



# The Quill

November 2002 Volume 14 Number 3

www.stc.waterloo.on.ca



SOCIETY FOR TECHNICAL COMMUNICATION

## Goal Setting Triumphs over Time Management

by Ted Edwins, Chapter President

In September, I wrote about how the council had met during the summer to set some goals for what we wanted to achieve this year. We tried to come up with some strategies that would help us accomplish those goals. This whole process started me thinking about setting some personal goals.

One year for Christmas, my brother Tim bought me a Day Runner and assorted refill pages. Tim, who is a technical specialist installing and servicing photo processing machines, is very good at time management. He has his day timer with its multiple page systems and handy cardboard, slip-covered storage box. His job requires him to keep track of mileage, expenses, service calls, phone conversations, and God knows what else.

Tim kindly spent a couple of hours on Christmas Day, patiently explaining to me how a time management system worked. While I listened to him define the uses for the different kinds of refill pages, I realized I didn't have a clue what he was talking about! He was talking a completely different language! What the hell is a "tickler"? Is it the perforated corner you rip off the day page? I hated the vocabulary of time management!

My role as chapter President has required me to consider time management as a part of the goal setting experience. I must admit that in the past, goal setting has not been a top priority with me. I felt constricted, tied to a schedule that I knew I never would be able to complete. I needed a new system that would help me "kick it up a notch"!

I've read some goal-setting type books in the past but they weren't very helpful. Maybe I just wasn't ready to hear the message they delivered. I bought television infomercial huckster Tony Robbins' book, "Awaken the Giant Within". His high-octane, American rah-rah style just grated on my nerves. I'm sure the advice is sound but I just couldn't get past the image of the perfect teeth and hair. Perhaps it was jealousy.

A couple of weeks ago, I had a conversation with Deb Maskens. Over coffees at Café Insomnia, I asked how she kept on track and accomplished the goals she set for herself. Anyone who knows Deb knows that she is a focused woman. As she opened her own calendar and told me what she did, it occurred to me that I'd heard this message before. This was Stephen Covey of "7 Habits of Highly Successful People" fame.

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Looking for something to keep you busy during the bleak winter months? Why not volunteer as The Quill Copyeditor for February and March 2003?

This two month, temporary volunteer position is a good way to get your feet wet and find out what volunteering is all about.

Plus, you get to work with an outstanding committee, and contribute to a newsletter that reaches many local businesses.

What better way to network? If you are interested, or want to know more about this opportunity, contact Andrea Braniff, the editor, at [acb@campana.com](mailto:acb@campana.com).

As usual, please send your submissions, suggestions, and criticisms to:

[acb@campana.com](mailto:acb@campana.com).

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# Making an Impression

## Building your portfolio with Carolyn Watt

by Sue-Anne Schroeder, Member

### Dotting I's and Crossing T's

Punctilious types know that to "dot the I's and cross the T's" is to be meticulous, to give the most careful attention to detail, or to finalize the details of an agreement. They also know this metaphorical meaning makes sense, since neither the lower case "l" nor the lower case "t" is considered complete without their respective final marks.

The diacritic dot dates back to the 11th century, when some scrupulous scribe first appended the point to distinguish between a "U" and two consecutive I's. But that's not the only detail we dug up on the dotted "I." The stand-alone phrase "dot the 'I'" is another way to say "fill in details"; that is, someone who got their message across without "dotting the 'I'" did not make an explicit statement.

Now that we've spelled out the story on the "dotted I," we'll turn our attention to one last detail: crossing the T. It's easy to see how the lower case "t" is a variation on the familiar symbol of the cross, but it isn't quite as easy to make the connection between "crossing the 'T'" and military maneuvers. But picture this: a line of warships passes across the bow of the enemy's line of ships. That not only produces a "T" but it also results in the broadsides of the attacking ships being concentrated on the lead ship of the enemy.



Carolyn Watt

Discard the plastic covers and inexpensive folders! They have no place with your portfolio. This is just one of the many valuable tips that Carolyn Watt of Carolyn

Watt & Associates Inc. offered at the October workshop hosted by the Contracting and Independent Consulting SIG.

A portfolio is visible proof of the skills and experience that we have described in cover letters and in our resumes. A portfolio is the anchor of your interview because it gives you a chance to tell your story—about the projects you have completed, the companies where you have worked, the situations you have encountered and the solutions you have provided.

Carolyn discussed how to set up a portfolio and what to put in it. First, it is important to define your personal style. Decide how you want to present yourself. Determine what projects you are good at, what projects you like to do, and what projects highlight your skills. Include samples of these projects in your portfolio.

Next, determine the style of the potential client. Find out if the company's work environment is formal or informal, if the company is progressive or conservative, or if it is an industry leader. Make sure that the company's environment is a "fit" with your personal style and that your skills are transferable. Understand your client's project and know what type of work is required to complete the project. Tailor your portfolio accordingly.

Once you are clear about the contents of your portfolio, you can decide how to package your work. A portfolio case can be a three-ring binder, a folder, or an art

case. Whatever cover you choose, make sure it is classy and of uncompromising quality. Your portfolio is part of your image. Make sure the packaging stands out.

Putting your portfolio together follows the same principles for completing a technical writing project. Label every sample and include a description of the project, your role, and the special skills you used or developed as a result of the project. Use originals, especially if they are in colour. Don't hesitate to use or hire graphic design expertise to enhance the presentation of your work. Give yourself the recognition you deserve.

Carolyn's advice and the stories she shared were of special interest to everyone who attended the workshop. A senior member of the Toronto chapter of the STC, she has been president of the chapter, and has been both an entrant and a judge in the chapter competitions. She has won both local and international awards for her work. At the local level, Carolyn's work won Best of Show and a special Innovation Award.

Carolyn has had prior involvement with the Southwestern Ontario chapter. Earlier this year, she led us in a chapter goal-setting session. At the Society level, she has been a special Assistant to the President for Professional Development.

In 1985, Carolyn founded Carolyn Watt & Associates, a company that specializes in helping clients to communicate clearly and to simplify work processes.

Through her presentation and personable style, Carolyn clearly demonstrated that by making the most of the opportunities and the experiences that come our way - and with a carefully constructed portfolio - we can achieve our professional goals. \*

# Ask an Expert

## Current Job Market



So, what's your take on the current job market for writers?

Interesting question, especially in light of the conflicting information coming at us right now. Despite gloomy predictions for the near future, Canadian economic indicators show strength. We have to face the fact though; it is a tough market, here and in the U.S. Jobs that survived the technology bear now face the effects of recession: mergers, layoffs, spending cuts, hiring freezes, and more.

At a recent User Interface Engineering event in Boston, Jared Spool spoke of the chill in the market that our American counterparts have endured. And participants at the ACM SIGDOC conference (in Toronto this October) held cuts in training budgets partially responsible for the low attendance. Despite the pain though, Canadian creativity and innovation continue to create jobs. Furthermore, 2002 shows the highest rate of participation in the job market we've seen in decades.

But what does this mean for you?

If you're in the market and seeking employment, develop and maintain a broad skill set. You'll need to be a flexible and resourceful team player when organizations start to grow or feel pinched by attrition. In the mean time, watch for contract work and take heart for two reasons. First, Southwestern Ontario, especially Waterloo Region, has skirted the worst of it. Second, our unemployment rate as writers is below the national average by a couple of percentage points.

If things have stalled with your current employer, take the opportunity to get your house in order. Chances are that your workflow and process could be cleaned up a bit, and you want to be prepared for the cyclical upturn. When that's done, take a look at the rest of your organization and see where you can contribute, because in the end, it'll be time to run again. You'll either be ready, or not.

For those of you who look around and wonder just what recession I'm talking about, consider yourself fairly fortunate. Businesses that continue to boom can take advantage of a job market that promises quality candidates, though some of those candidates may avoid the risk of a move right now.

To recap that weather report for you, I'm calling it cloudy with showers today, mixed sun and cloud tomorrow, clearing for the weekend!

For an interesting look at the market for writers, visit [www.jobfutures.ca](http://www.jobfutures.ca) and tell them you want to be an author. \*

Do you have a question or situation to share with our expert and the chapter? Email [quillexpert@yahoo.ca](mailto:quillexpert@yahoo.ca).

*If things have stalled with your current employer, take the opportunity to get your house in order.*

Help Wanted Hidden Meanings  
"Competitive Salary" - We remain competitive by paying less than our competitors.

"Join Our Fast Paced Company" - We have no time to train you.

"Casual Work Atmosphere" - We don't pay enough to expect that you will dress up.

"Must be Deadline Oriented" - You will be six months behind schedule on your first day.

"Some Overtime Required" - Some time each night, some time each weekend.

"Duties will Vary" - Anyone in the office can boss you around.

"Must have an Eye for Detail" - We have no quality control.

"Seeking Candidates with a Wide Variety of Experience" - You will need to replace three people who just left.

"Problem Solving Skills a Must" - You are walking into a company in perpetual chaos. Haven't heard a word from anyone out there. Your first task is to find out what is going on.

"Requires Team Leadership Skills" - You will have the responsibilities of a manager without the pay or respect.

"Good Communication Skills" - Management communicates poorly, so you have to figure out what they want and do it.

# September Board Meeting

## Summary

by Rob Houser, Director/Sponsor Region 3

Sub- and nonstandard English  
Forty years ago today, *The Beverly Hillbillies* began its nine-year run on television. One of the chief sources of humor on that popular program was language: remember Granny's "ruma-tiz medicine," carried by the Clampett clan from the hills of the Ozarks to the hills of "Bever-lee"? And who could forget the family's fancy "cee-ment pond" and Jethro's enthusiastic yells of "Yee-haw!"?

But while the program ostensibly mocked the backwoods hillbillies, its creators directed just as many jabs toward the self-absorbed Hollywood set. And while we're not going to take a position about which side is more deserving of derision, we will take our stand on the Clampett dialect: is it nonstandard or substandard?

Membership, budget, and member services were the focus of the STC board of directors meeting in Boston on September 26 to 28, 2002. As with many organizations, the STC is feeling the effects of a weak economy—membership, the value of our investments, and conference attendance are lower this year. Despite the challenges from the economy, the board spent a significant amount of time addressing ways to increase membership and improve the quality of member services.

Before the official meeting, the board held a workshop facilitated by John Nardone. John is president of International and Media Worldwide for Modem Media. He is a world-renowned expert in marketing. John led the board through brainstorming and discussions about the future of the Society. You'll be hearing more about the results of that workshop in the near future, but we would like to thank John publicly for donating his time and talents to help us think more creatively about the future of the STC.

The following actions were taken at the September board meeting:

- Approved the preliminary budget for fiscal year 2003.
- Revised the way that the Society pro-rates dues. Dues will now be pro-rated by month rather than only at the end of the year. The effect on new members is that they can join at any time during the year and receive 12 months of membership.
- Changed the way that chapter rebates will be paid for 2004 onwards. In the future, half of the rebate will be paid upon receipt and approval of the chapters' financial report and 990EZ (if applicable) and the remaining half will be paid the following January. The main reason this action was taken is to reduce the drain on the cash flow for the Society during the year.
- Approved the new strategic plan. You can see the plan at [www.stc.org](http://www.stc.org) (under *About STC*).
- Approved previously committed support for INTECOM (The International Council for Technical Communication), an organization of 15 international societies focusing on technical communication.
- Increased support for Society representation at the standards organizations related to our profession: National Information Standards Organization (NISO), World Wide Web Consortium (W3C), and International Organization for Standardization (ISO).





- The Chapter Achievement Award was updated to increase the profile of membership activities in chapters of all sizes. The revisions apply to chapters submitting this year (2002-2003), so make sure you get a copy of the revised guidelines from the Society web site.

The following items were discussed at the board meeting:

- The Society web site initiated the "members only" area starting October 1, 2002. The purpose of this move is to increase the value of membership in the STC. We will be monitoring the success of this effort closely over the next six months.
- The board discussed ways to increase the role of the SIGs in the Society. The SIGs represent the diversity of our membership and are important communities for technical communicators.
- Membership was discussed throughout the board meeting. You will see more of a focus on recruiting new members in the months to come. In preparation, start thinking about ways that you can help STC reach the many technical communicators who have not yet joined our community.

If you have questions or comments about the STC board of directors or any of the items mentioned in this article, please contact your Director/Sponsor. \*

## Goal Setting Triumphs over Time Management

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When I got home, I dug to the bottom of my desk drawer, found a copy of Covey's "First Things First", and began to reread it. I had started and stopped this book a number of times but I was determined to work through it this time!

Covey's basic message is that we will be successful only when we take into account all the roles in our life when planning our activities. Our goals must be aligned with values we instinctually understand. Once we have our roles and goals aligned, we no longer feel the urgent tasks pulling us away from what we want to do because we will already be doing what we want to do.

There are many exercises sprinkled throughout the book to help you define your roles and goals. At the end of these exercises, you are left with a road map of the direction you want to take your life. What I like best about Covey's message is that the type of time management tool is of no importance when setting goals. The only thing that is important is to have the goal and to work toward it. The tool you use is of no consequence.

I have horribly mangled Covey's message in attempting to state it concisely but I am confident that his method will help me. The goal-setting process is a valuable one that is beneficial to any individual or organization that undertakes it. I look forward to seeing the results for both myself and for the chapter. \*

Dictionary editors apply "substandard" to words and constructions normally used within a speech community by a group other than the one with prestige. "Nonstandard" is reserved for words and constructions that are not characteristic of usage by educated native speakers but that may be employed by them occasionally. So slang terms and regionalisms are may be "nonstandard" but they are not "substandard."

But some commentators and critics apply "nonstandard" more indiscriminately. Since they use "nonstandard" as a euphemistic replacement for the more pejorative "substandard" and "illiterate," we advise caution before accepting either term.

# Upcoming General Meetings

## Keeping yourself in the loop

by Shannon Hilker, Program Manager

### Nurturing Your Career

With today's economy, it's a good time to ask yourself: Could I survive company downsizing? Are your skills and contacts up-to-date? Do I have the skills to move up the ladder? Would you know how to begin a new job search? Do you know what "they" are looking for?

Join us December 2<sup>nd</sup> at 7:00 p.m., in the Rosedale room of the Waterloo Inn, 475 King Street North, Waterloo, for an interactive progression.

During the progression, you will have the opportunity to spend approximately 20 minutes at up to four tables of your choice. Each table will have an expert leading a mini discussion about a career related topic like networking, great resume writing, and dealing with the challenges of being a first time manager.

### Writing SDK Documentation for Programmers

What is an SDK? What is an API? How do you write SDK documentation even if you're not a programmer (and why would you want to)? What sort of information do you need to include? How do you work with developers to create this information? What are some tools that you can use?

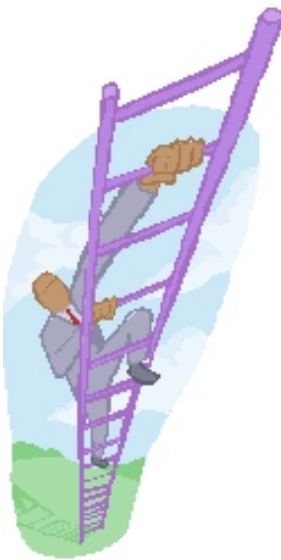
Join us January 7<sup>th</sup>, 2003 at 7:00 p.m., in room 1304 of the Davis Center at the University of Waterloo, for a discussion lead by Scott Wahl, team lead of technical documentation at Research In Motion®.

Scott will explain what's involved in writing documentation for software development kits (SDKs), answer the questions above, as well as provide examples with both C/C++ and Java code.

SDK documentation can be an exciting way to advance your career. If you are a technical writer with little or no programming experience but are interested in working on more technical documentation, this is the session for you!

Scott Wahl has over seven years' experience working on documentation for technical audiences. As team lead of technical documentation at Research In Motion®, his focus is on documentation for the BlackBerry(TM) Java Development Environment. He holds a B.A. from the University of Waterloo and an M.Sc. in Technical Communication from Utah State University.

As always, doors open at 6:30, snacks are provided, everyone is welcome, and attendance is free. \*



Business Card Etiquette, by  
Lynda Goldman

When it comes to giving out your business cards, keep the following tips in mind:

1. Don't hand out your business card to everyone you know, as if you are spreading the wonder of who you are. First see if people need or want your card. Handing out your cards like chewing gum makes you seem like a cheap salesperson - not the image you want to project.

2. Make sure your business cards are clean and in good condition. They are a part of your business image. A business card that is dirty, or curled at the edges leaves a poor first impression. Use a business card case to keep your cards clean and fresh.

3. When you receive a card, don't just snatch it and jam it into your pocket. Take a moment to look at it. Make a positive comment about some aspect of the card - the logo, company name or business location. This shows respect for the other person, and demonstrates your interest in them. As well, this is an excellent way for you to find out more about them, such as their job title. It also helps you remember their name, or reminds you of their name in case you forgot - a very common occurrence.

4. After you've looked at the card, place it carefully in a card case, or in a front pocket - not a back pocket. Treat the card with respect.

# Online Help Authoring Tools

## October general meeting recap

by Leo Petipas, Hospitality Manager



We jumped right into the scheduled panel discussion, with Heidi Marr as our moderator, after our experts introduced themselves:

- **Robin Dube**, currently working at Mitra Imaging Inc., has six years of solid online help experience and is currently using Dreamweaver and RoboHTML.
- **Carrie Spira** is at Inscribe Technology developing online documents using RoboHelp for PC-based products and Dreamweaver for Mac-based products.
- **Opal Gamble** is a gun-for-hire who has helped companies such as Descartes, Campana and Intellitactics with their online help systems.

Question:

*When your company documents are authored in a product like FrameMaker (Adobe Systems, Inc.), is it a wise strategy to gradually (less painfully) transition to less sophisticated products, such as ForeHelp (ComponentOne LLC), with a view to stepping up to a fancier online publishing tool such as Dreamweaver (Macromedia, Inc.) at a later date?*

Panel response:

Assuming resources are limited, a product like WebWorks, which comes with Framemaker, would be one way to go. It is a pretty versatile product, but involves a rather steep learning curve. It is also a good product to use for single-sourcing.

Robin suggested Dreamweaver would be a preferable way to go for clean HTML code that is easy to use and great for creating content. It has a facility for creating templates for different document types for which you may call up a variety of common library items. RoboHTML (eHelp Corp.) doesn't have the same capability for template generation as Dreamweaver - although there is some template availability in the recent release of RoboHTML X3.

Question:

*How would you compare writing for the web with writing offline copy?*

Panel response:

Online guides are treated quite differently. Online help is approached in a very different way from a layout and design perspective. Carrie offered the information model her company uses that begins with "How do I...?" questions followed by short, concise answers. The next level of information is "Tell me more about...", which provides users with more in-depth information, including procedures to address the "Why?" underlying the "How do I...?" questions.

Robin suggested organizing your data into concepts, reference material, and how to sections. She finds this system especially useful for complex systems. It addresses different levels of user understanding, depending on the depth of human interaction with the product. *continued on page 8*

5. Be careful about writing on people's cards. Now, this goes against convention with most networking books and articles. But in many cultures, specifically with people from Asia, a business card is an important part of their persona, and should be treated with respect. Other people spend time and money designing a professional card, and may not appreciate your writing across it. If you need to record important information, write on the back, not the front. And ask first, 'Do you mind if I write on your card?'

6. Don't leave home without your cards. You shouldn't give your cards to everyone you see, but you do want to have them ready when you need them.

7. If someone hands you a card that you don't want, don't refuse to take it. Accept it graciously, look at it, and put it in a pocket. You can throw it out later.

8. When your cards are damaged or out of date, print new ones. If you start crossing out information on a card and write new information on top of it, it makes it difficult to read, and looks messy. Business cards are part of your image. Make sure yours are well designed and up to date.

Source: Lynda Goldman of Goldman Smythe & Associates. Lynda can be reached by email [Lyndag@goldmansmythe.com](mailto:Lyndag@goldmansmythe.com) or visit <http://www.goldmansmythe.com/>.

## Online Help Authoring Tools

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### Off The Deep End

This expression is fairly new, dating back to the early 1900s. In many recreational buildings with indoor swimming pools, there were no lines showing the depth of the water. Swimmers familiar with the pool knew which end was deep and which was shallow, while newcomers hadn't a clue. It was these new swimmers - who took on more than they could handle without being careful - that inspired the expression.

### Pooped

Englishmen headed toward the New World found that violent waves did the most damage when they crashed against the stern, or poop, or a vessel. Any ship that made it through a long bout with the high seas was said to be badly pooped, or lucky to still be afloat after the many days of pounding. Sailors who described the splintered stern of a ship to friends or family frequently confessed that they felt as pooped as their vessel looked.

### Dead As A Doornail

In the centuries before the doorbell, a visitor's arrival was announced by pounding with a knocker upon a metal plate nailed to the door. The nails holding the knocking plate took a beating and had to be routinely replaced. These useless doornails were referred to as being dead.

#### Question:

What about single-sourcing considerations for help with documentation that is being created for the web?

#### Panel response:

If you have documents authored in a product like FrameMaker, you can single-source from FrameMaker to Dreamweaver, RoboHelp, or another HTML editor, using the WebWorks functionality in FrameMaker.

To avoid cumbersome web documents, they advised pruning the text down to the bare bones. The offline guide will be much larger in comparison.

The panelists generally agreed that it is really hard to do a thorough job of single-sourcing text and complementary online documents.

#### Question:

What is the difference between WinHelp and HTML Help/Webhelp?

#### Panel response:

WinHelp is a legacy format used in Windows together with older or cheaper products; it is not actively supported.

RoboHTML has some powerful features such as easy code editing, quick creation of *chm* files and, in combination with Dreamweaver, table of contents, index creation, site search capabilities and it is very well supported. XML-base "skins" can be generated for different "looks" to pages while maintaining content integrity.

#### Question:

How about learning about HTML online?

#### Panel response:

Several sources online: **HTMLgoodies.com** - great tutorials

**About.com** - basic HTML tutorials

**Helpstuff.com** - what's new? Compares web tools.

There you go. Now you can go out there and **help** everybody **online!** \*

# Volunteering - the STC Way

Your chance to gain some experience

by Lori Shantz, Vounteer Coordinator

Are you looking for a way to improve your skills as a technical communicator? How about creating some new material for your portfolio and resume? And who's not looking to meet new people and have a great time? Volunteering can accomplish all of these things and more!

Many important organizations in your community depend on volunteers to help them provide valuable services. Your skills in writing, editing, speaking, graphics, web design and database management can make a difference to an organization that is struggling to meet its mandate in a world of shrinking budgets and donor fatigue.

Best of all, volunteering doesn't just help your community - it benefits you too! It's a great way to learn new skills, develop portfolio material, and have a great time.

Volunteering Opportunities Available This Month

## ***The Business and Education Partnership of Waterloo Region***

Are you an experienced technical communicator with a passion for your work? The Business and Education Partnership of Waterloo Region is looking for professionals who would be willing to visit local high schools and talk to students about their careers. This is a great opportunity to raise awareness about technical communication as a career option.

## ***The STC Southwestern Ontario Chapter***

The Southwestern Ontario Chapter has several council positions still available. They include:

- Vice-president
- Online SIG co-ordinator
- Management SIG co-ordinator
- U of W student liaison
- WLU student liaison
- Copy editor for The Quill (February and March issues only)

If you are interested in any of the following volunteering opportunities and would like more information about them, or if you would like to be kept informed of other opportunities as they come up, please contact Lori Shantz at [lori.shantz@sympatico.ca](mailto:lori.shantz@sympatico.ca).

Visit the Chapter Info page on the Chapter website ([www.stc.waterloo.on.ca](http://www.stc.waterloo.on.ca)) to find out more about these positions and the council. \*



**Looking to get  
out of your box?**

## **Adam's Apple**

This one's based on mythology. Folktales explained that Adam shouldn't have taken the apple from Eve in the Garden of Eden. When he yielded to her temptation, a piece of fruit stuck on the way down. Ever since, it has moved when men eat or talk in order to warn: "Beware of the temptress."

## **Alibi**

This is the Latin word for "elsewhere." Many defense attorneys based their cases upon evidence that their client was alibi at the time of the crime. Use of the centuries-old word was so common that it entered modern speech with no change in spelling or meaning.

## **Ax to Grind**

An old Benjamin Franklin story tells the tale of how a young Franklin was approached by a fellow who stopped to admire the family grindstone. Asking to be shown how it worked, the stranger offered young Ben an ax with which to demonstrate. Once his ax was sharp, the fellow walked off, laughing. Thus anyone with a hidden motive has an ax to grind.

# Taking Help Online

## A quick reference

by Opal Gamble, Contract Writer

October's general meeting focused on online help: how to create it, the pros and cons of tools, the evil process of single-sourcing, and general tips.

There were lots of questions and theories thrown around, so I thought I'd take this opportunity to write an extended link list for answers to some of the big questions:

- What do I have to know to begin?
- What tools should I use?
- How do I write online help? (Also known as, what are the differences between writing for print and online documentation?)

### Start with the basics

In my opinion, knowing HTML and whatever other markup languages you plan on using to author your online help is vital. Take time to get to know the code, because no WYSIWYG editor is infallible. At some point, you're going to discover a coding mistake that your editor missed – and it's up to you to figure it out.

Carrie suggested [www.htmlgoodies.com](http://www.htmlgoodies.com) at the meeting. HTML Goodies has a great set of tutorials if you're learning HTML, or provides a good reference if you just need to check your facts.

If you hate reading online (the irony!), you can order the HTML Goodies series from Amazon or Chapters.

There are lots of tutorials online or in print, so if HTML Goodies isn't your style, you have lots of alternatives, for example:

- Webmonkey (<http://hotwired.lycos.com/webmonkey/>)
- W3C's Getting Started with HTML (<http://www.w3.org/MarkUp/Guide/>)
- Dave's Interactive Guide to HTML (<http://www.davesite.com/webstation/html/>)

While you're learning the ropes, check your fledgling code for mistakes with the World Wide Web Consortium's validation service (<http://validator.w3.org>). When you've got your code all up to spec, feel free to mock certain companies (\*cough\* *eHelp* \*cough\*) that charge you thousands of dollars to produce code that doesn't validate.

One more thing to consider: Cascading Style Sheets. You need to understand how the CSS works, how it affects your project, and how to manipulate it to conform to your company's branding guidelines. Here are a few resources:

- W3C's A Matter of Style (<http://www.w3.org/MarkUp/Guide/Style>)
- W3Schools CSS Tutorials (<http://www.w3schools.com/css/default.asp>)
- CSS Pointers Group (<http://css.nu/>)

### Bite the Bullet

When U.S. Civil War casualties were carried off the field with a mangled arm or leg, the soldiers couldn't turn away when a surgeon with a bloody apron approached with a scalpel or a saw. Sometimes, the supply of painkillers and whiskey had run out, forcing the medics to place a soft-lead bullet in the patient's mouth. It wasn't much, but it made amputation a little easier to bite the bullet instead of lying on the table screaming.

### Bitter Pill to Swallow

For centuries, a physician's pellet for use in sickness has been known as a pill. Bark of the cinchona tree was effective in fighting malaria, but the quinine it contained was extremely bitter. Since medications weren't coated, cinchona pellets caused any disagreeable thing to be termed a bitter pill to swallow.

### Blue Chips

This expression owes its origins to poker. Early tokens were white, red or blue, with blue being by far the most valuable of the three. Investors soon capitalized on the chip's higher stature and began touting their holdings as consisting of only the best companies or commodities.



## Products

There are lots of products available for creating online help. Choosing the right one for your project and team is a problem that requires you to consider:

1. What do you need as a final result? Procedures? High-level overviews? Advanced or beginner level?
2. Who is doing the writing? Do you have a team that is at an experienced or beginner level with online help?
3. How is the online help being deployed? With the product? As context sensitive help? On a support site?

Answering these questions should help you choose which product is best for you.

### RoboHelp

This is the name that gets thrown around the most. eHelp, makers of the RoboHelp suite of products, have won industry awards and claim to be the industry standard (although, you'll notice that most product websites make this claim). RoboHelp for HTML integrates with other WYSIWYG HTML editors and produces a variety of online help solutions.

eHelp charges for technical support, but there is a free, user-to-user forum that answers a majority of the problems that you might encounter.

(<http://ehelp.com/products/robohelp/>)

### FrameMaker

If you're thinking of creating online help by single-sourcing from existing FrameMaker documents, WebWorks (the Standard Edition is shipped with FrameMaker, but you'll want to upgrade to the Professional version for more flexibility in customizing the output) or the **Save As** functionality will help you.

Believe it or not, Adobe's online help is pretty handy when you're trying to figure out the mysteries of single-sourcing, but if you need a book, try Adobe's *Classroom in a Book* series.

As an alternative to buying a product specifically for online help, you could author your online help in FrameMaker and just output to HTML.

(<http://www.adobe.com/products/framemaker/main.html>)

### HelpBreeze

An economical choice, HelpBreeze allows you to create online help (HTML Help, WinHelp, JavaHelp, or plain HTML) as well as produce print documents.

Created in 1993 by SolutionSoft, HelpBreeze offers a standalone WYSIWYG editor, or integration with Microsoft Word, depending on the solution you prefer.

(<http://www.solutionsoft.com/hlpbrz.htm>) continued on page 12

### Bootlegger

The government made alcohol sales to the Indians illegal because their low tolerance to the drink made them dangerous. So frontiersmen used to smuggle the bottles to the Indians by hiding the alcohol in the legs of their boots.

### Break The Ice

This expression came into general usage upon the 1821 release of Lord Byron's *Don Juan*. Referring to British people, Byron wrote, "And your cold people are beyond all price, When once you've broken through their confounded ice."

### The Bronx

The New York borough gets its name from Jonas Bronck, an early settler who bought five hundred acres of land in the neighborhood of the district that bears his name.

### Bus

Shortened from the French phrase *voiture omnibus*, which means "vehicle for all."

## Taking Help Online

continued from page 11

**Books** on religion outnumbered works of fiction by a 2 to 1 margin in 1870 England. Sixteen years later, novels surpassed religious works.

**There** are 48 Gutenberg Bibles still in existence. Two of them were in Germany during World War II and are missing, but many book collectors believe them to be in private collections.

**The** world's largest art gallery is the Winter Palace and the Hermitage in Leningrad. Visitors walk fifteen miles to visit each of the 322 galleries, which house nearly 3 million works of art and archaeological remains.

**Pablo** Picasso almost died at birth. The midwife present though he was stillborn and left him on the table. His father, a physician, revived Pablo by breathing air into his lungs.

**Wonder** Woman was the world's first comic book superheroine. She was introduced in *All Star Comics* in December 1941 and created by psychologist William Moulton Marston.

**The** Bible is the best selling book of all time with approximately six billion books sold. The second-best selling book is *Quotations from the Works of Mao Tse-Tung* with about 800 million sales.

**The** first book published in the United States was *Massachusetts Bay Colony: The Oath of a Free Man*, in 1638.

### ForeHelp and Doc-to-Help

As of January 10, 2002, ForeFront (creators of ForeHelp) does not exist. They sold ForeHelp and other products to ComponentOne, who appears to be continuing support on the product.

According to the website, ForeHelp's technology is being added into Doc-to-Help.

Doc-to-Help integrates with Microsoft Word to create print documentation, HTML Help, HTML, WinHelp, and JavaHelp.

(<http://www.forehelp.com/> and <http://www.componentone.com/cmd.boa?product=DTH6>)

### Other HTML Editors

If you're going to write online help the do-it-yourself way (with or without using RoboHelp for added functionality), any HTML editor will do. Here are a few you might want to consider:

- Macromedia Dreamweaver (<http://www.macromedia.com/software/dreamweaver/>)
- Adobe GoLive (<http://www.adobe.com/products/golive/>)
- Macromedia HomeSite (<http://www.macromedia.com/software/homesite/>)
- bluefish (<http://bluefish.openoffice.nl/>)



Even Notepad will do the trick. Really, if you're comfortable enough to go this route, you probably have a favorite HTML editor already.

### Attacking the Writing Issue

Although "how do I write online help?" doesn't seem like a difficult question, the main problem in defining how to write online help lies in technicalities about your product and your intended audience.

A few quick tips from me, since online resources are scarce or unreliable:

- *Chunking information is vital.* It aids scanning (admit it, you do it too) and invites users to actually read. Dense text is your enemy.
- *Minimize clicking.* It's a lot easier for users to stick a finger in the appropriate chapter when you force them to "see page 15" for added instructions, but forcing them to use the BACK button might result in disorientation. Using dynamic HTML tricks, or pop-ups, might be a good way to provide information to users with less experience, without losing them in the online help.
- *Think about your preferences.* As a writer, you have to figure out a lot of tools. How do you prefer your information presented? If you don't want to read your online help, your users probably don't either.

- *Test it out.* Grab a new analyst, the company accountant, or other willing volunteers, and make them try to accomplish a few tasks using the online help (for example, get them to look up “Adding a new user” and then try doing it with the software).

For more authoritative advice, try authors such as JoAnne Hackos, Janice Reddish, William Horton, and Claire Harrison.

As a final note, despite obvious interest about online issues in our chapter, the Online SIG is currently without a portfolio manager. Last year’s Online SIG site (<http://online-sig.sio2.ca/>) is still available for conversation and questions. If you are interested in taking on the portfolio, contact our Volunteer Coordinator, Lori ([lori.shantz@sympatico.ca](mailto:lori.shantz@sympatico.ca)), for details. \*

## Word Trivia

### Test your smarts

by Meredith Ballaban, Puzzlemaker

- 1 What are the only four countries in the world with one-syllable names?
- 2 What is the only number whose number of letters in the name equals the number?
- 3 What is the longest word with 180-degree rotational symmetry (if you were to view it upside-down it would still be the same word and perfectly readable)?
- 4 What three-syllable word, with the change of a single consonant, becomes a two-syllable word with no vowel sounds in common?
- 5 How many letters does the longest word in the Oxford dictionary have?
- 6 What is the only number which has its letters in alphabetical order?
- 7 What is the only common English word ending in –mt?

Answers:  
 1. Chad, France, Spain and Greece  
 2. Four  
 3. SWIMS  
 4. Hideous > Hideout  
 5. 45  
 6. Forty  
 7. Dreamt  
 pneumonoultramicroscopicsilicovolcanocentosis

**Close** to two million people who go to hospitals in the United States for one ailment wind up catching another.

**Ketchup** was once sold as a patented medicine. In the 1830s it was marketed in the United States as Dr. Miles’s Compound Extract of Tomato.

**The** electric automobile self-starter was invented to make it possible for women to drive without a companion, who was previously needed to crank the engine.

**There** are only 81 stable chemical elements. Rhenium was the last one to be found in 1925. Fifteen other elements have been discovered since then, but they are all radioactive.

**The** first computer, the steam-driven calculating machine, was built in 1823 by Charles Babbage. It failed to work due to poor workmanship in the intricate parts. When rebuilt by the London Museum of Science in 1991, it worked.

**98%** of the weight of water is made up from oxygen.

**Pearls** melt in vinegar.

**According** to an Old English system of time units, a moment is considered to be one and a half minutes.

## What is the Quill?

The **Quill** is the official newsletter of the Southwestern Ontario chapter of the Society for Technical Communication (STC). The Quill is published in Waterloo, Ontario monthly, except in January, July, and August, and distributed free to all local STC members. Material in this publication may be reprinted, provided the author and the Southwestern Ontario chapter of the STC are acknowledged. All readers are welcome to submit short articles, letters, and other interesting items relevant to technical communication to the editor, [acb@campana.com](mailto:acb@campana.com). Please submit items by one week prior to the date of the general meeting.

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To submit advertising, please consult with the editor, [acb@campana.com](mailto:acb@campana.com). Advertising combining text and graphics *must* be supplied in graphic format.

**Business card** \$10

**1/4 page** \$30

(\$20 for 3 or more issues)

**1/2 page** \$40

(\$30 for 3 or more issues)

**Full page** \$80

(\$60 for 3 or more issues)

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