

To JavaScript or Not to JavaScript?

.....
by Michael Uhl, President of the Carolina Chapter.
You can reach him at mikeuhl@mindspring.com
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As I prepared for the February 21st JavaScript workshop that I led, I tried to justify the effort of learning to use JavaScript given its limited scope. If learning HTML was the equivalent of kindergarten-level work, then JavaScript is high school stuff. (Java itself is college.)

In other words, beyond copying extremely simple JavaScript code, you have some significant learning to do. First, you must understand basic object-oriented programming principles. Then you must familiarize yourself with the JavaScript syntax. If you are an experienced programmer, you are well on your way to writing JavaScript applications.

As for me, I have a limited amount of programming experience, and it was crucial in getting beyond merely copying other people's code. If you have no programming experience, you'll need to learn basic programming concepts, such as decision trees, data types, and looping.

Before any of you JavaScript programmer wannabes get bummed out, let me tell you this: learning basic JavaScript programming is worth the effort.

First and foremost, JavaScript gives the technical communicator a straightforward way to learn some basic object-oriented programming principles and at the same time justify the effort by applying it to Web pages. (Technically, JavaScript is "object-based" rather than "object-oriented," but the distinction is irrelevant to the beginning programmer.) It is useful for technical communicators in the computing industries to understand some of what's behind the JavaScript (and Java) craze. Furthermore, JavaScript will play an important role in managing style sheets and Dynamic HTML for Web pages.

Older browsers do have a lot of trouble with JavaScript. But, with Netscape's hold on the browser market holding steady, Netscape 4.0x is the browser of the future. Given this, I look at JavaScript as an investment for the future, which in the world of the Web is always getting here sooner than you planned.

I have some advice to those of you getting started with JavaScript. Get your hands on plenty of documentation. Start at Netscape's Web site: <http://developer.netscape.com/library/documentation/index.html> and be sure to look at code samples at <http://developer.netscape.com/library/examples/index.html>. Buy at least two third-party books. As you work through different topics, read what each text has to say about it. I'm using three texts:

- Arman Danesh, *JavaScript Interactive Course* (Corte Madera, CA: The Waite Group, Inc, 1997)
- Peter Kent, et al, *Netscape JavaScript 1.2 Book* (RTP, NC: Ventana Communications Group, 1997)
- Danny Goodman, *Danny Goodman's JavaScript Handbook* (Foster City, CA: IDG Books Worldwide, Inc., 1996).

The February 21 JavaScript workshop is sold out. We are in the process of setting up a second, and most likely a third, workshop on JavaScript. Please let Dick Evans (infodex@mindspring.com) know if you're interested in attending one and we'll see what we can arrange.
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Carolina Communiqué

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

Editor-in-Chief

Michelle Corbin Nichols

Proofreader

Craig Rice

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 (please 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://www.stc-va.org>
E-mail: stc@stc-va.org
901 North Stuart Street, Suite 904
Arlington, VA 22203-1854

See the Future, Make It Happen

— Join Us for Vision Day

.....
by Larry Kunz, Strategic Planner for the Carolina Chapter. You can reach him at ldkunz@vnet.ibm.com.

Times are good, aren't they? No, I'm not talking about politics, or the economy, or even the weather. I'm saying that the last few years have been very good for the Carolina Chapter of STC.

We've grown explosively—in size, activities, opportunities, and the quality of services we offer to our members. We can be proud of how we've grown and what we've achieved.

But when we look back in another few years, what will we say? Will we be proud of what we've become and what we've achieved?

We can be proud if we build a strong foundation and do some strategic planning—now. And you can be a part of it. Join us on Saturday, May 30, for a Carolina Chapter tradition: Vision Day. On Vision Day we gather in a relaxing setting to stimulate our creative juices and chart the course for our Chapter's future. This year's event will take place at the Durham home of our Chapter vice president, Chris Benz.

At Vision Day we'll work together to find ways to make the ideas in our Chapter's Strategic Plan (which is itself a product of past Vision Days) a reality. This isn't about making "to do" lists and handing out assignments. It's about discovering creative, strategic, and visionary ways to reach our goals and make the most of our 350-plus members' talents and abilities.

Can you suggest new activities and services that the Chapter isn't providing today? Does an afternoon of creativity and fun sound good to you? Then join us for Vision Day. Every Chapter member is welcome—you don't have to be an officer, have served on a committee, or even have attended a meeting.

Lunch will be provided. If you plan to attend, please contact me by May 27th so we can have enough to eat. Let me know, also, if you have special dietary or logistical needs. I hope to see you at Vision Day. Incidentally, if you want to look over our Chapter's Strategic Plan before then, point your Web browser to http://stc.org/region2/ncc/pubs/strategic_plan.html.

What: Carolina Chapter Vision Day

When: Saturday, May 30, 12:00 noon - 4:00 p.m.

Where: Chris Benz's house, 1406 Milton Road, Durham (directions are at <http://members.aol.com/cjbenz/directions.html>)

RSVP: Larry Kunz (254-6395 or ldkunz@vnet.ibm.com) by May 27

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A Mentor's Approach to Managing Technical Writers

.....
by Bill Sullivan, San Diego Chapter. Bill is a technical writer for the Exide Electronics Network Systems Group in San Diego. You can reach him at bsullivan@email.exide.com.
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Let's say you are the boss. You have been put in charge of one or more technical writers. How can you create a positive and productive environment? One way is to consider the difference between managing and mentoring.

A manager, especially a more hard-nosed type, may pick up a writer's draft and attack the writer, circling mistakes with red ink, demanding rewrites, and peppering the work with negative remarks. If the manager is uptight, it doesn't take very long for subordinates to become uptight also. And being too managerial may end up creating an adversarial relationship, which can thwart the writer's professional growth.

On the other hand, a supportive and nurturing fellow worker—a mentor, in other words—can help create a positive and productive team environment. Mentors may have to be patient with their writers at times, but that patience should

pay off, long-term, in results and accomplishments. When you find ways to make your people look good, they will in turn make you look good.

Making Mentoring Work

As a mentor, you might consider the differences between professional writing in an ideal world and professional writing in your shop. Taking a realistic view of the environment in which your writers operate may help you develop realistic expectations of those writers. For one reason or another, your writers may have been thrown into less than ideal situations. You can help improve such situations if you understand them.

How does a mentor teach a writer and still manage the writing project? A mentor should offer constructive criticism during the writing project. Often, the temptation is to rewrite a faulty sentence or paragraph to show how it should be done. Instead, why not diplomatically point out that the passage has some flaws and ask the writer to try again? Your goal should be to help the writer grow, not to do the writing yourself. People seldom learn when another person does their work for them, even when that person is the boss.

See "Mentor" on page 4

"Mentor" from page 3

Mentor to Improve the Writer's Communication

As a mentor, quality communication with your writers can foster *their* quality communication with readers. When you edit a writer's work, comment as copiously as you can. But learn to make comments that will help the writer become better. Avoid at all costs such unhelpful and unspecific chidings as "This sentence is bad." Untactful discussions of good and bad style can easily lead to resentments. Instead of saying that a passage is bad, say that you find it unclear or too detailed, and explain why. Then, meet with the writer, and sitting beside the writer—psychologically a better position than facing across a desk—talk calmly about the parts that bother you. If the office environment is too hectic, suggest a lunch meeting. Remember that a writer's best friend is a reader who takes him or her seriously enough to read carefully and provide constructive criticism.

Before and After a Writing Project

A lull in activity between major projects can be an excellent opportunity to help writers develop the style you are looking for. Encourage writers to study other technical documents you feel are successful. Develop a collection of good model documents, categorized by genre, so you can quickly find the right document for a given circumstance. If a writer is having problems describing a procedure, you can show the writer a

See "Mentor" on page 7

The Spiders Have Been Busy

.....
by Melissa Powell, Newsletter Web Site
Coordinator. You can reach her at
fmpowell@mindspring.com
.....

We're even further out there than you may have imagined! On the Web, that is. The *Carolina Communiqué* has a newly expanded Web site within the Carolina Chapter Web site.

Our new site still provides back issues of the newsletter. We've added a section of feature articles so you can have easy access to information you might want to read more than once. We have also provided information to help you get to know us and how we produce your newsletter.

We have two goals in updating our site. First, we want the *Carolina Communiqué* to be as accessible as possible. We realize that, being the techies you are, your computer is usually closer at hand than your stack of newsletters. Second, we want to make it as easy as possible for you to contribute to this publication and become famous. The site now includes a staff section that advertises who we are, where we meet, and what and how you can contribute.

Drop in on us. Tell us if you think we're meeting our goals. Share with us your vision of an even better site. Follow the "newsletters" link from the Carolina Chapter Web site (<http://stc.org/region2/ncc/>) to our new home page. We'll be waiting...
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Membership News

Total STC membership: 22,049

Current chapter membership: 401

New members:

Christina Biliouris, Paula Blanchard, Jeanette Bottitta, Michael Kleppinger, Sheila Loring, Vivian Farah McGee, Marty McLean, Amanda Worthington

Transfers in:

Stephanie Lassiter, Linda Rudd

Transfers out:

None

Members reinstated:

Deanna Betterton

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)

Report on the STC Winter Board of Directors Meeting

by Tracey Chiricosta, Region 2 Director-Sponsor.
You can reach her at tchiricosta@kbmgroup.com.

In January, the STC Board of Directors landed in Vancouver, British Columbia, to the sight of a beautiful skyline surrounded by a skier's paradise. The Canada West Coast Chapter hosted the Board of Directors winter meeting, in addition to an evening at the First Nations House of Learning (called The Longhouse) on the University of British Columbia campus, replete with a salmon dinner and aboriginal dancers. The following items describe the results of the board meeting.

Technical Editing SIG Created

The STC board approved the new Technical Editing SIG and named Tom Hoyt of the Willamette Valley Chapter as the SIG manager.

STC Board Reaches Out to Chapters

During the winter board meeting, the STC Board approved several action items to facilitate Chapter activities. These include approval for:

- A travel budget established for visits to Chapter and regional activities for the Society Immediate Past President, Society Secretary and Society Treasurer, starting in the STC Year 1998-99.
- A "roadmap" and other information to the *Chapter Handbook*, which will assist small, medium, student, and non-North American Chapters in planning their activities.
- An area at the annual conference for organizations related to STC to display materials to members who might be interested in their organization.
- A new financial reporting process for student Chapters to coincide with a fiscal year of May 1 through April 30, making it more convenient for student Chapters to file their financial reports during the school year.

The STC Board encouraged Chapters to enter their web sites in the Public Relations Competition. All entries must be postmarked by February 28, 1998.

STC Awards Grants and Loans to Chapters

STC supports and encourages special Chapter events and activities that further the goals of the Society through the Grants and Loans to Chapters Program.

The STC board approved a \$3,000 merit grant for the Chicago Chapter to launch a publicity campaign for their Chapter members' professional development and visibility of the profession among Chicago area businesses, students, and educators—through its publicity and education committees.

The STC board approved a \$2,000 merit grant for the East Tennessee Chapter to make the J. Paul Blakely

Scholarship, instituted in 1975, closer to being self-sufficient. This fund provides a \$500 annual scholarship and a \$100 Blakely Award of Excellence for undergraduate students of technical communication at the University of Tennessee.

The STC board approved a \$1,500 loan for the SpaceTech Chapter for the administrative costs associated with the Region 3 Student Conference to be held on March 28, 1998.

Board Approves Screen Capture Research Grant

The STC Board approved a research grant of \$10,000 for Hans van der Meij of the Department of Instructional Technology, the Netherlands, for a study of "The Design and Role of Screen Captures in Software Documentation."

Committee Managers Named

The STC Board approved Austin Brown as the 1997-98 Manager of the Nominating Committee and Annette Reilly as the 1997-98 Manager of the Strategic Planning Committee.

New Category Added to ISETC Competition

The STC Board added a new award category to the International Science and Engineering Technical Communication Competition for team projects, with an award amount of \$250 for each member of the winning team.

Student Chapter Dissolved

The Wright State University Student Chapter was dissolved.

STC Approves Changes to Bylaws

The STC Board approved changes to the bylaws in Article VI - COMMITTEES, Section 4. Standing Committees that tightened up the wording and changed the bylaws to more closely reflect the current functions of the Conference Advisory Committee and the Recognitions Advisory Committee. The two paragraphs affected now read as follows:

- The *conference advisory committee* provides guidance and continuity in the planning and management of annual conferences by making the expertise of its members available to current and future conferences. Its members are selected principally from past conference program managers and members who have expertise in managing elements of conferences at the international, regional, and Chapter levels.
- The *recognitions advisory committee* provides guidance and continuity in planning and managing all Society recognition programs at the international, regional, and Chapter levels. The committee makes the expertise of its members available to conference planning committees to provide advice and guidance on standards and procedures for recognition activities at the annual conference.

If You Want to E-volve, You've Got to Get In-volved

.....
by Ceil Shuman, member of the Education and Training Committee and a mentor to many. You can reach her at realtime@interpath.com
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In the February 1998 issue of *Carolina Communiqué*, our illustrious Chapter President Mike Uhl urged all of us to get involved in STC activities—more for our own professional benefit than for Chapter enhancement. I am living proof that active involvement and service to our Carolina Chapter results in amazing, almost miraculous benefits. Here is a list of just *some* of the benefits I have reaped as a result of active involvement in our Chapter:

- I know what is happening out there in our industry; I am aware of what tools and skills are most sought after today, and I have learned those skills.
- I have the confidence of knowing that, as long as I stay involved in STC, I will continue to stay current in the skills required by our industry.
- My income has increased by more than 65 per cent.
- I have received requests for interviews from recruiters and company managers in our area on the average of twice each week.
- Several companies all over the country have found my resume on our Chapter Web site and have approached me with attractive career opportunities.

- People whom I've never met contact me on a regular basis for help and advice; conversations with these people have lead to a dramatic increase in professional contacts.
- I have the most wonderful, challenging job I've ever had and am earning more money than I ever dreamed possible.
- I am becoming a visible, known member of the technical writing community here in the Triangle area.
- I've had the privilege of helping people get jobs and acquire skills.
- I won an award; this has resulted in increased demand for my services.
- I have met some of the most wonderful people on Earth; I have amazing new friends who are doing fabulous things with their lives.
- I am in a position where I can put my stepdaughter through college.

Because of all these rewards, I am a happier, more confident person than I was before I joined STC.

I attribute *all* of these wonderful realities directly to my activities in the STC. It is surprising how little I have done to reap such powerful benefits:

- Attended Carolina Chapter meetings on a regular basis, whether or not I thought I was interested in the topic.

See "Involved" on page 7

"Involved" from page 6

- Joined a committee and attended committee meetings on a regular basis.
- Attended a workshop in HTML.
- Started and authored an Education and Training Web page system (this required only two weekend days of my time, and very little maintenance time is necessary).
- Coordinated, co-authored, and taught an HTML workshop with Candee Hellberg.
- Entered an online documentation competition.
- Wrote a few articles for *Carolina Communiqué*.
- Began mentoring an NC State student in documentation design and the advanced features in Microsoft Word.

I did not invest very much time and energy in these activities, yet the return on that investment has been abundant—far beyond my dreams or initial intentions.

Everyone has *something* that he or she loves to do and can contribute to our Chapter. I encourage every member to think of one skill or activity that he and she enjoys and to apply it in service to our wonderful organization. Write an article for *Carolina Communiqué* on your lunch hour some day. Lead a workshop for the Education Committee. Help out with one of the Carolina Chapter Web pages. Attend meetings and share ideas.

You would be surprised by what might take place in your life, just by offering one act of service. As my dear friend and technical consultant, Tim Comstock, always says, "If you don't know what to do next in your career, stick close to your professional organization." That's good advice; and the best way to stay close is to participate.

See you at the next meeting. Be there or be square!

"Mentor" from page 4

model procedure, and examine together how it's done in that one case.

If you feel a writer needs personal instruction, devote some time to critiquing and perhaps rewriting *after* you release a job, especially while constructive criticism is still fresh in the writer's mind. Such post-release reflection can help prepare for subsequent projects.

Encourage your technical writers to practice their craft in between projects. E-mail is a wonderful tool for daily writing practice. Mentors should encourage writers to participate in discussion groups such as TECHWR-L (this writer's favorite) for technical writing, UTEST for usability testing, INDEX-L for indexing, COPYEDITING-L for editing, or discussion groups for specific software that the writers use. Encourage writers to broaden their skills by writing letters to the editors or articles for journals and newsletters, or even for various Web sites.

Taking on the role of a mentor as well as a manager can go a long way toward creating a positive and productive technical writing environment.

Chapter Leadership

President

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

Vice President

Christopher Benz
cjbenz@unforgettable.com
(919) 479-4891

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 Manager

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

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
(919) 677-8000, x6086

Education/Training Committee Chair

Dick Evans
infodex@mindspring.com
(919) 781-4302

Strategic Planning

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

Monthly Meeting Notice

What: STC Awards Banquet!

When: Thursday, March 12, 1998, 6:00pm

Where: Nortel RTP Auditorium

You should have already received a post card in the mail advertising this event. Check the Chapter's Web site for more information as well.

Contact Ivan Manestar (919-942-2322) for more information. Or, call the Carolina Chapter phone line at 406-6600



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 (992-0181).
- Managers SIG. Contact Steve Pope (851-4064).
- Online Information SIG. Contact Ann-Marie Grissino (562-2464).



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

Education and Training Events

The Education and Training Committee, led by Dick Evans (who can be contacted at 781-4302) and supported by many, has the following seminars or workshops available in the coming months:

- **“Process Documentation”** by Bill Albing. Saturday, March 14th, 1:00 P.M. to 4:00 P.M. Cost and location to be determined. For more information, contact Terry Otto at 992-0181.
- **“3-Day Basic FrameMaker Training”** offered by Mallett Technology. Early 1998. To register, or to get other details, please contact: Kay Ethier (406-1500 x22) or KEthier@rtp.mallett.com.

The Education and Training Committee meets on the Tuesday after the regular Carolina Chapter meeting (which is the 2nd Thursday of every month), from 6:00 P.M. to 7:30 P.M. at restaurants near RTP. See the Chapter's Web site or call Dick Evans (781-4302) for the location of the next meeting.



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