

STC Salary Survey: Tools, Technologies, and Companies

by Michael Harvey, who works at Data General.
You can reach him at harvey@m@rtp.dg.com.

Last month, I showed how experience predicted salary in the 1997 survey of 86 *Carolina Communicé* readers. I compared the 1997 results to those I gathered in 1994. In both surveys, the more experience you had, the more money you made. This month, I'll begin by presenting the range of that experience.

Experience	1997	1994
0-5 years	19	23
>5 - 10 years	40	25
>10 - 15 years	13	9
>15 years	12	5
No response	2	5
Totals	86	67

Table 1. Amount of Experience

Table 1 shows that 1997 survey respondents are more experienced than 1994 respondents. In 1997, 60% more respondents have five to ten years' experience, 44% more have ten to fifteen years' experience, and 140% more have greater than fifteen years' experience. I don't think this is simply a function of our getting three years older, although that and an improving economy certainly would contribute to higher salaries. I think the numbers point to an influx of older and more experienced writers, and I believe that these more experienced writers brought higher salary expectations with them.

What skills do we think are more important to our profession: technical skills or writing skills? (See Table 2.) Hint: Don't expect a simple answer from a technical writer.

Important skills?	Frequency
Technical	9
Writing	34
Equal/both	26
Other	12
No response	5
Total	86

Table 2. Important Skills

Nearly 40% of us think that writing skills are more important; whereas only 10% of us think that technical skills are. But, being technical writers, and thus alert to the complexities of an issue, nearly a third of us thinks that both are important or are equally important. And it appears that 14% felt that the choices I offered were too constraining and so reported that "desire" or "diplomacy" or "perseverance" were the most important skill to have.

What's the biggest change we've seen in the technical writing profession over the last five years? Table 3 shows these responses.

Biggest change?	Frequency
New technologies	15
Shift to on-line	12
Emphasis on technical skills	11
More contractors	5
More unqualified writers	4
Growth of field	4
Internet	4
Other	11
No response	23
Total	89

Table 3. Changes in the Profession

See "Salary Survey" on page 3

inside

Web Resumes.....	4
HTML Help and NetHelp.....	5
Indexing Guidelines.....	6
Address Changes.....	7

Carolina Communiqué

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

Editor-in-Chief

Michelle Corbin Nichols

Associate Editor

Lee Bumgarner

Copy Editors

John R. Stuart
Diane Feldman
Mike Boyd

Newsletter Web Pages

Melissa Powell, Coordinator
Lee Bumgarner
Mike Boyd

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 tigger@vnet.net or send snailmail to:

Michelle Corbin Nichols
310 Montibello Drive
Cary, NC 27513

Submission Deadlines

Articles are due on the first day of every month. For example, articles submitted by November 1st are considered for the December issue or later issues. Exceptions can be made for extremely timely information.

Points of Contact

Carolina Chapter, STC

Voice Mail: (919) 406-6600

Chapter Web page: <http://www.stc.org/region2/ncc/>

Society for Technical Communication

Phone: (703) 522-4114

Fax: (703) 522-2075

Web page: <http://stc-va.org/>

E-mail: stc@stc-va.org

901 North Stuart Street

Arlington, VA 22203

Her Nichols Worth

I bet you were wondering where the heck your newsletter was and were just thrilled to finally receive it, right? No? Well, I'm sorry that it was late this month. At the beginning of October, my husband and I bought a new house and then moved. Then, I found out 4 days after moving in that my company was closing down, which means I focused much of my energies on finding my next job, so that I could afford to keep my new house, which keeps my computer, which allows me to produce the newsletter, which I try very hard to get to you by the first Thursday of every month. I'll do my best to get back on track soon.

In the spirit of the Carolina Chapter's efforts to sell t-shirts to raise funds, I'm including some humor I got off of the Internet. If you'd like to purchase a t-shirt, contact Ven Carver (992-2928). Enjoy!

If Dr. Suess Wrote about Computer Users

- Tech: "I think I know from where your problems stem. Would you, could you, RTFM?"
- User: "I would not, could not, RTFM I want *you* to solve my problem."
- Tech: "Could you read the docs online? Would you read them any time?"
- User: "I would not read the docs online, Without them I can do just fine."
- Tech: "Would you read a FAQ or HOWTO? Is this something you could do?"
- User: "I could not read a FAQ or HOWTO. Even the thought makes me spew."
- Tech: "What could I suggest next? Would you read it in HyperText?"
- User: "I would not read help in hypertext For the problem with which I am vexed."
- Tech: "How about if you could read it through A conveniently placed system menu?"
- User: "I will not access help from a menu. That stuff is a bunch of ballyhoo!"
- Tech: "How much simpler could this be? Did you try the help hotkey?"
- User: "I'll try not a help hotkey To that I will never agree!"
- User: "I would not, could not RTFM. I want *you* to solve my problem!"
- Tech: "Since you will not RTFM You I must now condemn
- Tech: To a life without working software And a constant feeling of despair."
- Tech: "You should read a book by Dr. Suess Or maybe something by Mother Goose."
-

“Survey” from page 1

Some respondents gave more than one answer, which accounts for the total exceeding 86. I distinguished between “shift to online,” which comprises responses about more emphasis on online help than on printed manuals, and “Internet,” which comprises explicit references to work on Web pages. “New technologies” comprises more general responses, such as the availability of more powerful desktop publishing tools.

Table 4 shows where we work, both now and in 1994.

	1997	1994
Computer	28	28
Pharmaceutical	5	2
Research	5	4
Contract house	14	9
Hospital	2	2
Self	7	9
Other	8	11
Unemployed	1	1
Telcom	14	0
Bank	0	1
No response	2	0
Total	86	67

Table 4. Types of Companies

We still work mostly at computer companies. More of us work for telecommunications and pharmaceutical companies now. It will be interesting to see whether and how this trend continues in a future survey. The numbers suggest that in 1997, as in 1994, we don’t stay at a job very long (Table 5).

Years there	1997	1994
0-5 years	55	47
>5 – 10 years	18	12
10 – 15 years	4	3
>15 – 20 years	2	3
Over 20 years	3	1
No response	4	1
Total	86	67

Table 5. Length at Company

Our reasons are varied, as the next table shows.

Why leave last job?	Frequency
Better opportunity	22
Job ended	11
Relocation	10
Downsizing	10
Bad situation	7
Money	6
Career change	3
No response	5
Other	12
Total	86

Table 6. Reasons for Leaving Jobs

Here I made a distinction between “job ended,” which included a contract terminating voluntarily, and “downsizing,” which is never voluntary. The good news seems to be that many of us are good at managing our career, leaving a job for a better opportunity when it arises.

Finally, take a look at the tools that we use. Here’s that list:

- Microsoft Word (39)
- Adobe FrameMaker (29)
- RoboHelp (10)
- CorelDraw (9)
- Adobe PageMaker (9)
- Microsoft PowerPoint (8)
- Adobe Illustrator (7)
- Adobe Acrobat (6)
- Interleaf (6)
- HTML (6)
- BookMaster (5)
- Microsoft Excel (5)
- WordPerfect (5)
- Adept Editor (5)
- Paint Shop Pro (5)
- Photoshop (4)
- Visio (4)
- HiJaak (4)
- Internal tools (4)
- Netscape (3)
- ASCII text editor (3)
- Adobe FrameBuilder (2)
- FreeHand (2)
- Adobe Distiller (2)
- MacDraw (2)
- SGML (2)
- No response (5)
- Other (19)

The grand total exceeds 86 (the total was 210) because respondents frequently listed more than one tool. I wasn’t surprised that Microsoft and Adobe had such a strong hold on the desktop, but I was surprised that only two persons reported using SGML. I had been hearing so much about SGML over the last three years that I expected more readers to report it.

In my final article, I’ll look at what affects job satisfaction, I’ll examine whether the differences between the 1994 and 1997 results are significant, and I’ll suggest avenues for further research.



Web Resumes — Catch the Wave

by Gina Caldanaro, co-manager of the Carolina Chapter Job Bank. You can reach her at ginacal@vnet.ibm.com.

Location, location, location. Whether you're marketing soap or snake oil, one of the keys to making the sale is location. This is also true when you market your most valuable asset—you. As a benefit to local chapter members, the Job Bank Committee maintains a page of member resumes at the Carolina Chapter Web site (<http://stc.org/region2/ncc/www/resumes.html>).

How do you post? See the web site for details, but the short of it is: Create an HTML resume. Send it to Gina Caldanaro (ginacal@raleigh.ibm.com) or Dick Evans (infodex@mindspring.com) for posting.

You say you don't know HTML? Contact Ceil Shuman (realtime@interpath.com) or Candee Hellberg (candeeh@ix.netcom.com). Not only do they hold workshops on HTML for the chapter, but they're willing to offer a little one-on-one.

Do you need some reasons to post your resume (or provide a link to an existing resume)? Think about these reasons:

- If you were an employer looking for a technical writing professional, where would you look? (Remember: Location, location, location.)
- The fickle finger of fate might send an unexpected pink slip your way. Wouldn't it be better to have an up-to-date resume already available?
- You have a resume, you want people to see it, and you don't have a home page. (Note: We only post resumes, not home pages.)
- You want to practice coding HTML and a resume seemed like a useful exercise. Now what?
- Right now we have eight resumes. How does that make the chapter look? Come on, post one for the chapter.
- Even if you're not looking for a job, your resume can showcase your talent and the talent of the chapter.
- Who ya gonna call? Need some advice on a tool? Want to know what it's like to work at company ABC? You can scan the resumes of your fellows and find out who to call.
- They say that who you hang out with says a lot about you. For the cost of a membership, you get to hang out (virtually) with a swell bunch of people.
- What do you do when a recruiter calls and asks if you know anyone? Send then to the Web site!
- Do you lay awake at night wondering why you don't get more respect? What could be more professional and offer you more credibility than having your resume available at the number-one society's Web site?

Special thanks to Ceil Shuman for her input and enthusiasm.

Membership News

Total STC membership: 20103

Current chapter membership: 357

New members:

Mark Meech, Elizabeth Snively

Transfers in:

Tiffany Whitt, Jennifer Willard

Transfers out:

Judith Menninger

Members reinstated:

Teresa Summerlin

Members with undeliverable addresses:

Jeffrey B. Miller

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 (jobumg@unx.sas.com)
- Terry Otto (tnotto@mindspring.com)

Toil and Trouble: HTML Help and NetHelp

.....
by Ann-Marie Grissino, who is Principal of
Keypoint Consultants, a documentation and
media design firm. You can reach her at
keypoint@mindspring.com.
.....

Toil and trouble. That's what this year's online help crystal ball predicts. It shows two flavors of HTML-based help and to make matters worse, their names are confusing: HTML help (which is *not* the same as HTML-based help) and NetHelp. Oh, me nerves. Well, let's try to calm ourselves and explore these new concepts.

What Is HTML-Based Help?

Online help methods are moving toward an HTML-based standard. HTML-based help is based on using Hypertext Markup Language (HTML), rather than our customary Rich Text Format (RTF) standard.

Is HTML-based help the same as HTML? No. HTML is the tagging language used to produce Web pages. While HTML-based help has its basis in HTML and uses the same basic tags and constructs as HTML, HTML-based help moves beyond HTML and includes features such as contents files, indexes, and navigation buttons.

You probably will *not* want to use a standard HTML authoring tool to create HTML-based help. Standard HTML

Want to coast through your projects and occasionally surf the Web as your annual professional development activity? Then, don't read the rest of this year's online communication articles. This year the online communication articles will focus on HTML-based help and its flavors, when we should begin looking at it, what tools are available, and why we should or should not convert our projects. Our technical communication industry is sure to be a ride, including ups and downs, and sometimes at warp speed.

tools do not support some of our most beloved help features, such as popups, related topics, contents, and an index. (Future articles will focus on authoring tools.)

Two Flavors of HTML-Based Help

Let's add to the complexity. Both Microsoft and Netscape announced standards for HTML-based Help. And, of course, they're not the same. Microsoft announced HTML Help (note the name) and Netscape announced NetHelp.

There are also two major browsers: Microsoft distributes its Web browser, Internet Explorer, and Netscape produces its popular browser, Netscape Navigator. Some HTML features work fine in one browser, but not in the other. Oh, me nerves.

See "HTML Help" on page 7

Looking for Guidelines for Indexing? Look No Further

.....
by Lori Lathrop, Lathrop Media Services. You
can reach her at 303-567-4447 ext. 28, or
76620.456@compuserve.com.
.....

*Editor's Note: The following article is a post to the
TECHWR-L listserv. Lori is a freelance indexer and teaches
workshops in indexing for technical communicators around
the country.*

How convenient that *Read Me First: A Style Guide for the
Computer Industry* (which I ordered after reading a recent
announcement by Janice Gelb) arrived when I happened to be
between indexing projects (a rare occurrence!).

Naturally, I turned directly to Chapter 9, Indexing, and
I'm delighted to say that I was very impressed with what I
found there. As the introduction to Chapter 9 alludes,
indexes enhance product usability. In addition to affecting
customers' perceptions of the product, indexes affect
customers' perceptions of the developer's credibility.

Many surveys have shown that one of the biggest
complaints end users of technical manuals have is the
inability to find the information they need. That doesn't have

to be the case. If technical writers apply the guidelines in this
chapter, they will avoid some of the most common indexing
pitfalls.

Some of the best guidelines focus on strategies for
developing concise, specific index entries and on techniques
for enhancing the index by double-posting entries, using
meaningful cross-references, finding the right balance (not
over-indexing or under-indexing), and editing the index.

All in all, I must say, the indexing guidelines in this style
guide are much better than the indexing guidelines I've seen
in other books on developing documentation for the computer
industry. BTW, in case you're wondering, I have no
connection with Sun Microsystems, Inc., and they did not ask
me to write this review!

If you want to find the book, here's the info you need:
Read Me First: A Style Guide for the Computer Industry,
CD-ROM edition, by Sun Technical Publications (Editor),
published by Prentice Hall Computer Books (January 1997)
ISBN: 0134553470, paperback, 250 pages.
.....

Address Changes Anyone?

.....
by Liz Wing, Carolina Chapter Membership
Manager. You can reach her at mew@nortel.com.
.....

The STC-Carolina chapter will be publishing the 1997-1998 membership directories later this year. Are both your mailing address and e-mail address current with the Society office?

The directory is generated using the most recent member information from the Society's database. So, if you've moved, or if your e-mail address has changed, make sure to notify the Society office at:

Society for Technical Communication
901 N. Stuart St., Suite 904
Arlington, VA 22203-1854
(703) 522-4114 (office)
(703) 522-2075 (fax)
membership@stc-va.org

If you haven't been receiving the monthly meeting notices sent by me, then your e-mail address may be incorrect in the database. Please send a message to:

membership@stc-va.org.
.....

"HTML Help" from page 5

Microsoft's HTML Help

Microsoft developed HTML Help to let help authors use the new HTML functionality and maintain current features of Windows Help. HTML Help also supports the advanced features of ActiveX controls, which are like reusable building blocks of software. (Microsoft published the ActiveX specification and Microsoft's Internet Explorer supports ActiveX technology.)

Netscape's NetHelp

Netscape offers its NetHelp as a cross-platform solution for HTML-based help. This solution currently operates in many platforms, including Windows, Macintosh, OS/2, and UNIX. However, NetHelp does not include direct support for Help features, such as popups, contents, or indexes.

Coming to the rescue, some help authoring tools extend NetHelp's functionality by including Netscape plug-ins and Java applets that *do* let you create contents and indexes. Netscape has announced its plans for a successor to Navigator; the company claims that this successor will support many more help features.

Future of HTML

As noted in a previous article, Francine Hyman of Communitec cautions us that HTML-based help is not yet ready for prime time and that browser conflicts are far from resolved. She says, "RTF is not a dirty word," and reminds us that we still need to get our work done using RTF-based tools.
.....

chapter leadership

President

Mike Uhl
mikeuhl@mindspring.com
(919) 541-4283

Vice President

Christopher Benz
cjbenz@unforgettable.com
(919) 549-9770

Immediate Past President

Bill Albing
wwa@fns.com
(919) 713-1133

Treasurer

Robert Perry
aldolink@aol.com
(919) 468-2308

Secretary

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

Membership

Liz Wing
mew@nortel.ca
(919) 991-2084

Programs Manager

Ivan Manestar
advanced@interpath.com
(919) 942-2322

Job Bank Co-Managers

Gina Caldanaro
ginacal@vnet.ibm.com
(919) 543-0187

Dick Evans

infodex@mindspring.com

Hospitality Manager

Rhonda Keyes
keyes1@niehs.nih.gov
(919) 941-6564

Public Relations

Ven Carver
ven.carver@nt.com
(919) 992-2928

Nominating

Ken House
kehous@unx.sas.com
677-8000, x6086

Education/Training Committee Chair

Doug Ryan
dsryan@mindspring.com
(919) 490-6927

Strategic Planning

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

Monthly Meeting Notice

What:

Holiday Party!

When:

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

Where:

TBD. Check the chapter's Web site for more information.

Contact:

Ivan Manestar (advanced@interpath.com or 942-2322) for more information.



Other STC Events

Several Special Interest Groups (SIGs) are becoming active in the Carolina Chapter. Here is some contact information for two of the most active ones:

- Medical, Pharmaceutical, Environmental, and General Science Writers SIG. Contact Tom Burns (365-6935) or Terry Otto (933-6353).
- Managers SIG. Contact Steve Pope (851-4064).



Education and Training Events

The Education and Training Committee, led by 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:

- **“Online Help Design”** by Diane Feldman and Carol Ryner. Saturday, November 15th, 9:00 A.M. to 1:00 P.M. Cost is \$25. For more information, contact Hillary Harris at 846-3742.
- **“Introduction to JavaScript”** by Michael Uhl. Saturday, February 21st, 8:30 A.M. to 2:30 P.M. Cost is \$35. For more information, contact Hillary Harris at 846-3742.
- Other upcoming seminars include **“Basic FrameMaker”** and **“Process Documentation.”**

The Education and Training Committee meet on the Tuesday after the regular chapter meeting (which is the 2nd Thursday of every month), between 6:00 P.M. and 7:30 P.M. at restaurants near RTP. See the chapter's Web site or call Doug Ryan (380-4552) for the location of the next meeting.



c/o Michelle Corbin Nichols
310 Montibello Drive
Cary, NC 27513

FIRST CLASS MAIL