remember that, like last year, we are also having an Online Pubs Competition.

As a Chapter we are healthy and growing. We topped 350 members earlier this year and know that it will top 400 before long.

Our Summer Conference in July was a success with over 100 people attending and plenty of discussion about various aspects of our profession. I was impressed by the amount of interchange and am thankful to all those who participated. Already it is fading into memory, like the Olympics last month, as we plan next year's conference and begin to promote the events coming up this fall. We are in a profession where such interchange of ideas is essential. I encourage all of you to attend the SIGDOC conference in October or our own STC Region 2 conference slated for the weekend before the SIGDOC conference here in RTP. The Governor of North Carolina has proclaimed October 13-19 as Technical Communication week, so if you want your boss to take you to lunch, that's the week to ask for it.

As always, if you have some ideas or suggestions about what the chapter could be doing or doing better, contact me. This chapter is organized to serve you (and all of us) and to further the profession. As we grow in size, it gets harder to keep in touch with all of you, but with e-mail, I am always available! Let me know what you think about our chapter ([kgbill@aol.com](mailto:kgbill@aol.com)). ☛

# Eduspeak

by Doug Ryan - Education Committee Chair

Greetings, fellow screen-starrers. Well, not only did I volunteer to resuscitate our Chapter's Education Committee, but Michelle has talked me into writing a column about it for each issue of the *Communiqué*.

Actually that's fine (at least for now), because I need to get the word out that (a) we exist, and (b) we plan to do things.

Our immediate goal is to arrange for short (one-day) training in specific skills which everyone can use, such as FrameMaker and RoboHelp.

The idea is to use our membership numbers to get us these workshops at decent prices, and I'd love to offer at least one in the Fall and one next Spring.

A few STC members expressed interest at the Summer Conference (thanks!— you'll

be hearing from me), but we need more, and we'll take whatever you can give. Consider getting involved by doing any or all of the following: contacting me with leads, contacts, hard-learned lessons, or other useful info; doing short bits of "gofer" stuff (phoning, etc.); becoming a regular committee member (hey—I've got a "meetings refreshments" budget, and if you really get into it, you can put Co-chair on your resume).

Longer term, the Committee will look at opportunities for further training, survey members' wishlists for training, update the chapter's Education Resource List, and possibly examine questions such as "What constitutes an education for technical writing, anyway?"

Think about enlightened self-interest, tell your peers about the Education Committee, and contact me, Doug Ryan, at 490-6927 or dsryan@dur.mindspring.com. ☼

## Call for Entries

### 1996 Carolina Chapter Publications Competition

This annual competition recognizes excellence in technical communication. Winning entries will be submitted to the STC International Technical Publications Competition.

Entries can be brochures, reference guides, user guides, combination guides, installation instructions, organizational manuals, training materials, newsletters, articles, and technical reports.

Entries must be received by Oct. 18, 1996.

Competition brochures, which include entry forms, have been mailed to all chapter members. If you did not receive a brochure, contact John West at 677-8000 or e-mail him at sasjww@unx.sas.com.

As Ed McMahon says, "Enter today!" ☼

## Show Your Stuff!

### 1996 Carolina Chapter Online Competition

Looking for a few good.... projects! Win a spot in the regional (and possibly international) online showcase by submitting your project to the online communication competition.

Entries must be received by Oct. 31, 1996.

This includes computer-based training, World Wide Web pages, help systems, online demonstration programs, and multimedia systems.

For information and an application, call Diane Feldman (Online Competition Co-Manager) at 941-5740. ☼

## Membership News

The latest membership report from national:

**Total STC membership:** 18,095

**Current chapter membership:** 345

#### New members:

Frieda J. Artis

Thomas A. Burns, Jr.

#### Transfers in:

Ann-Marie Grissino

Susan M. Katz

#### Transfers out:

Cristiane Batbie Davis

#### Members reinstated:

None

#### Members with undeliverable addresses:

Richard T. Evans

Susan Gonzalez

Dale Weiler

Tony Morrison

If you know these people, please have them contact the STC Regional Office with a valid address. ☼

### "Table" from page 1

merely a broker, a money changer. Your work feeds the agency; they will always want you back as long as you can make money for them.

5. What does "permanent" mean? Who feels more secure: the contractor with a three-year contract or the employee at a company in the middle of downsizing?

In general, we agreed that a technical communicator can make a good living as a contractor, but only if they follow these principles:

1. Be honest and work hard; a good reputation is essential for long-term security as a contractor.
2. Negotiate the best deal you can, but then work according to what you promised.

3. Take cash over "benefits" where possible.
4. Always look toward the long term; use each contract as an opportunity to build a good relationship with a client and as an opportunity to improve your skills and value in the market. ☼



# Ask Dr. Couth

## Q: Why are bluelines blue, not red or green?

Hmmmmm. I am tempted to tell you they are blue because they feel sad knowing they will be changed at blueline time, but I will resist. I understand that you want a serious answer to your question.

The answer calls to mind the Milli Vanilli flap. It involves phonies, covert operations, big money, exposes, and blazoning headlines in *The Independent*.

Let me explain.

Long ago in a kingdom far, far away, bluelines were called “proofs.” The printers used black ink to create these proofs, and writers did not have to wear pop-bottle-bottom glasses<sup>1</sup> to be able to read them.

Life was easy then.

However, a small group of wicked, would-be-writers (pre-Milli Vanilli<sup>2</sup>), decided to get into the lucrative writing business. They knew there were big bucks to be had, especially for those writers who wrote for big computer companies.

Rather than learn how to write, these unscrupulous, low-life thieves infiltrated the printing business. There, working as printers, they ran two copies of the (black ink) proofs: one to return to the writers and one for themselves.

And then they waited.

If the proofs did not come back within 48 hours (which rarely happened), these printer plagiarists printed those publications and sold them (wholesale) to customers. These proof-pirating printers accurately predicted that big computer companies would make hundreds of changes, thus delaying the “final” printing.

They got rich. They led the good life. They did not suffer from compressed schedules, out-of-date specifications, or three approval drafts. They did not have to sit in countless

status meetings, get two developers to agree on how the product *really* works, review their work with their manager, or suffer from red-ink-happy editors.

Life was good...until one fateful day.

On that day, a bored buyer of a bootleg book actually compared that book to the book that came with the product (a book that, heretofore, remained bound in shrinkwrap). There were differences, many differences. The titles were the same, yet the new book appeared to explain an entirely different product!

The product’s functions seemed drastically changed. How could this be?

This bewildered buyer called an innovative investigative reporter on *The Independent*, and the media blitz began. Some of the headlines were:

**Printers In a Pickle Over Proof Probe**

**Wronged Writers Wrestle With Rascals**  
**Bluelines<sup>3</sup> Blessed! Printers Put In Pen.**

Yes, the conversion to the blues saved the day. And do you know why? The answer lies in the fact that copiers cannot detect light blue print; would-be thieves could print only blank pages!

There is an unfortunate footnote to this foul feat. Several of those jailbirds, released for good behavior, continued the scam.

They decided to “print” bluelines, thus producing manuals with blank pages. And, believe it or not, they continued to sell (at a profit!) these blank-paged manuals to hapless customers.

The unfortunate part? No one noticed.

*If you have questions of equal importance, send them to Dr. Couth care of your newsletter editor (tigger@vnet.net or 481-2287). Dr. Couth will be a regular column as long as you have questions. ❁*

## chapter leadership

### President

Bill Albing  
kgbill@aol.com  
(919) 365-2448

### Vice President

Mike Uhl  
mikeuhl@nando.net  
(919) 541-4283

### Treasurer

Jeanne Ferneyhough  
jeanne@unx.sas.com  
(919) 677-8000 x. 6480

### Secretary

Pat Moell  
saspgm@unx.sas.com  
(919) 677-8000

### Immediate Past President

Diane Feldman  
feldmand@smtp.wg.com

### Director-Sponsor

Mary Wise  
Mary\_Wise@manu.com  
(301) 984-5436

### Membership

Kathy McKenzie  
khmck@aol.com  
(919) 572-1137

### Programs Manager

Open (Mike Uhl is acting chair.)

### Job Bank Manager

Lee Bumgarner  
jlbumgar@aol.com  
(919) 829-0258

### Hospitality Manager

Gary Spizizen  
spizizen@imonics.com  
(919) 544-5000

### Public Relations

Christopher Benz  
cjbenz@aol.com  
(919) 248-2169

### Nominating

Open

### N.C.S.U Liaison

Cindy Haller  
cindyh@unity.ncsu.edu  
(919) 515-4137

### Strategic Planning

Larry Kunz  
ldkunz@vnet.ibm.com  
(919) 254-6395

<sup>1</sup> Contacts were not invented yet.

<sup>2</sup> In fact, Milli Vanilli may have concocted their hoax based on this case.

<sup>3</sup> The press, a creative lot, coined the term bluelines. (Why bluelines? “Blue ink proofs” wouldn’t fit in the headline.)

# Coming Attractions

## Human Factors & Ergonomics Society (HFES) Conference

September 2-6, 1996, Philadelphia PA  
Contact: HFES Office  
Phone: 310-394-1811

## SIGDOC '96

October 19-22, 1996, Research Triangle Park, NC

Contact:  
Nina Wishbow, 613-765-4941  
email: [nwishbows@bnr.ca](mailto:nwishbows@bnr.ca)

## ITVA Silver Reeds Awards

Recognizing best video productions of 1996

November 9, 1996, Omni Hotel, Durham, NC

Contact:  
Suzanne Moss Mullen, 496-0224

## Manager's PIC Meeting

October 3, 1996  
Location: To Be Determined  
Contact: Steve Pope, 851-4064

## Technical Communication Week

October 13-19, 1996

## Region 2 Conference

October 19, 1996, Raleigh, NC  
Contact: Mary Wise, (301) 984-5436  
email: [Mary\\_Wise@manu.com](mailto:Mary_Wise@manu.com)

## Monthly Meeting Notice

- What:** The Carolina Chapter, STC will host a membership picnic at Lake Crabtree Park in Cary. Come meet and mingle with members to start the new STC year.
- Where:** Lake Crabtree Park, Cary, NC (We haven't reserved a particular shelter yet.)  
For information about the park, you can call (919) 460-3390.
- Directions: Aviation Parkway exit off of Interstate 40. Turn toward Cary. The park is on the left, less than a mile away.
- When:** Thursday, September 12, 1996, 6:00 p.m.
- Contact:** Mike Uhl at 544-0951 for more information.

 **society for technical communication**  
Carolina Chapter - Central North Carolina

c/o Michelle Corbin Nichols  
100 Romaine Court  
Cary, NC 27513

**FIRST CLASS MAIL**