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Heidi makes resolutions for the new year. She thought she would share them with you so you can help to keep her on track. [More](#)

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It's one thing to find just the right words, and to match them with complementary graphics. It's even better when there is consistency between the words and the graphics. Patrick Hofmann shares his words of wisdom in this article on templating. [More](#)

### Translation

Pauline isn't the only one who has been involved in career changes over the years. From translation to technical writing and back again, find out what changes Al Daigen has seen over the years. [More](#)

### Workshop Ideas

The February workshop is just around the corner. You can have a say

## The Editor's Message

Although this is the December issue of The Quill, it is indirectly the January issue as well. I didn't have the heart to make people write articles while they were visiting with family and friends over the holidays. If the truth be told, I also wanted to be able to enjoy the holidays without worrying about getting the January issue ready. Although The Quill is a labour of love, it isn't that I necessarily love labour all the time.

Unfortunately, for you avid readers, this slight break in the newsletter may cause you to suffer withdrawal. If you start seeing pink elephants, you might want to try reading a back issue of The Quill. If that doesn't work, you can write an article and submit it. I think writing an article is a cure for everything. It will make you feel like you have accomplished something, and I know it will make me feel better to have an extra article.

Since January is a time for resolutions, I thought I would let you know some of my goals are for next year's newsletters:

- To continue the regularly featured articles, like our president's message and helpful advice for consultants and independent contractors.
- To keep you informed of upcoming events, like meetings and the February workshop.
- To feature more industries that use technical communication (for

about what this workshop will address. Find out where you can submit your wish list and vote on possible topics. [More](#)

## News from England

All work and no play would make life dull for Nancy Halverson. Find out what is happening in Nancy's life in England as she continues working and makes plans for an upcoming vacation. [More](#)

## November Recap

High tech meets education at November's general meeting. Find out what's happening at the University of Waterloo. [More](#)

## Company Recognition

Many companies do a lot for the STC, either directly or indirectly. Find out how you can recognize the efforts of a particular company by nominating them for this award. [More](#)

## Upcoming Events

The STC provides you with a lot of opportunities to learn and grow as a communicator. See which of the upcoming events might interest you. [More](#)

## CIC Business Plan

Before you can start a business, you have to develop your business plan. If you are not sure what you need to do, read Elaine Garnet's words of wisdom to help get you started. [More](#)

## Next CIC Meeting

It's one thing to develop your business plan and make contacts; it's another to turn leads into paying customers. Attend this meeting and find out how you may be selling yourself short. [More](#)

## STC Head Office

Opportunities for learning are not restricted to your STC chapter. Find out about upcoming conferences so that you can keep your skills up to date. [More](#)

## Just for Laughs

Part of being a good communicator is being able to laugh at ourselves and the world in which we live. [More](#)

example, manufacturing, education, agriculture). I am always looking for volunteers to write an article.

- To find out how Nancy goes about getting an STC chapter started in northern England and what the next development will be where she works.
- To introduce you to more of our members.
- To share more success stories that show the value of our profession.
- To provide reviews of various Websites and books that may interest communicators.

There is a lot to accomplish over the next year, but I have faith in those people who have helped me in the past and those people who will help me in the future. If you have already experienced the satisfaction of being involved in The Quill, I want to thank you for adding value to this newsletter. I couldn't have done it without you.

If you have an opinion about anything that appears in The Quill or suggestions for new avenues to explore, I look forward to hearing from you. It's your feedback that determines the direction of the newsletter and improves its value.

Send your questions or comments to me, Debbie, at [quill@stc-soc.org](mailto:quill@stc-soc.org)





## About The Quill



The Quill is the monthly newsletter of the Southwestern Ontario Chapter STC, which is a Canadian chapter in Region 1.

### The Quill History

In October 1989, the first edition of the The Goose was launched by editor Rick Martin, who immediately announced a contest for a new name. The winning entry was, of course, The Quill. Within two years, The Quill earned an Achievement Award for small chapter newsletters, followed by back-to-back Merit Awards in **1993** and **1994**. **1992** and **2001** saw Awards of Excellence. In **1996**, we were awarded not only the Distinguished Award, but the Best of Show for all chapter newsletters.

### Submission Deadlines

August 25	September Issue
September 19	October Issue
October 17	November Issue
November 14	December Issue
No Quill	January Issue
January 16	February Issue
February 13	March Issue
March 19	April Issue
April 16	May Issue
May 14	June Issue
No Quill	July or August Issues

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to other publications.

When you submit an article, you give the editor and the newsletter staff the right to edit your article for clarity and to ensure that it adheres to the newsletter's style and standards. All articles are edited, copy edited, and proofed prior to publication.

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## **Mailing Address**

Debbie Kerr,

The Quill Editor, 373 Imperial Rd. S., Guelph, Ontario, Canada N1K 1L3

## **The Quill Staff**

Editor: [Debbie Kerr](#)

Copy Editor: Margie Yundt

Technical and Layout Advisor: Opal Gamble

## **Chapter Officers**

President: [Heidi Marr](#)

Past President: [Ted Edwins](#)

Treasurer: [Carol Lawless](#)

Recorder: [Darlene Wood](#)

For a complete list of contacts, go to the site of the Southwestern Ontario Chapter STC at [www.stc-soc.org](http://www.stc-soc.org).

## **STC Head Office**

You can find out more about the STC using any of the following methods.

Website: [www.stc.org](http://www.stc.org).

Address: 901 N. Stuart Street, Suite 904, Arlington, Virginia 222203-1822

Voice: (703) 522-4114

Fax: (703) 522-2075

E-mail: [stc@stc.org](mailto:stc@stc.org) ♦

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## President's Message

by Heidi Marr



Around this time every year, I start making a list of my New Year's resolutions. Well, this year is going to be different. First of all, I resolve not to resolve to lose ten pounds. That one hasn't worked for me in the past so I don't see why it will work for me in the future.

Instead, this year, I've made STC resolutions. Since we won't be publishing a January Quill, I thought I'd use the December issue to capture a couple of my "presidential plans" for the upcoming year. So, if you notice I'm not living up to my promises, feel free to nudge me in the right direction.

### **I resolve to meet at least one new person at each general meeting.**

I can still remember what it felt like to attend my first STC meeting. New faces. New ideas. Scary stuff. I don't remember the speaker or the topic, but I do remember that an STC council member introduced me to an ad hoc group of newbies that very night. Because we were all looking to beef up our portfolios, we decided to gather the next month before the general meeting to generate a list of local volunteering opportunities. This meant, before I left my first STC meeting, I had a small group of allies and the potential to work on a volunteer assignment. So, I came back the next month. And the next. And the next after that.

It only took one individual to make a difference. She made me feel welcome and helped me find my niche in our chapter. If I can be that person to a newcomer this year, I will consider it a job well done. I hope you consider doing the same.

### **I resolve to recognize the amazing contributions our volunteers make.**

Every day, I'm reminded of how lucky I am to serve on the Southwestern Ontario STC council. What an incredible group! Your council members volunteer more than just their time. They also provide one another with a tremendous amount of support - both at the career and personal levels. And, this type of support extends past the council chamber walls. (OK, the walls of the Seminar Room at the Grand River Community Library.)

It is your council members who make our chapter programs possible. So, I'd like to thank everyone who volunteers for our chapter and helps make us thrive! Thank you current council members: Ted, Carol, Darlene, Lori, Elaine, Paul, Ursula, Christy, Tina, Debbie, Opal, Paul, Andrea, and Shannon.

Without you, we wouldn't enjoy workshops, telephone seminars, and general

meetings. Without you, we wouldn't host a competition or give away student awards. Without you, there would be no chapter website, newsletter, or job bank, and our members wouldn't receive email announcements. Without you, we wouldn't have enough money in the bank to continue any programs. Thank you.

I'd also like to thank all non-council members who have helped us out already this year -- without you, we wouldn't have active SIGs or portfolio committees. You help make our chapter tick.

So, thank you all for volunteering your creativity, enthusiasm, and inspiration. You have certainly made my time on council enjoyable -- and I look forward to working with you all in 2004! ♦

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# Sweet Taste of Victory: RoboHelp 2003 Awards for Excellence



by Robin Dube

Good news is always better shared, which is why I'm happy to report the Documentation Group at Agfa Healthcare (formerly Mitra) won the [Grand Prize \(USA/Canada\) for the RoboHelp 2003 Awards for Excellence](#).

## Why did we enter?

When I heard about the RoboHelp 2003 Awards for Excellence, I thought this would be a great way for our Documentation Group at Agfa Healthcare to get some external feedback on the online knowledge bases we have been creating for the past three years. My manager, Kristi Fox, and I put together a pared down knowledge base (what we call our "online help") and sent the RoboHTML-generated WebHelp system off to the contest.

Much to our surprise, we received an email from eHelp Corporation a couple months later:

First of all, I would like to thank you for participating in this year's RoboHelp Awards for Excellence event. Secondly, I think you should know that your Help system was chosen as our Grand Prize Winner (US/Canada) & I am proud to announce that you are recipient of \$1,000 on behalf of RoboHelp. Congratulations on putting together a superb Help system, recognized by those who create Help systems.

"This recognition, for our entire team, was really gratifying," said Kristi Fox, Documentation Group Manager. "It validates the efforts we've made to produce quality products."

## How do we get from A to B?

When asked to share our good news, the Quill editor requested that we talk a little about how we create our online knowledge bases.

Our team has spent about three years creating and streamlining our online documentation products. One of the main tenets of our process is to separate the content creation from the production of the final WebHelp system.



Home page from our entry

All of the content is authored in Macromedia Dreamweaver. Dreamweaver provides us with advanced content creation features, such as templates, and library items (reusable snippets of HTML code), as well as very clean and readable code. (Oddly enough, Macromedia just announced the purchase of eHelp Corporation, the makers of RoboHelp. Perhaps RoboHTML will start using the Dreamweaver interface natively.)

After authoring the content, our writers use FAR HTML (<http://www.helpware.net/>) to create an HTML Help Project file (.hhp). We then open this HHP file in RoboHTML. Why? FAR allows us to add hundreds of HTML files at once to an HHP file, while RoboHTML requires that you add each file and folder individually to a project. The time savings using FAR are enormous.

After we've opened the project in RoboHTML, we create the TOC, index the knowledge base, and then generate the WebHelp based on a custom WebHelp skin. During this process, we also use a quality checklist to ensure that the final product uses the most up-to-date templates, contains no typos, and so on.

### **What about the money?**

Usually, winning a technical writing competition means a warm fuzzy feeling and a nice certificate, but we are receiving a cheque for \$1000 US. So, instead of splitting this eight ways for our personal Christmas fund, we've decided to donate the prize to a local charity. ♦

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# I Saw the Light: From Programmer to Writer

by Pauline Horn



I sat there reading the job posting - Technical what? Just what is this thing called technical writing? It sounds a little boring. Will I be able to mentor other writers? Will there be enough variety to keep me interested? Isn't it just sitting at my computer putting words to paper or screen?

These were the thoughts going through my mind as I pondered a career change. For over 20 years, I had worked as a developer, analyst and project leader deeply immersed in the darkness of technologies that support business applications. I supported mainframe, mid-range, PCs, COBOL, PL1, JCL, DCL, SAS -- all these techie areas and more. Maybe it was a mid-life crisis but I wanted a change from the constant stress of not knowing if I'd be called in the early evening but expecting that call at 1 am, 3 am, 5 am, and so on.

## The Search for a New Career

I was lucky enough to be working at Clarica Life Insurance where there were plenty of opportunities and a variety of choices. From Business Analyst, to Training Supervisor to Manager in a business area; I explored these choices but none of them seemed to fit or work out. Then that posting came along for a Technical Writer.

While I was looking for new challenges, Carol Lawless was working with her management to establish a technical writing area in the Information Technology department. The mandate of this group was to produce documentation for the many legacy systems at Clarica. Readers of The Quill and members of the local STC chapter know that Carol has an extensive background in technical writing. Even though most of her experience was in the business part of Clarica, where technology is used without going into the deep dark depths of how it works, she brought her credibility with her to the IT department. To make sure the company used best practices in setting up the document model and procedures, she engaged outside consultants to help define the next steps. The message was clear - as you build your team look for a "writer who can teach or a techie who can write".

My job search was still on-going at this point. My management and Carol's management worked together to let me have a taste of this new "light side" before committing myself. At least I thought it was the lighter side of life. Somehow, I quickly earned the title of 'Freak' and was constantly reminded that I had seen the light and left the deep dark technical world. Our summer coop student called me 'Freak' since she had never met a techie who could write and actually enjoyed it.

That's a nickname I treasure still.

## **The World of Technical Writing**

I quickly became immersed in the world of technical writing and started to work on one of the largest and most complex mainframe systems at Clarica. My skills as a developer/analyst were invaluable as I turned very old process specifications into a Data Flow Diagram (DFD). I discovered that it was faster and more accurate to read the code and JCL to create the DFD. Aha, I really was still using my technical skills.

As I was learning the ropes, Carol had arranged for Judy Glick-Smith of Integrated Documentation Inc. (IDI) to come and provide an assessment of where we were in the documentation process and model. Judy assured me that my ability to read the code and translate into English were skills that would add a lot to the documentation process. It wasn't cheating to dig deep into my bag of tricks. In addition, she said we should seek out the 10% of developers who were closet technical writers and get their notes and documented processes. Wow, I'd been a closet technical writer all along and didn't know it -- I wrote instructions for junior developers, business requirements, and I even documented my code. Maybe I did see the light and had really seen it all along.

My career change occurred over three years ago now and most days at one point or another the phrase "I love my job" comes to my mind. I have learned the writing skills that make documentation effective. I've helped to fine tune our style guide, our documentation model, and our documentation processes. I've been fortunate enough to be able to work with other team members so they can glean the important information from code, JCL, and from developers' documentation.

## **A Comparison of Skill Sets -- writing words versus writing code**

The job of a technical writer has a strong parallel to the job of a developer. By understanding the similarities and overlap between the processes, I've been able to help other technical writers relate their role to the developers who are, after all, our primary audience. My background as a developer has given me, and by default the rest of the team, the credibility we need to act as an equal partner.

The more I enhance my technical writing skills, the more I use the skills I developed when I was on the dark side. Some of these are:

- Audience analysis - a developer needs to know who will be using the system.
- Information analysis - a developer needs to analyze the business needs.
- Organization of information - developers need to organize code to make sure the tasks are done in the right order and that others can understand it.

- Testing written procedures - developers do more formal and automated testing, but the end result is the same; you check your product to make sure it works and does the job it was supposed to do.
- Project Management - identify tasks, organize them, follow up for completion.

Writers use tools just as developers use tools to complete their work. Grammar rules exist just as there are programming language syntax rules. A style guide is very similar to the programming and JCL standards that developers are taught. We choose a document media based on what's available, cost effective, and works best for the audience and situation, just as a systems analyst chooses the platform on which to develop a computer system. Writers even use a compiler (although a human one) when they send their work for a usability test.

## Conclusions

The opportunities to learn new technologies, to learn more about different areas of our business and to learn more about effective writing practices are available to me everyday. For me, the job of technical writing has provided me with more variety, given me the opportunity to be more creative, and involves mentoring people directly and indirectly everyday.

During my three years as a technical writer, I've probably worked in the dark side as much as in the lighter side of technology. I've translated code into documentation with no SME support. I've worked as a part of a large project team, documenting changes to existing systems and new systems to support a new insurance project. Integration work has been a constant in our industry and as a technical writer, I've been involved in many of these projects. We've been able to add the most value here by making sure terms are defined and that the integrating companies understand each other's language and assumptions. I've been a scribe at meetings (hey, I'm already in the room writing my notes -- I might as well share), a project leader for documentation projects, a business analyst, a systems analyst and even made a JCL change to provide usable information. What a lot of different hats we wear and what a range of technologies we need to understand. Many times I've had to wear the different hats simultaneously on one project.

Boring, repetitive, always at the computer? No way. I'm stretched technically to understand information and systems every day. There are always new situations that enable me to use my technical skills. I'm really glad that I've seen the light and been able to contribute to the growth of the technical writing discipline at Clarica. The sky's the limit for future growth for myself and for the team. Look out world, here we come. ♦

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## Biography: New Chapter Members



When people join the Southwestern Ontario Chapter STC, and attend their first general meeting, they are anxious to find out more about the other people they meet. As technical writers, we too are also curious to hear more about new members. In an attempt to appease this need for more detail, here are biographies about three new members.

### **Gina Jackson**

**Joined:** October 2003

Gina Jackson is currently a math major at University of Waterloo (U of W). In her spare time she loves to run and is on the U of W Cross-Country and Indoor Track teams. During her co-op, she was thrilled to be a technical writer at Northern Digital Inc. There she spent her summer writing, as well as editing some older documents. Gina loved the experience and is contemplating technical writing as a possible career path. She has always enjoyed writing and has joined the STC to learn more about the profession.

### **Al MacLeod**

**Joined:** October 2003

In Kitchener, Al MacLeod is the Lead Technical Writer for Research In Motion's Knowledge Management Team. As a writer, Al and his team creates and maintains documents for their Technical Knowledge Center. He joined the STC because his manager suggested it would help him progress his career in technical writing. Outside of work, Al loves to hang out with his friends, and sharpen his coordination on his X-Box.

### **Steve Neville**

**Joined:** June 2003

From the Royal City, Guelph, Steve Neville has joined the STC to break into the field of technical writing. Previously, he was an Operations Manager at The Score Television Network, and currently is attending Humber College, doing some freelance writing, and looking for better opportunities. Steve has always loved writing, and is looking forward to taking on new challenges. In his spare time, he read books, watches movies, and cooks.

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For those who are thinking about joining the STC, December is a good month to join. Your dues will be credited to the coming year and the December membership will be free. ♦

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# History of Decembers

by Carol Lawless, Treasurer



December is always a time for reflection. What's this year's legacy and what will the New Year bring us? As we reflect on our chapter's Decembers past, we see a pattern of looking to the future with education as the common thread. In 1990, we read that Phil Lilles and Jack McFadden teamed up with the University of Waterloo's Paul Beam and Gordon Slethang to begin a comprehensive survey of technical communications education programs in Canada. Eight years later, again in December, Jack was awarded the Jack McFadden Distinguished Canadian Leadership Award, for "pioneering efforts to increase awareness of technical communication in Canada, for groundbreaking initiatives to promote the education of technical communicators in Canada, for founding the Southwestern Ontario chapter of the STC, and for guiding and supporting the careers of so many of us."

Other December news:

- **1995** - Technical Writing was 18th on the list of the top 100 jobs.
- **1995** - Our chapter's membership was tagged at 76 in 1140 members in Canada and 19,148 worldwide.
- **1996** - Our memberships didn't sit at 76 for long! One year later we had over 100 members.
- **1997** - Our chapter announced its first scholarship.
- **1999** - The membership count was up to 166 and rising.
- **2002** - We announced that we would host the STC phone seminars for members and non-members.



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# "Templating" Your Pictures

by Patrick Hofmann



My favourite examples of documentation, and the documentation I've had the most fun producing, have one thing in common: they have templates that are wickedly designed and strictly followed. Applying the right template means headings, instructions, notes, and navigational features are effective and consistent. By standardizing our documentation's type and layout attributes, there are no unfriendly surprises for the reader, and mmmm, the documentation looks and feels so fresh and so clean.

We invest oodles of time coming up with the right combination of fonts, types, colours, sizes, margins, indents, all in an effort to make our documentation easier to use and something to drool over.

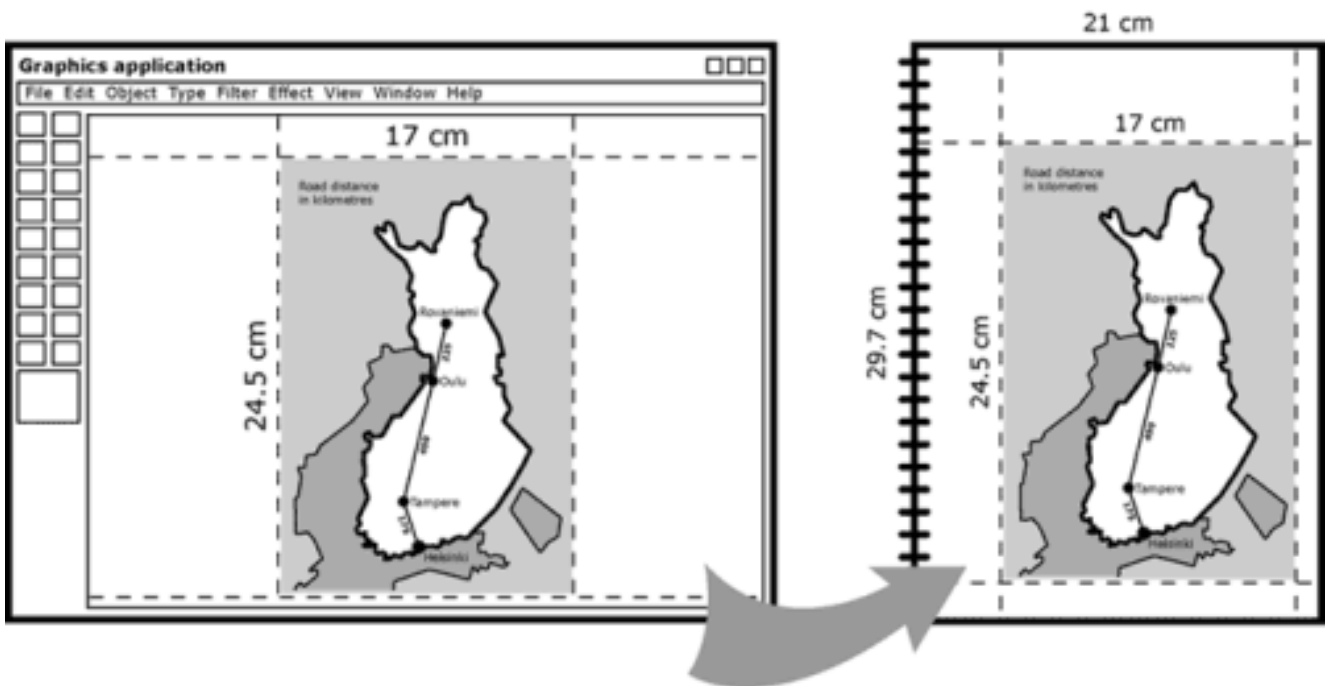
Why then do we not apply the same principles to our pictures?

After all, what's the biggest complaint about our pictures? Either there aren't enough of them, or the ones that we do have look inconsistent, misplaced, unprofessional, fuzzy, or merely not meaningful. Since we know the benefits of building effective documentation with templates, let's do the same with pictures.

## **Build Standard Sizes**

More often than not, we draw our pictures at various sizes, then squeeze them into variously sized spaces -- a standard US letter page, a smaller A5 page, or a tiny help window. When reduced dramatically, the once nicely spaced lines in our pictures begin to bleed into one another, and the once legible text becomes utterly unreadable. When expanded dramatically, our crisply bitmapped pictures become roughly pixilated and just plain yucky.

To prevent this, always consider the picture's final destination when you create the picture (whether the documentation is on-screen or on-paper). For example, if the maximum size of any picture in your end-user manuals is 17 x 24.5 cm, create a "template" box at that size in your graphics application, so all of your illustrations never exceed it.



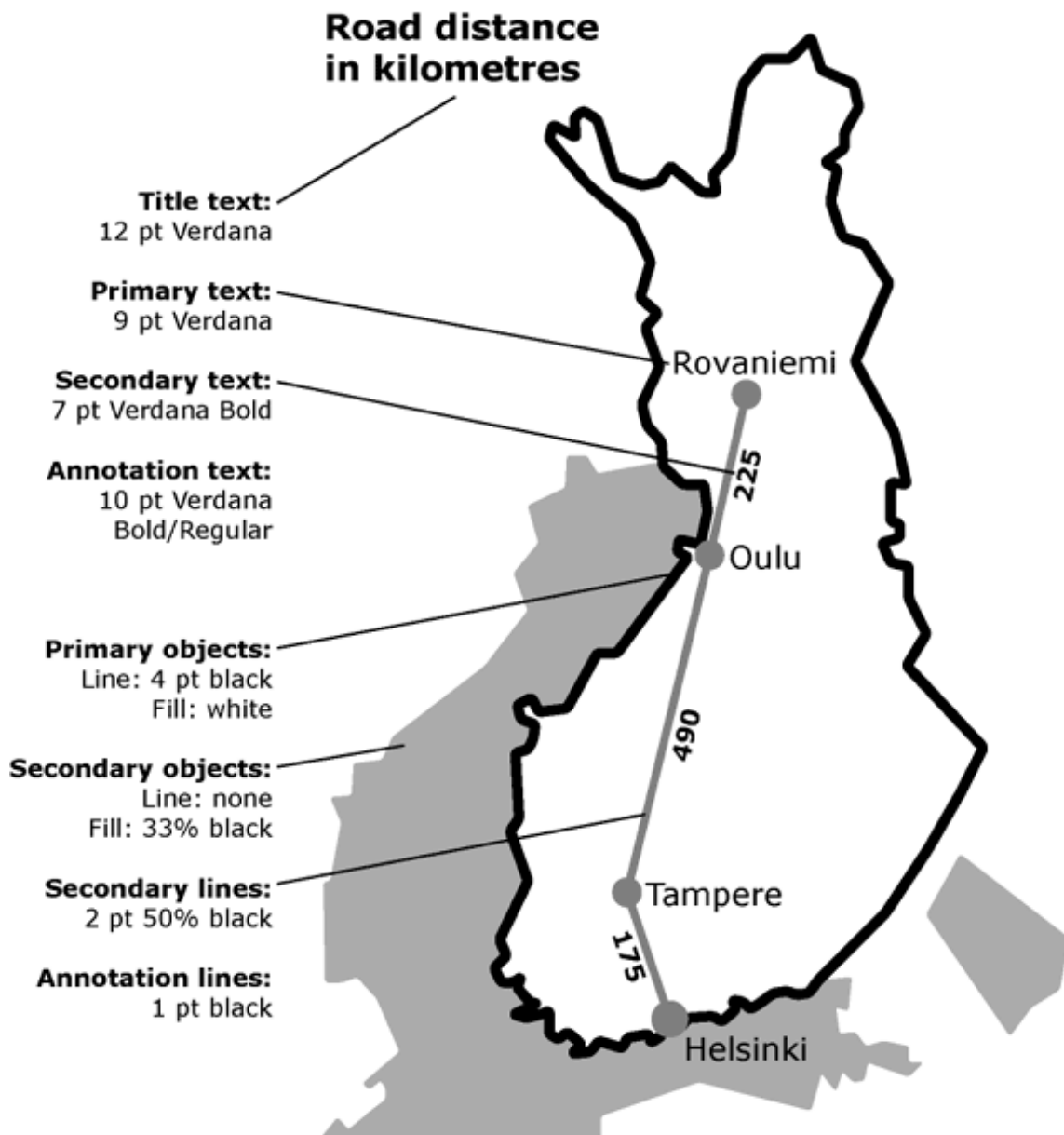
Likewise, if the maximum size of any picture in your online help is 320 x 320 pixels, create a template box of that size in your graphics application for all your online help illustrations.

But does that mean having multiple versions of the same illustration (if it goes to all destination documents)? Yep! Sadly, in the era of single-sourcing, we are encouraged to use the same picture file across many media, to rather fuzzy results! We think about our own efficiency in publishing a document, but not the customer's efficiency in reading it.

So, grit your teeth, trying flashing a smile, and remember: for each uniquely sized destination, create a uniquely sized illustration template.

### **Build Standard Attributes**

Now that you've standardized the illustration size for each of your picture's destinations, we have to define the type, colour, and line attributes for each destination template. As shown in the illustration following, this means establishing style guidelines for each unique element in your illustration: titles and annotations, primary and secondary text, and primary and secondary objects.



Just as you create separate styles in your documents for chapter headings, section headings, notes, warnings, body text, and table text, do the same for your illustration templates. In the end, this brings a new level of consistency, professionalism, and userfriendliness not just to your pictures, but to the entire document. ♦

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# Memories that Don't Need Translation

by Al Daigen



Like most North American tech writers of the Boomer generation, I started in another field and stumbled into ours. I spent 8 years as a French-to-English translator, made a 13-year detour into technical writing, and have since gone back to translation full-time. Here's a brief account of how these two fields have overlapped for me and of how radically technology has changed my life as a translator for the better over the years.

## Course Offerings

In the mid-1970s, the U.S. grad school where I received my translation degree focused on economic and political translation. They didn't even offer a course in scientific or technical translation. But when I graduated and accepted a job with the Government of Canada's Translation Bureau in Toronto, I was immediately expected to translate a steady diet of scientific and technical papers in fields I knew nothing about such as fish population dynamics, tree-ring chronologies, the structure of the atmospheric boundary layer over the St. Lawrence River, and so on.

## Doing it the Hard Way -- The Only Way

To do research on terms and concepts, I used the limited resources of my section's library, and a painfully slow line-printer terminal that accessed the earliest version of the Translation Bureau's terminology database. When these resources failed, I'd spend entire days plumbing the journals of the University of Toronto's Science and Medicine library, searching almost randomly for English-language articles that might contain the information I needed. I spent hours on the phone questioning my authors. My daily output was abysmally low, and my bosses weren't too shy to complain about it!

## Technological Advances

To produce my translations physically, I prepared drafts on an electric typewriter. A typing pool then completely rekeyed them as clean copies. Next, I would proofread the clean copies and mark up any errors, which the typists then corrected with white-out fluid and correction tape. It could take three or four iterations to eliminate all the typos. When my section bought its first standalone word-processing machines (at about \$18,000 a pop), I jumped on the chance to use them. The freedom to revise and refine my work, and to deliver it without waiting for the typing pool, was exhilarating.

## Years as a Technical Writer

After eight years on the job, I was ready for a change and began working as a tech writer in Waterloo Region's booming high-tech industry. On the side, I continued to do translations for the Canadian federal government, as a freelancer. I bought my own PC and learned to use WordStar, WordPerfect, and Word. My access to local research libraries was limited, so I avoided highly technical translations when I could. To exchange the necessary reams of paper with my clients, I bought a photocopier and a fax machine and opened accounts with Purolator and Fedex. Meanwhile, in my work as a tech writer, my constant exposure to new developments in information technology and to new authoring tools gave me a competitive edge as a translator. My clients began to steer me lots of IT-related translations that other translators avoided. My ability to translate slide presentations, spreadsheets, and graphics in their native software packages also made me the first pick for many jobs.

## Web-based Technology

Most momentously, I remember the day that a product manager showed me his latest toy: a very early version of the Mosaic Web browser. It blew me away. I knew that sooner rather than later, the Web would revolutionize the way I researched my translations.

Fast-forward to 2003. Thanks to e-mail, I exchange all documents with my clients electronically -- my courier bills have dropped to zero; my fax machine gathers dust. Thanks to Google, confirming equivalencies for French and English terms takes me seconds instead of hours. When I need an overview of a subject, or details about some particular aspect of it, I can find authoritative sources on the Web just about instantly. In short, the comfort with technology that I gained as a tech writer has been critical to my success as a translator. I enjoy my work immensely. I'm a very lucky man. ♦

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## Make Your Wish List for the February Workshop



by Elaine Ruddock, Education Manager

For some people, December is a time of great hustle and bustle, so why should it be different for me as the Education Manager? February is our annual workshop, so December is the time when a decision has to be reached about a topic and speaker. This is the step that makes or breaks a workshop, and we want to ensure that it is a success.

In the past, many topic and speaker suggestions have come from you, our members, which is why our workshops have been such great educational successes. Over the last few years, we've covered such topics as: Managing Documentation Projects (Joann Hackos, 1998), Secrets of a Successful Website (Ginny Redish, 2001), and Goal-Oriented Design (Kim Goodwin, 2002). With your help again, February's workshop should be no exception to this series of hits.

Some of you have already suggested these topics:

- Single sourcing
- Planning, estimating, and managing documentation projects
- Developing training courses
- Editing technical documents
- Documenting APIs and SDKs
- Discovering emerging technologies and tools -- a series of short sessions (feel free to suggest desired tools)
- Writing technical marketing materials / Marcom writing

Now I need to find out which of these topics interests you, or what other topics you might find interesting. There's still time.

To indicate your interest in a topic, you can either go to the home page of our website [www.stc-soc.org](http://www.stc-soc.org) and complete our poll, or you can e-mail me, Elaine Ruddock, at [education@stc-soc.org](mailto:education@stc-soc.org)

Have you heard about any great speakers? Send me their names and any additional information that you might have; for example, their web address and contact information.

Don't get so caught up in the hustle and bustle of the month that you forget to send me your suggestions or vote online. Details must be confirmed in December, so hurry in with your suggestions today! Don't miss this opportunity to make your own wish list. ♦

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## View From the Other Side...the Other Side of Work

by Nancy Halverson



Life settles into somewhat of a routine in mid-fall here. The darkness closes in just after 4:30 pm now, so it feels quite late by the time that I pick up the kids and we make our way home. No outdoor play after we get home anymore. Feed 'em and get 'em to bed -- or whatever activity they're doing.

Just today the winter winds started to blow -- not bad really. Last year we'd been feeling these winds since August (I'm not exaggerating!)

Winter here is cold in a different way. You feel the wind slice right through your coats and hats. And I never had to wear as much wool in Canada -- inside the house! It's the damp I guess. I felt warmer at my parents' place in Peterborough county, at minus 20, than I usually do here at zero -- and in the same coat!

### **Trouble Conforming, As Usual**

My job continues to develop, and I think that I'm doing pretty well. The software is cumbersome -- Oracle based, financial institution users -- not exactly a recipe for innovation. My boss, Alice, has patience with me...even after she asked me to toss out most of my work from my first month on the job. She's encouraged me to work with the style guide open from now on and, whenever I feel the urge to veer off and cut a new style path, I am supposed to ask someone to beat it out of me. Not that they're adverse to my suggestions -- they just will never get anything produced if we take time to redo anything.

So, slow and steady it goes. Style guide open, fingers working as much as possible to get through the software and produce workable help. So much for having my own project! (she said wistfully). I'm sure that even if I'd stayed in Canada, sooner or later I would have run into a heavily organized documentation team, so I don't attribute this to the English experience.

One minor setback in my career path here in England though; I had to cancel the meeting I proposed to organize for 'northern' STC members here in Sheffield. There just wasn't enough energy left at the end of my day to get any publicity done. I've got speakers lined up though, and I'm ready to put it together for a meeting in March. This time, I'll have lots of help (they're starting to come out of the woodwork), and I've already got more interest from the discussion forum than I had for either of my two earlier proposed dates. Maybe failing acts like one of those teaser ads you see on TV; it whets the appetite and gets people into the spirit.

## Bright Spot

I'm happy to tell you that my family will be spending the Christmas holidays in France! I've booked the train for us on the 23<sup>rd</sup>, and we'll be in the [region of Alsace](#) for a few days. The train will take about 11 hours to get us from Sheffield to the city of... what else, Nancy. Really, that's the name of the city. It's just a coincidence that I've booked a holiday near there. We will actually spend Christmas in a town called Colmar, then drive away to Bavaria -- or Switzerland -- and possibly meet up with some friends who just moved to Bavaria.

My long days now are going to pay off with a nice relaxing vacation -- lots of wine, good food, walking in the French countryside, and maybe even some skiing. It's not my much-dreamed-of beach holiday, but it'll be so good to get away for a bit. We get back on the 4<sup>th</sup> of January, just in time to go back to work and school.

## Good Vacation Time

Oh, and if I complain about a few things in my life in England -- separate cold and hot water taps, hideous carpet, and parking on major roads -- I'll never complain about the vacation allowances. I get 23 days each year (although only 5.5 days until Dec 31, which luckily is all I need for our sojourn). My husband gets 30 days, but then again, as an academic with a light teaching load (heavy research load of course), few people notice if he's around or not! So, we'll all settle in for the winter, listen to the winds howl and the precipitation fall (rain or snow), drink some good wine, and look forward to spring. Oh, but first I'll have to plant some winter flowers - - pansies do quite nicely here through the winter I hear... ♦

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# November Meeting Recap: Cycle of Achievement -- From Student to Researcher to Professional



by David Geddes

In the November 4th meeting, we were treated to a sweeping panorama of what is to come in the world of technical communication and how we might take our place in that world. We heard how our chapter is contributing to an exciting new program, Digital Arts Communication (DAC), at the University of Waterloo. And we toured the university's research centre for testing digital prototypes on real people.

Dr. David Goodwin, of the University of Waterloo, described how the DAC program is a crucial component to the university's newly formed Canadian Center of Arts and Technology (CCAT). CCAT has a mandate to "build a research cluster that combines practical and theoretical analysis of human-digital interaction in an environment that unites artistic, cultural, and technological literacy."

## The Meaning of DAC and CCAT

From a practical point of view, it means that world-class researchers in digital arts technology will be attracted to the University of Waterloo. Top quality students wishing to blend an honours Arts and Business co-op degree with the practical and theoretical knowledge available from four core DAC credits plus four electives will graduate from the university and go on to become leaders in digital communication. And finally, and perhaps most significantly to many of us, it means that we have an opportunity to participate in the program...no really. David went out of his way to stress that we can use our professional experience and wisdom to provide direction to the new program. We can help develop realistic case project scenarios, we can mentor, and we can speak up about what skills are most needed among new technical communicators as we embrace the challenges of designing with text, sound, video, and hypertext. As professionals, we were invited to participate in the "cycle of achievement" from student to researcher to professional.

## Digital Junkyard

From what we saw, CCAT has begun the cycle of achievement with an excellent start. Dr. Phil Graham of the University of Queensland in Australia is a world-class researcher and is the first appointed Canada Research Chair affiliated with CCAT. Dr. Graham is heading a research project to develop the world's largest publicly accessible digital archive. Or, to put it more succinctly, Phil wants to build a "digital junkyard." The idea came out of a very real and very costly problem in the creative arts industry; that is, it takes a lot of effort to produce just about anything. Thirty seconds of footage might take several hours of preparation and shooting -- an hour segment might take several days, and so on.



A digital junkyard could lead to quicker and cheaper creative cycles. And it could provide the infrastructure for an explosion in creative enterprise as digital assets become freely available to folks who cannot afford the costs of producing their own material.

One of the challenges in creating a digital junkyard is to make things accessible. Of course, text searches are challenging enough but what about searching by sound or by visual attribute? Punch in the sound pattern of a loon and the light attributes of a moonless evening and we're at the cottage in no time. Students in the 400 level DAC course will participate in research projects that grapple with problems such as parsing, tagging, and retrieving digital junk using visual and audio elements from the digital junkyard.

## **Technological Wonders**

Tonight there was a special focus on the world-class facilities available to CCAT and the DAC. We saw two main things: a lecture room on steroids and some very nice facilities to test digital prototypes on users. David Goodwin took us through all the technical wonders available in the flagship lecture room and Deb Maskens took us through the test facilities,



which include recording and observation rooms and a room where the actual tests are done. Speech communication researchers and other university departments interested in testing technology-mediated communication in real-time also use these test facilities. For example, one theater group is interested in using the facilities to test the effectiveness of re-creating the acoustics of a community-based theatrical setting into a digital (virtual) environment.

The lecture room, or e-classroom, is where it all begins. The room features two data projectors and two big screens called "smart boards" that can be touch-activated just like a touch-sensitive computer screen. Two screens really are better than one (not like Spinal-Tap's amplifier, "but it goes to eleven, man!"). Two screens allow students to compare designs, evaluate before and after scenarios, and the like simultaneously. Users can also add markups to the smart screen and save the result as an image - no more DO NOT ERASE admonishments! Other goodies include document cameras that can scan pages of notes and project them to a smart board or save them as images. The room is wired for laptops and is soon to be wireless capable. Of course, no state-of-the-art classroom would be complete without multi-point videoconferencing, data logging, multimedia editing, storage, streaming, pan and tilt cameras, and oh so much more... David noted that while many lectures rooms are presentation-ready, this room is unique in that it is "production-ready."

### **The Podium that Pulls Everything Together**

As you can imagine, a classroom that can incorporate just about any digital source can be a confusing place. How does one manage all this? Not so ironically, that's where the STC comes in. To make all this stuff "go," we donated \$15,000 to the Digital Arts Communication classroom to purchase a "digital podium." The digital podium incorporates a hand held control and a user interface known as the Crestron

touch screen that enables users to pull all this technology together. Instructors don't have to know about the underlying technology to use it and that's the point. The digital podium can be tailored too. For example, if you need an effective icon to symbolize a piece of equipment that can be activated, you could take a picture of the equipment and add the picture as an icon to the touch screen. It is particularly apt that the STC contribute in a way that enables users to use, learn, and activate. Isn't that what we do for a living?

## Conclusions

By its own reckoning, CCAT "provides a physical and virtual space for bringing together people who share a common interest in the digital design of sound, text, hypertext, images, and video." From what I saw, CCAT is doing just that and we can be proud that we helped to make this happen. And we should be honoured that David Goodwin, Phil Graham, Glen Stillar, and Andrew McMurry, on behalf of CCAT, took the time to say thank you on this crisp November evening. But, perhaps most of all, we should be excited about the roles we can play as we complete and rejuvenate the cycle of achievement from student to researcher to professional.

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Part of the November meeting was a draw for two free memberships: one full-time membership and one student membership. David Geddes won the full-time membership. Sarah-Beth Doner was the recipient of the student membership. ♦

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## Company Recognition Award



Over the years, the Southwestern Ontario Chapter STC has presented the Company Recognition Award to local companies -- NCR, Quarry Integrated Communications, and Campana Systems Inc. -- for their support of our chapter.

This support may have taken many forms. For example, companies may have provided a meeting place, donated door prizes, allowed members to do STC work on company time, or enabled members to use their company's material and equipment. Support may also have been in the form of payment for things like STC memberships or attendance at STC events, for example, the annual international conference, workshops, and seminars.

Do you know a company who has shown support for our local chapter? Complete an online form at [www.stc-soc.org](http://www.stc-soc.org). If you have any questions, you can email [Ted Edwins](mailto:Ted.Edwins). The deadline for submissions is in early February, so take the time now to think about what company would get your vote. ♦

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# Upcoming Chapter Events

by Opal Gamble, Program Manager



*Reminder:* There is no General Meeting in January.

If you have any questions about upcoming chapter events, or if you have a suggestion for a meeting topic, feel free to email [Opal Gamble](#) (Program Manager) or [Paul Lofthouse](#) (Program Assistant).

For details about our chapter's events for the rest of the year, as well as last minute updates or additions to the schedule, take a look at the [STC calendar](#).

## **December 4 MGT-SIG Meeting**

Management SIG meeting - noon at [Virtek Laser Systems](#). RSVP to [Margie Yundt](#).

## **December 5 Web-Telephone Seminar Adobe Acrobat 6.0 for Technical Communicators - Part II**

STC's first Web-and-telephone seminar, "Adobe Acrobat 6.0 for Technical Communicators," was so successful that we're providing an advanced seminar on the same topic! If you wish to learn more about Acrobat 6.0's capabilities to manage documents efficiently, reliably, securely, and cost-effectively, this seminar is for you.

Acrobat 6.0 Professional allows you to create searchable archives, review and mark up PDF files, and easily generate PDFs that retain layer information from applications such as AutoCAD, Visio, and Project. Building upon a basic knowledge of Acrobat 6.0 Professional, this seminar will delve deeply into the following software features:

- Review and Comment Tools for Writers. Learn how to maximize efficiency with clients while minimizing review and commentary times.
- Preflight and Proofing Tools for Creative Professionals. Those of us who deal with printers and output will appreciate Acrobat 6.0 Professional's unique features, including separations, preflighting, proofing, PDF/X support, advanced print controls, and advanced editing capabilities. Learn how to wield these tools for greater control of your PDF print workflow.
- Advanced Commenting Tools for Engineers. Acrobat 6.0 Professional allows users to preserve and view layers in a CAD file, and provides commenting tools specific to the engineering workflow, measurement tools, large format

support, and more.

[\[Additional seminar and speaker details\]](#)

This free seminar (\$35 for non-members) takes place at Virtek, 785 Bridge Street, Waterloo, from 12:30-3:00 pm.

Please RSVP to [Opal Gamble](#) by **Wednesday, December 3, 2003**. In your e-mail message, please state the names of attendees and membership status.

**Seating is limited for this event - please RSVP soon!**

**December 10**

### **Telephone Seminar Adding Panache to Your Procedures**

Like most technical communicators, you've probably written countless procedures. But have your procedures fallen into a rut? Are they good but not great? Do you know how to provide that "something extra" that can turn a mundane procedure into a great piece of technical product documentation?

This seminar covers all aspects of writing effective, powerful procedures. Participants will cover the purpose and theory of procedures and review the basic elements before moving on to advanced aspects of creating added value, using effective design elements, and testing. Throughout, you'll see examples of both good and bad procedures. [\[Additional seminar and speaker details\]](#)

This free seminar (\$35 for non-members) takes place at the Waterloo Recreation Complex, 101 Father David Bauer Drive, Waterloo, from 12:30-3:00 pm.

Please RSVP to [Opal Gamble](#) by **Monday, December 8, 2003**. In your e-mail message, please state the names of attendees and membership status.

**December 16**

### **Council Meeting**

Restaurant TBA.

All members welcome; RSVP to [Heidi Marr](#).

**January 14**

### **Web-Telephone Seminar**

#### **Effective Web Sites: Structure, Navigation, and Graphics**

When it comes to Web sites, many of us lack reference points. Faced with a new medium like the Internet, we tend to ignore traditional design models and, instead, rely on intuition. When we come across a different way of doing things (an original structure, an unexpected hyperlink), we may like or dislike it, but are often unable

to evaluate its appropriateness. Originality (structural or graphical), technical sophistication, or number of hits may become goals in themselves, at the expense of effectiveness. In terms of structuring information, Web designers have much to learn from their counterparts in print publishing.

The seminar will propose a simple but effective model for thinking about the structure and navigation of a Web site--one that can be used both to analyze existing sites and to design or implement new ones. While perusing various Web pages, we will discuss three main themes: how to structure Web sites so visitors do not get lost (structure); how to phrase and display hyperlinks to make them highly visible and allow visitors to make informed decisions about where to go next (navigation); and how to format a Web site to reveal its structure and facilitate its navigation (graphics).

[\[Additional seminar and speaker details\]](#)

This free seminar (\$35 for non-members) takes place at Campana, 99 Randall Drive, Waterloo, from 12:30-3:00 pm.

Please RSVP to [Opal Gamble](#) by **Monday, January 12, 2004**. In your e-mail message, please state the names of attendees and membership status.

**Seating is limited to 12 seats for this event - RSVP quickly!**

## January 14 Free Contractors and Independent Consultants Workshop The Six-Step Selling Process

Attend this workshop from 6:30 to 9:00 pm to find out how to turn leads into paying customers. For more details, read the article in this issue of The Quill at [Next CIC Meeting](#).

## Coming Up

February's General Meeting will feature *Word 2003 and XML* with Peter Vogel - for details, check January in our chapter's [calendar](#). ♦

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# The Consulting and Independent Contracting Corner



## Starting a Business 101 -- Writing Your Business Plan

by Elaine Garnet, CIC-SIG Manager

Dear Entrepreneurial Spirit:

You have a good business idea; you've identified your target market; you know what your competition is doing; and you have a reasonable expectation of success. There are some important items remaining before you can launch your business. You have to prepare a financial forecast and write a business plan. If you are planning to approach a financial institution for a business operating line of credit, they will want to see your business plan and the appended financial forecast. Because financial forecasting can be a difficult and time-consuming process, I have asked a professional to consider writing to you on this subject. For now, I will guide you through the basic steps of writing the business plan, and you can work on the forecast early next year. Normally, you would prepare the forecast first.

### Why write a business plan?

A business plan is a written document that reflects all your careful business research! It describes your business, the marketplace opportunities, the services you will offer, your business structure, and potential revenue. You should write a business plan to demonstrate the feasibility of your business and to provide you with a framework for making future decisions. A business plan is a flexible document that can be revised as you encounter the occasional detour in your progress. Revise your plan as often as necessary. Use it to keep you on track.

### Your business plan should look professional (both in content and format)

You are a writer so I don't need to tell you that the plan should be easy to read and follow. Correct? Also, be prepared to support any statements by citing your research. Finally, make sure to print and bind the plan on letter-sized paper. The library is full of books with suggestions on how your business plan should look. Choose your own format or follow my guidelines:

1. **Title Page:** Include the business name, address, phone number, fax, email address, your name, the years covered by the plan.
2. **Table of Contents:** Make sure all the pages are numbered. This is a no-

brainer.

3. **Executive Summary:** Provide a brief description of the business, your services, why you are going into business, your potential customers, the financial highlights, and why you expect to succeed.
4. **Objectives:** Describe your business objectives in terms of both short and long-term goals. Make sure they are realistic, measurable and have a specified time frame.
5. **Management and Business Organization:** For most of us, the type of company will be a sole proprietorship.

Specify the skills you have that will help the business to succeed. Specify to whom you will turn for the skills you are lacking. For example, you might decide to use a bookkeeper or accountant, printer, etc. Also, be sure to specify if a business license or insurance is required, and when you plan to obtain these items.

6. **Marketing and Operational Plan:**

- Highlight your market research and make sure that it is accentuated with charts, graphs, etc.
- Describe your service or service mix completely. Assume that the reader is totally unfamiliar with your type of service.
- Describe how you achieved your pricing structure by outlining your costs.
- Describe any pricing strategies, such as discounts to lure new customers.
- Tell the reader where your business will be located and the advantages of this location.
- Describe how you will promote your business -- where, when and at what cost. A chart will be useful.
- Describe your competition. For each competitor, outline their strengths and weaknesses, as well as where there are opportunities for you and any threats (SWOT). Here again, a chart will be useful. Identify your suppliers. This can be as simple as the local computer or stationery stores. Try to identify more than one supplier for each product.
- Describe the technologies you will be using. In our case, this will be computer hardware, software, etc.

7. **Financial Statements:** These items should be included in your plan and we will discuss these early next year:

- Cash flow forecast
- Income statements
- Balance sheet
- Break even analysis

8. **Appendices:** Include items such as your résumé, sample contracts, sample business cards and supportive items from your portfolio.

This is by no means an exhaustive treatment of the business plan. Your local Business Enterprise Center often presents seminars on all of the above sections. I would encourage you to attend these seminars as well as those offered by your local public library.

Our next letter will be in February. Until then, may I wish you a very Merry Christmas on behalf of the CIC-SIG.

Sincerely,

Elaine Garnet (CIC-SIG Manager)

P.S. *Intercom* (November 2003) has an interesting article by Elizabeth G. Frick on "Independents' Success Depends on Business Skills." Check it out on page 35. ♦

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# The Six-Step Selling Process

A Free and Practical Workshop Presented by Lois Raats, M.Ed, and the CIC-SIG



We all do marketing to generate leads, but how does one turn those leads into paying clients? Research into effective selling has confirmed three critical behaviours common to the most successful sales people. They:

1. Ask a lot more questions
2. Encourage potential clients to do most of the talking
3. Wait a lot longer before jumping in with a solution

The Six-Step Selling Process provides a structured framework for conducting the telephone or face-to-face follow-up meeting. We will learn to use coaching techniques to truly understand the needs of our clients, and then to help the client discover how effectively we can meet those needs.

## **Speaker Information -- Lois Raats, M.Ed**

Over the last eighteen years, Lois Raats has helped over 2500 individuals and organizations to achieve results by leveraging their strengths and abilities. Her company, CoachLois Associates ([www.coachlois.com](http://www.coachlois.com)), provides coaching and training to individuals and organizations. Lois coaches individual managers, executives, and professionals to achieve balance and purpose in their lives. She also consults with organizations, helping them develop clearer communication, stronger teams, and better bottom-line performance. Lois enjoys living in Waterloo with her husband Dan, and her two sons Nicholas, 15 and Philip, 12.

## **Details**

Start the New Year on a practical note by joining us on January 14, 2004 from 6:30 to 9:00 pm. When the location is finalized, it will be posted on the Southwestern Ontario Chapter's Website in the [calendar](#). ♦

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## STC Head Office - Conferences



Part of being a technical communicator requires keeping your skills current. One way to do this is to attend conferences. The following events were included in the November issue of *Tielines*, The Society Leaders' Newsletter.

### **STC's 51st Annual Conference**

STC's 51st Annual Conference will take place May 9-12, 2004, in Baltimore, Maryland. All STC members will soon receive a copy of the *Preliminary Program*, which includes registration forms, information on technical sessions, conference transportation contacts, and other information designed to help you plan your conference trip.

The *Preliminary Program* will be mailed with the February issue of *Intercom*, which STC members will receive in January, and will also be posted on the Society's Website at [www.stc.org](http://www.stc.org).

### **Other Society Events**

#### **February 27-28, 2004**

The Atlanta Chapter STC will hold its annual regional conference, *Currents*, at Mercer University in Atlanta, Georgia. Topics include learning new skills and tools, contracting, satisfying users, education/professional development, and management. For more information, please contact [Cheri Crider](#) or go to [www.stcatlanta.org](http://www.stcatlanta.org).

#### **July 25-27, 2004**

The Sacramento Chapter STC will host the STC Region 8 Conference at the University of California, Davis. The conference will feature seminars, a regional leadership summit, and a trade show and career expo. For more information, please contact [Eric Butow](#) or go to [www.stcregion8conference.org](http://www.stcregion8conference.org). ♦

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## Just for Laughs

by Debbie Kerr, The Quill Editor



Since it is the season for giving, I thought that I would share some of the "fun stuff" that I have received in the last several months.

### Word Shapes

Many years ago I attended a workshop that Celia Clark gave about how people learn. She said that people find it easier to read text when they can easily see its shape. This theory explains why it is easier to read text that is in "Mixed Casing" than entirely in "UPPERCASE".

This theory is taken one step further in an email that has been circulating (I received it from several sources). The premise of the email is that people can still recognize a word as long as the word starts with the correct first letter and ends with the correct last two letters.

In an attempt to verify its authenticity, Carol Lawless discovered that, although it may be an urban legend, it may be based on a grain of truth. It apparently comes from a letter that was written to New Scientist magazine by someone who did research into the topic at Nottingham University in the 1970s.

The following is purported to be an excerpt from that original letter:

"Randomising letters in the middle of words had little or no effect on the ability of skilled readers to understand the text. Indeed one rapid reader noticed only four or five errors in an A4 page of muddled text. This is easy to demtrasote. In a puiltacibon of New Scnieitst you could ramdinose all the letetrs, keipeng the first two and last two the same, and reibadailty would hadrly be aftcfeed. My ansaylis did not come to much beucase the thoery at the time was for shape and senqeuce retigcionon. Work sugsegts we may have some pofrweul palrlael prsooscers at work. The resaon for this is suerly that idnetiyfing coentnt by paarllel prseocsing speeds up regnicoiton. We only need the first and last two letetrs to spot chganes in menieng."

### Can You Figure This Out?

Carol Lawless submitted the following sample of some "interesting" instructions.

# Operation Manual

- ★ PUT TWO Um4 BATTERIES IN THE BATTERY CASE WITH THE CORRECT.
- ★ USE A 3.5MM STEREO EARPHONE AND PLUG IN THE EARPHONE SOCKET.
- ★ SWITCH ON THE VOLUME CONTROL AND ADJUST THE VOLUME LEVEL.
- ★ TO PRESS RESET AND DIGIT TURNING BUTTON SCAN ONCE PRESS, THE RADIO WILL IN ORDER UPWARD AUTOMATICALLY HUNTING AND LOCK TO FIX, MAY LISTEN TO 88-108MHz FM BROADCAST.
- ★ WHEN THE SOUND BECOMES WEAK OR DISTORTED, REPLACE THE BATTERY WITH NEW ONE.

## Notes on battery

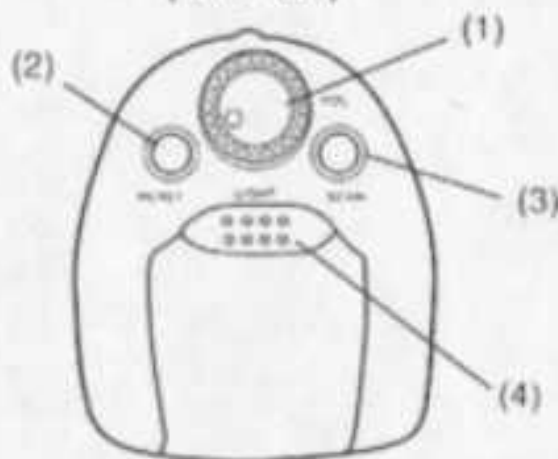
- ALIGN THE BATTERY CORRECTLY.
- THE DRY BATTERY CANNOT BE CHARGED.
- TO AVOID DAMAGE FROM POSSIBLE BATTERY LEAKAGE, REMOVE THE BATTERY WHEN THE UNIT WILL NOT BE USED FOR A LONG TIME.



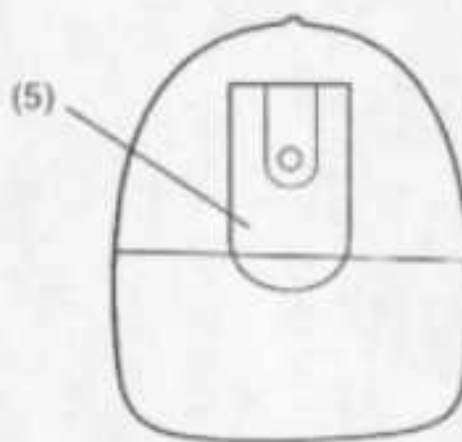
## Controls

- (1) On/Off Switch & Volume Control
- (2) "Reset" Button
- (3) "Scan" Seek Button
- (4) "Light" Button
- (5) Belt Clip

(front view)



(back view)



MADE IN CHINA

If you find other samples of questionable documentation, please submit them to me at [quill@stc-soc.org](mailto:quill@stc-soc.org). ♦

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