

1997 Summer Conference Quotables

by Viola Suddaby and Melissa Powell. Viola can be reached at suddaby@juno.com. Melissa can be reached at fmpowell@mindspring.com.

Over 100 technical communicators from North Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, South Carolina, and Washington, D.C., got up early on Saturday, July 19 to attend the STC-Carolina Chapter's 1997 Summer Conference. Their effort was well-rewarded with over a dozen workshops by knowledgeable presenters, with tasty refreshments, and with numerous opportunities to meet and visit. This was the best summer conference yet, and those who didn't get there definitely missed out.

During the workshops, attendees were listening, learning, and taking notes to ensure that this information stayed around a little longer. Be forewarned that some of these "quotes" are not word for word but definitely catch the intent of the speaker.

From the "Making the Transition to a Leadership and Management Position" workshop

"So now that you're a manager, are you still going to have lunch with us?" Wanda Verreault, a panelist, used this question she was asked upon assuming leadership responsibilities to illustrate how your working relationships change when you accept a higher position. Her response to this question was "Yes."

From the "Advanced HTML" workshop

"Notepad is still our primary text editing tool for designing and laying out Web pages." While these weren't the exact words, Beth Hardin and Marty Tomasi definitely counted Notepad high on the list of tools that can be used. These Webmasters should know as they have used quite a few of the tools available.

"Design the framework for presenting the information and then do the content writing." Beth and Marty offered this as means of ensuring continuity in the presentation of information from multiple sources.

From the "Making Creative Color Decisions for Computer Screen-Based Presentations" workshop

"Don't be fooled into thinking that what you see on your screen is what other people see on theirs." Marsha Dohrmann used this quote from Lynda Weinman and Bruce Heavin's book *Coloring Web Graphics* as a jumping-off point for

discussion on all the limitations and variations that can effect the colors people see on their computer screens.

The following valuable tip came from a workshop participant: "To judge the color values, squint." If you can still see all the areas and colors on your screen through squinted eyes, you've got an image that's legible and comfortable to view.

From the "Electronic Performance Support Systems" workshop

"Use EPSS to improve user performance by simplifying processes, providing performance information, and supporting decision-making for users." If you've ever used a software program to figure your income tax, fill out an expense report, or learn a new task, you are the user of Electronic Performance Support Systems (EPSS). Mary Cantando explained how EPPS software improves user performance: Remember how that template or macro decreased the time or effort to complete your task? If you get lost doing a new or unfamiliar task, those help files or an online tutorial look pretty good. When you wonder what to do next, questions in a dialog box can help you process information more easily.

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carolina communiqué

A publication of the Society for Technical Communication (STC), Carolina Chapter, serving Central North Carolina

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The Carolina Chapter publishes the *Carolina Communiqué* monthly to provide reliable and timely information to chapter and society members.

We encourage other STC chapters to reprint material from this publication as long as they credit us and send us 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 editor to tigger@vnet.net or send snailmail to:

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Submission Deadlines

Articles are due on the first day of every month. We are currently planning the following issues: November, December, and January.

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Do Yourself a Favor...

Get Involved!

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by Chris Benz, Chapter Vice President. You can reach Chris at CJBenz@unforgettable.com or 919-479-4891.

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As Chapter Vice President this year, I have two main goals:

1. Find out what each chapter volunteer needs in order to do his or her chapter job better, and then try to fill those needs.
2. Help more people become chapter volunteers.

Why volunteer? Here are some *selfless* reasons:

- Promote the profession of technical communication.
- Share your knowledge and wisdom with other members.
- Save the world from the evil that lurks in the hearts of the grammatically incorrect.

And here are some more *self-serving* reasons:

- Try something you've never had a chance to try. And if you don't exactly succeed with flying colors, relax, because it's not your *paying* job at stake.
- Get to know and be known to people who can advise and support you both personally and professionally. (As someone who just completed a thankfully short and successful job search, I can attest to the knowledge and power of fellow STC members.)
- Keep yourself out of professional ruts by always tapping into new ideas. Besides avoiding boredom, learning more usually means earning more.
- The occasional free pizza.
- Believe it or not, it's fun!

Decide which reasons are the ones for you. While you do that, I will be working with the chapter leadership, especially our Nominations Chair Ken House, to determine exactly which volunteer opportunities we will have this year. I'm sure we'll need plenty of people for next year's summer conference, plus people to help all our committees to the level of excellence set by our Job Bank and our Education and Training committees. We're also looking for someone to help nurture our relationship with the Communications Roundtable.

Whether it's an hour a month or 10 hours a week, making decisions or implementing them, we hope to have a job for anyone who wants one. Watch this newsletter, the chapter Web site, and chapter e-mailings for more details on how you can help the chapter and yourself. In the meantime, please contact me with your own thoughts and ideas.

Oh, and if you don't contact us, rest assured that we'll be contacting *you!*

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Neologisms: Fun with Words

by Gina Caldanaro, Co-Chair of the Job Bank.
You can reach her at ginacal@vnet.net.

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In our professional lives, business and technology are the main sources for many new words. In our personal lives, blame (I mean credit) goes to popular culture for new words. New words, or “neologisms,” are defined in Merriam Webster as “a new word, usage, or expression” and (and next is my preferred definition) as “a meaningless word coined by a psychotic.”

For example, “beepilepsy” is a condition that “afflicts those with vibrating pagers; characterized by sudden spasms, goofy facial expressions and loss of speech.” Paging technology combined with people’s sense of fun and wordplay gave birth to “beepilepsy” as new word. A more familiar example might be the word “software” (first used in 1960, source Merriam Webster). Now in the 1990s, software is a common term, but when it was first used, it was a made-up word that meant “computer programs.”

See if you can figure out what the neologisms mean in this short story (yes, some of them have been around for a long time). Which new words do you think will survive and graduate into common usage?

It was a hot day and I was almost glad to be inside working with my square-headed boyfriend. I didn’t have time for any facetime, so I put a do-not-disturb sign on my cube to

keep the carbon community at bay. I had a tight deadline for the next release of treeware for our product. I had met yesterday with the project’s high dome and he’d given me a lot of new information. Not only did I have to update the treeware, but I really needed to clean out the cobwebs on our Web site. I’d surfed the world wide wait just last week and seen our competitor’s site and, boy, did they have some hot new news. I write for siliwood and it’s a fast-changing industry. I hope our product doesn’t get betamaxed. This puts me under a lot of stress. I’ve been seeing a therapist so I don’t go postal.

I was on a roll. Suddenly the power flickered and died. Everyone prairie-dogged to see what was going on. Our power was down like the Titanic. Fred, the guy in the next cube, moaned, “Man, I just lost everything I’ve been working on all morning. What a salmon day.” (I refrained from reminding him he should save often.) I heard him try some percussive maintenance. He and I both knew it wouldn’t bring his data back, but it probably felt good to hit something. He asked me if I wanted to go to lunch. The power loss had totally blown my buffer (and my square-headed boyfriend’s) so I said, “Sure, but I need to stop and get some yuppie food coupons first.” Fred and I left cubeville and the comfort of Cyberspace to interface F2F in the scary world of meatspace and to bravely search for a food source in the frighteningly cookie-cutter world of generica.

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A New SIG is Forming!

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by Tom Burns and Terry Otto.
You can reach Tom at tomb@mindspring.com.
You can reach Terry at tnotto@mindspring.com.

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Attention Medical, Pharmaceutical, Environmental, General Science Writers! A special interest group (SIG) is forming within the Carolina Chapter to address your needs.

An informal organizational meeting will be held during the picnic next month —come and enjoy the food and fun and listen for the announcement.

If you'd like to get involved before this, contact either Tom (365-6935) or Terry (933-6353). See you at the picnic!

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We are proud sponsors of the Carolina Chapter Education Committee!

Chapter Announces Logo Contest!

by Chris Benz, Chapter Vice President. You can reach Chris at CJBenz@unforgettable.com or 919-479-4891.

Have you noticed that the “official” STC logo is a bit clunky? Chunky? Many of us have. That’s why I’m pleased to announce our first-ever “Please, Please Design Us a Better Logo” contest. We’re asking **you**—the ever-talented and wonderful and resourceful and artistic and altruistic chapter member—to design a logo that the chapter can be proud of and use for years to come.



So, what’s in it for you, you ask? Hmm. Well, accolades, of course. And pride in a job well done. And...oh, okay, a prize. A wonderful, fabulous prize. A prize that will make you glad to be alive. A prize that I’ll figure out at least 24 hours before I need to present it.

Are you still with me? Good. Are you interested? Great! So what’s the next step? Contact me no later than Monday, September 22, 1997. We can discuss ideas, questions, formats, and, of course, how wonderful you are. Really.

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/cc_joblisting.html.

If you do not have Web access, you can request to have a hard copy sent to you by U.S. mail. We on the Job Bank hope you find this arrangement satisfactory and invite your comments or suggestions.

Send requests or comments to NCSTCJobs@aol.com, or call (919) 406-6600.

For comments about the Job Bank Web pages:

- Gina Caldanaro, Co-chair (ginacal@vnet.ibm.com)
- Dick Evans, Co-chair (infodex@mindspring.com)
- Lee Bumgarner (jlbumgar@aol.com)
- Terry Otto (tnotto@mindspring.com)

Keeping Recruiters Accountable

by Ceil Shuman, member of the Education and Training Committee. You can reach Ceil at realtime@interpath.com.



Sooner or later, most of us work with a recruiter or two (or three or four) to look for a job or to respond to the ever-increasing abundance of employment opportunities for technical communicators in the Triangle area. In fact, due to the tendency companies have for hiring technical writers on a contract basis, recruiters often play a necessary part in our career development.

Most of us know that this can be a mixed blessing. Some recruiters are honest, hard-working people whose sincere efforts help us find a job that matches our professional needs and talents. Others (let's face it), seem more interested in a commission or in just filling a position quickly. Think about the kind of service you've received and ask yourself these questions. Has a recruiter ever:

- Given you the wrong information about the length of a contract?
- Told an employer that you have certain skills that you do not actually possess?
- Given you descriptions about a job that turn out to be inaccurate when you interview for the position?
- Given you the wrong salary or pay rate figures?
- Given you misleading information about contractor benefits?
- Called you up about a job without knowing anything significant about the position?
- Given you incomplete, exaggerated, or false information about their company's clients?
- Given your resume to other recruiters for subcontract opportunities without your permission?

Many of these things have happened to me. Usually, if there's going to be a discrepancy between what you're told and what actually pans out, it'll be about the length of the contract. If I had a dime for every time a recruiter called me up to say, "The contract runs for six months, but it can last longer," I could retire right now to a cozy yacht and cruise around the Caymen Islands in style. Once, a recruiter told me that a particular position would last at least a year, and when I spoke to the employer on the phone, she told me that the contract would end in exactly three months.

Is there anything that an honest, hard-working writer can do to prevent these disappointing experiences? You bet there is! It is high time that we arm ourselves with the right questions, unequivocally communicate our requirements, and share what we know with each other.

Here are some tips to help you avoid falling victim to poor recruiting practices:

- Ask a lot of probing, specific questions when speaking to recruiters. You might want to keep a list of questions by the telephone for this purpose.
- Before you commit to an in-person interview, ask the recruiter to set up a preliminary telephone interview between you and the employer.
- When interviewing prospective employers, check the recruiter's story regarding job description, contract duration, and other important aspects of the job.
- Make it clear to the recruiter that you expect any recruiter who handles your resume to solicit your permission to send your resume to each and every client, each and every time.
- When you accept a position, get all of the particulars about the job *in writing*. If you have accepted a temp-to-term position, be sure that both the temporary pay and the pay at the time-of-hire are in writing.
- *Never* submit your resignation to your current employer until your recruiter has received a *written* commitment from your new employer to hire you and you have signed an agreement-to-hire statement with the recruiter.
- If your employer is thinking of doing business with a recruiter who has given you misinformation, tell the employer about it. Conversely, sing the praises of recruiters who have behaved in an ethical, professional manner and who have made a sincere effort to match you with the right company.
- Do business with recruiters who invest in the industry. Advanced Concepts Business Communications, Inc., TPS, Inc., and others are all active in the local chapter and support your involvement in the STC.
- Do business with recruiters who are certified or who are working toward certification. Two fabulous technical recruiters with whom I have worked at RHI Consulting in Raleigh have their CTS (Certified Temporary Specialist), issued by the National Association of Temporary Services. They told me that, to get certified, a recruiter has to be in the industry for at least two years and must demonstrate knowledge of the legal and ethical ramifications of the business.

During an e-mail discussion with several Carolina Chapter members, a terrific idea emerged about how we can help keep recruiters accountable. STC members can offer themselves as a reference for specific recruiters and recruiting firms with whom we have done business. I would like to see our chapter take this giant step toward helping our members and other employees in our industry. It might help some good technical writers avert a professional mishap, as well as show the recruiters out there that we expect them to be accountable for the information they communicate to us and their clients.



STC Process Documentation SIG: Should We Form One?

by Nicholas Gattuccio. You can reach Nicholas at gattuccio@iftech.com (please get both "T"s and both "C"s into the address).

Process documentation standards abound. The big gun in today's quality standards environment is the ISO series, of course, but ISO 9000 is just the beginning. In the software development arena, the Software Engineering Institute's Capability Maturity Model (SEI/CMM) dominates, while Microsoft's Solution Development Discipline, as well as a raft of process models, have littered that chaotic world. And then, depending on client, employer, and project requirements, a document manager may also need to cast a cold eye on any number of Department of Defense standards, a broad palette of IEEE/ANSI standards, plus any number of industry- or product-specific standards (for example, aerospace or automotive industry standards).

In some of these arenas, conventions for implementing the standards in local documentation efforts are well-defined and straightforward (albeit complex and challenging). This is particularly true in manufacturing, where ISO and QS 9000 implementation has a stable history. In software development, however, the ground is far fresher, the standards are far less clear and objective, the debate over appropriate models is a great deal more lively, and the *process* of implementing external standards is an excursion into uncharted waters.

Identifying external process standards is the easy part. There exist ample stores of standards, many of them cookie-cutter process models, and numerous glosses and overviews expand upon them; however, one is hard pressed to find much in the way of reliable guidelines for *implementation* of the process models. And implementation is the hard part, because it requires taking two challenging steps: (1) interpreting practical applications of the standards or model, and (2) adapting the model to the local setting and requirements. Both interpretation and implementation pose big challenges.

This is particularly difficult for software firms. While the key ingredient for successfully solving business challenges is experience, software development, being a relatively young industry, is largely, in the words of the Software Engineering Institute (SEI), "immature." Although energy, creativity, and "individual heroism" are usually abundant in small software firms, experience with quality standards and process models is frequently lacking.

Technical writers stand at ground zero of process documentation projects. It is my experience that, outside of the small universe of quality engineers who specialize in these matters, it is technical writers who possess the greatest hands-on experience with the practical side of *implementing* global process standards at the local level.

I have no doubt that among the membership of the STC there exists abundant experience in adapting external standards to local settings. While some may have experience with one or more wedges of the standards pie, none (or few), perhaps, have sweeping experience with a wide range of standards applied to a wide variety of business types. I, for example, have experience writing ISO 9000 documentation in a medical device manufacturing environment and QS 9000 experience in an automotive components manufacturing process. Now, however, I'm faced with process documentation in a small software firm, and I feel like a horse in a hen house. You see where I'm going.

I propose, modestly, that by harnessing the aggregate talents of the STC, we may have the opportunity to create a collective consultant that all of us can draw upon for advice, expertise, and assistance. I do not see that existing SIGs presently fill this need—not in a specific, focused way. I suggest that STC found a Process Documentation SIG. Within it, smaller interest groups could address specific

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Membership News

Total STC membership: 19535

Current chapter membership: 350

New members: Jay Joiner, Alice Man, Loretta Mershon, Dorothy Nichols

Transfers in: Kristin Hale, Aimee Roberts Porter

Transfers out: Kelley Cobb, Peter Holman

Members reinstated: None.

Members with undeliverable addresses: None.

“Quotables” from page 1

“Analyze the tasks for effective, efficient processing. Think in terms of verbal and visual instructions.” Mary emphasized planning that resulted in more than a pretty interface. Visual, business, competitive, and information design plus the all important human factors and usage are critical in producing an effective EPSS.

From the “Dynamic Career Management” workshop

“The worst time to write a resume is when you really need it. Update it regularly.” Stephanie McDilda challenged her listeners to take charge of their careers in many ways—including a resume that is kept in tip-top shape with regular updates. Don’t let your resume become an autobiography by including that very first job mowing your neighbor’s lawn or babysitting unless those skills are needed by your prospective employer. Highlight those skills you want to market and customize it for your audience. Treat this important marketing tool with the respect it needs and deserves.

“Not staying informed is like playing tennis with a blindfold.” Know which skills are required for where you want to be and work at getting them by attending classes, volunteering to do some work in that area, or studying on your own. Stay on top of the directions your chosen field is heading in. Be at the front of the competitive edge.

“Have you ever experience the ‘fairy wand’ theory of empowerment? That’s where the manager whacks you in the head and voila—you’re empowered.” The chuckles and nods of agreement from many indicated an awareness of today’s workplace environment. Stephanie reminded us that managers want employees who are knowledgeable about their field and can suggest a variety of options when solving problems. Managers only think they empower us—we empower ourselves by being proactive and controlling our responses and attitudes.

“In today’s job market, three things are guaranteed--change, problems, and ownership.” Although this comment elicited a great number of groans, Stephanie went on to include some good news about these certainties in the job market. Change means that we can make choices. Problems can create new opportunities. Ownership means control and when we take control, we develop our careers and ourselves.



“SIG” from page 6

process models, quality standards and/or business types (for example, manufacturing, software development, service industries, etc.). A SIG such as this has the potential to become a pool of expertise for the Chapter at large.

I would be most interested in hearing from members about this idea and about your own difficulties with external standards-related documentation projects. I am especially interested in hearing about your successes and your expertise. Whether you like the idea or not, please drop me a note.



chapter leadership

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Monthly Meeting Notice

What:

Annual Fall Picnic. Good Food, Good Company, in a natural setting. Come out and meet your fellow STC members and maybe find some inspiration.

When:

Thursday, September 11, 6:00P.M.

Where:

Lake Crabtree County Park is located on Aviation Parkway. Take I-40 to the Aviation Parkway exit and go east. The park is the first drive on the left. The White Oak Shelter is the 4th drive on your right.

Contact:

Michael Uhl (mikeuhl@mindspring.com) or 919-541-4283 for more information.

Other STC Events

21st Annual Practical Conference on Communication (PCOC, pronounced "peacock") is being held October 23-25 in Knoxville, Tennessee. For more information contact Karla McMaster, at 423-966-0072, ext. 541, or visit their Web site at <http://www.stc.org/region3/etc/pcoc.htm>.



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

Education & Training Events

The Education and Training Committee, led by the fearless Doug Ryan (who can be contacted at 919-380-4552) and supported by many, has the following seminars or workshops available in the coming months:

- **“Introduction to Indexing”** by Dick Evans. Saturday, September 13, 9AM to 4PM. To register call Jerry Pople at 919-834-5272.
- **“7 Habits of Highly Effective People”** by Abel Valls. Thursday, October 23, 6P.M. to 8:30P.M. For more information, contact Doug Ryan at 919-380-4552.
- **“Beginning HTML: Putting your Resume on the World Wide Web”** by Candee Hellberg and Ceil Shuman, Saturday, October 25, 9A.M. to 1P.M. For more information, contact Doug Ryan at 919-380-4552.
- Other seminars on their way include **“Online Help Workshop”** by Diane Feldman and Carol Ryner (in early November) and **“Introduction to JavaScript”** by Michael Uhl (in January).

Other Events of Interest

ArborText is offering a free **SGML Seminar**, Wednesday, September 10, 9A.M. to Noon and again 1:30P.M. to 4:30P.M. Call 1-313-997-0200, x255 for more information.



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