



the Quill

the Newsletter for the Southwestern Ontario Chapter STC



June 2005 (Volume 16 Number 9) [About the Quill](#)

In This Issue

Persistence is Fruitful

With the new Star Wars movie out, I thought of Star Trek and the Borg, and other stuff that is not remotely related to Opal's topic; however, since Opal does mention the persistence of this year's council in achieving its goals, I used my editorial right to come up with the title. ♦

Advancing Through Volunteering

June marks the end of the council year until September, so you'll have to find something else to do—like volunteer. Now, in addition to our job bank, we now have a place for you to look up organizations that are looking for volunteers to help them with their writing. Why not advance your career and help an organization in the process? ♦

52nd Annual STC Conference: They just keep getting better!

Not everyone is able to attend the annual STC conference, which is why we are so fortunate that three of the attendees are members of our chapter. One of the attendees wrote this overview of the conference so that you could get a sense of what you missed...both during and after the sessions. ♦

52nd Annual STC Conference: These are a few of my favourite things

In a follow up to the first article, find out which sessions appealed the most to two of our attendees. There's nothing better than having two writers describe something for you—like the sessions that you missed at the conference. You'll see that the battle of Word versus FrameMaker is not finished yet. ♦

Membership News

Not everyone has gone on vacation when it comes to joining the STC. Find out who is new to our chapter and find a link to a great article about getting the most out of your membership. ♦

The Editor's Message

The saying, "Time flies when you are having fun," has never been more true than now. I can't believe that it was two years ago when I agreed to be The Quill's new editor. In my family, whenever someone wonders how long ago an event took place, my father ultimately says that it was about two years ago. Well, for once, that statement is true.

The Dark Side of Writing

As writers, we are our own worst critics. Over the years, I have received submissions from fellow writers who were not entirely happy with what they produced. Ironically, for the most part, these were the articles that required the least amount of editing.

I don't know what it is that makes writing articles so difficult:

- writing on demand?
- knowing that fellow writers will notice any mistake that you might make (or so you think)?
- trying to sound learned when you would like to just write something creative for a change?
- coming up with a topic that people might find interesting?
- trying to hit a deadline when you have so much else to do?

The Benefits of Writing

Because good press means presenting both sides of the story, I thought I'd better talk about the benefits of

[Cooking the Books: A Practical Guide to Documentation Design](#)

Attendance was high at this general meeting, possibly because "cooking the books" sounded a little exciting and bad at the same time. Fortunately (or unfortunately) the presentation had no illegal element, but had everything to do with choosing the right type of book to match the product type. ♦

[Health Care: Which country has the right idea?](#)

When you have a Canadian technical writer living in the United States, you have the opportunity to hear about both sides of the fence (border). Form your own opinions as you read some of the comments that were made from our American neighbours. ♦

[Building Brand into Your Product or Web Site](#)

We all recognize symbols and sayings as belonging to a particular company, but sometimes we aren't aware of how they became so memorable. Understanding why a brand is recognizable helps us to understand how we can create a brand for our own product or company. Read the recap of our most recent telephone seminar. ♦

[Recap of the May Council Meeting](#)

Your council meets monthly to keep the chapter running smoothly and to ensure that you get good value for your membership fee. Find out what your council members discussed, including the results of a brainstorming session for next year. ♦

[Upcoming Chapter Events](#)

Just because the general meetings have stopped for the summer doesn't mean that there aren't still opportunities for you to learn. Find out what telephone seminars are available and find out how to cast your vote for the August seminar. ♦

[Freelance 101: The Fine Art of Cold Calling](#)

For some people, making a cold call means a heart-pounding experience where they feel cold because the blood in their veins has turned to ice. Find out how to keep your cool so that you don't lose that potential lead. ♦

[Babel Not: Machine Translation for the Technical Communicator](#)

Not all translations are created equal when it comes to deciding when to human translators versus machine translators. Find out what types of machine translation are available to you, when you should use it, and how you should write to make translations more accurate. ♦

writing. Writing articles enables you to:

- share your knowledge with other people, even when you didn't think you knew as much as you did.
- express yourself in a different way so that you are not restricted to writing about technical things all of the time.
- find out that you are not alone. Sometimes when you share your story (or pain), it encourages others to share their stories too. In the end, you can pool your ideas and resolve common problems.

This Year's Winners

There are no losers associated with this year's newsletter. Just ask the people who reviewed our newsletter and upgraded our Distinguished award to Best of Show. Although, even if we hadn't won the top award, I would still have been very proud of the people who worked with me to make this newsletter something that I hope you enjoyed reading.

Our core newsletter team consisted of Opal Gamble (Technical Advisor), Margie Yundt (Copy Editor), and Martin Eisenloeffel (Illustrator). And from there, our team consisted of many people who either volunteered to write or who stepped up to the keyboard and wrote articles whenever asked.

A separate [article](#) provides details about the award and the people who helped to make the newsletter a success.

Your New Editor

Margie Yundt, the current copy editor for this newsletter, will be your new editor for the 2005 to 2006 year. So I have left you in very capable and somewhat familiar hands. I also won't

Becoming STC

The outgoing Director/Sponsor of Region 1 writes his last article of the year. Learn a bit about how this position of Director/Sponsor is evolving, the reaction to the transformation, and the financial status of the STC. ♦

The Quill Wins "Best of Show"

Although "Best of Show" may sound like we went to the dogs, winning this award means we are top dog when it comes to producing newsletters. Read the judges' comments and look at some of the statistics that made the newsletter such a success. ♦

View From the Other Side...the flip side of travelling in England

Even in England, people are going south, and like other travellers, sometimes the cost of accommodations can be high. However, in some cases, attending the Annual General Meeting (without children) can be priceless. ♦

Creating and supporting a forum for communities of practice in the profession of technical communication

be entirely off the newsletter committee. In addition to my new role as President of this chapter, I will also be doing some copy editing for Margie.

Don't be idle this summer. Send your articles, suggestions, and comments to Margie at

quill@stc-soc.org.





About The Quill

by [Debbie Kerr](#), The Quill Editor



The Quill is the monthly newsletter of the Southwestern Ontario Chapter STC, which is a Canadian chapter in Region 1. Our chapter spans from Windsor to Mississauga and Georgian Bay to Lake Ontario. This area is home to the technology triangle, which is home to many high-tech industries.

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. In **2003**, our first year in an online format, we won a Merit Award.

Publication Policies and Frequency

The Quill is published monthly, with the exception of January, so there are nine issues published from September 2004 to June 2005.

The following is a summary of when articles must be submitted so that they can be included in a particular issue. To help the Quill Editor to plan the content of each issue, contributors are encouraged to submit their story ideas one week before submitting their articles.

Issue	Article Deadline
September	August 23
October	September 20
November	October 18
December	November 22
January	No Quill
February	January 18
March	February 14
April	March 21

May	April 18
June	May 23
July or August	No Quill

Copyright Statement

This newsletter invites writers to submit articles that they wish to be considered for publication within the submission deadlines stated earlier. By submitting an article, you implicitly grant a license to the newsletter to run the article and to other STC publications to reprint it without permission. Copyright is held by the writer. When you submit an article, please let the editor know if this article has run elsewhere, and if it has been submitted for consideration 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.

The design and layout of this newsletter are copyright STC, 2004-2005.

Reprint Policy

Articles contained in this newsletter may be reprinted if credit is given to The Quill and the author of the article. You must also submit an electronic copy of the article to The Quill Editor at quill@stc-soc.org OR mail two paper copies to the mailing address below.

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Treasurer: [Carol Lawless](#)

Recorder: [Emily Layng](#)

For a complete list of contacts, go to the site of the Southwestern Ontario Chapter STC at www.stc-soc.org.

STC Head Office

Mission Statement:

Creating and supporting a forum for communities of practice in the profession of technical communication

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

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Persistence is Fruitful

by [Opal Gamble](#), President



Now that it's spring (is that the third or fourth time I've made that claim?), and the annual June barbeque is mere moments away, I figure it is time to plant my little garden.

My yard, though I try hard, isn't anything to write home about. There are parts that are nice, but it's a frustrating endeavour to spruce up one part, pat myself ceremoniously on the back, and then step back a little farther and realize how much more there is to go.

In many ways, the 2004-2005 STC year was similar. The council tried and tried, and just when we thought we had it right, we'd find another few missing pieces of the puzzle.

There are points where I began to wonder how the council volunteers could stand to continue trying despite setback after setback. Illness, scheduling issues, typos, delays: we saw it all this year.

Ray of Sunshine

Through the grapevine, we discovered at the last council meeting that our chapter, Southwestern Ontario, has one of the lowest attrition rates in the entire society. After an extended technology slump, and a lingering cautious environment, we still managed to hold on to over 90% of our membership.

Call me crazy, but that says to me that we're doing something right.

Round of Applause

This success comes from two factors: our volunteers and our chapter members.

Though I said it a lot, I'm going to say it again: To our volunteers—portfolio managers and committee members—your dedication, hard work, and belief in our chapter is what keeps it going. Thank you very, very much for all that you do.

Meanwhile, we could all toil away 24-7, but without the interest and participation of our chapter members, it would all be pointless.

To all of you who came to meetings, attended phone seminars, read the newsletter, visited our Web site, emailed us your questions: thank you for making it all worth while.

Encore, Encore!

There is one other matter, while I'm saying thank you on behalf of the chapter. Every year, our chapter bestows a thank you to a local business.

This year's recipient of our Company Achievement Award has earned it over and over again.

The winner has a mandate to be prominent in our community, and to make a positive impact where they can. For the Southwestern Ontario Chapter, this mandate has made a big difference in our year.

CheckFree i-Solutions helped us this year by:

- hosting telephone seminars
- donating time towards our program and competition
- donating door prizes
- hosting council meetings in their kitchen

CheckFree: we couldn't have done it without you. Thank you!

Finale

So, in the end, every bit of effort was worth it. Given the energy that was still in the room during our council meeting, and the interest that was being poured into improving things even more next year, I'd say I'm not the only one on the council that believes that the outcome was worth every ounce of work.

Now, if only my garden could do as well! ♦

About Opal Gamble

Technical writer, web monkey, and general geek, Opal's wanted to be a tech writer since high school; she became a STC-SOC council member in 1997. A graduate of UW's co-op Rhetoric and Professional Writing program, Opal is a contract Technical Writer at [Campana](#). She also runs her own freelance business, [SiO2](#).

When she's not doing STC business, Opal participates in autocross events (with a hybrid car, no less!) and tries to cultivate a green thumb in her garden.



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Advancing Through Volunteering



by [Fei Min Lorente](#), Volunteer Manager

If you've cruised the job bank lately, you might have noticed a new option to "View Volunteer Jobs". We have been informing volunteer organizations in the area that we, as a professional community, are available to lend our skills to their organizations. They can post volunteer positions in our job bank the same way that other employers do. Then, when you're looking for something to do with your "spare time", you can "View Volunteer Jobs" and pick one.

Who has any spare time?!

Well, think of this as professional development. You can gain experience as a technical communicator and add items to your portfolio, either in your field of expertise or in a field you want to develop. Besides the actual technical work, you can learn about interviewing skills, working relationships, organizational skills and even management skills. It increases your networking opportunities. Moreover, you are doing your profession a service by boosting the status of technical communicators, and you are making a difference in your community. With volunteer work, you also have the freedom to choose an activity that fits into your available time and schedule. The job descriptions should give you an idea of the time commitment involved, and often you can do the work by "telecommuting" and using "flex time".

Why do volunteer organizations need technical communicators?

In short, they need people who can research, analyze, evaluate, organize and present information in a coherent fashion. That's us! These skills can be used to write proposals for grants, newspaper ads for fundraisers, newsletters, and letters appealing for donations. From the historical material I've inherited, I have samples of brochures, posters, and presentation material that technical communicators in our chapter have developed for volunteer organizations.

What if I end up doing volunteer work?

If you contact a volunteer organization and end up working for them, please let me know. I'm entering this information in a database so that our chapter will be able to track the impact that this program has had on the community. You can email me at volunteering@stc-soc.org.

(By the way, all of the benefits of volunteering that I listed above also apply to

volunteering in our STC chapter—hint, hint.) ♦

About Fei Min Lorente

Fei Min is back in the Waterloo area after graduating from UW and spending 10 years in Calgary. She is currently working at Dspfactory Ltd., running her own business called Articulated Concepts on the side, and is happily getting involved in STC business now that the dust has settled from the Big Move. When she's not doing technical writing or family stuff, Fei Min fills in the spare minutes with scrap booking.

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52nd Annual STC Conference: They just keep getting better!



by [Carol Lawless](#), Treasurer

With the 52nd Annual STC Conference, in Seattle, under my belt, I can lay claim to seven conferences experiences. They were all great but somehow this year just felt a little better. Maybe it was the scenery. Wow—mountains to the east and to the west and Puget Sound and more mountains. Maybe it was all that seafood. Or perhaps the many kinds of draft beer available. (No—I didn't try them all no matter what Margie may claim!) Despite the rain we did get in some sight seeing. From the Space Needle we had a wonderful view of Mount Washington and the rest of Seattle. At least if it had been clear, it would have been wonderful!

The Joy of SOX

Unlike the weather, the conference shed a fair bit of light on my latest project. I'm working on Sarbannes-Oxley documentation, fondly called SOX by those of us who have the challenge of writing for a piece of American legislation that is rather inexplicit, at best. SOX tells us that any company that trades on the US Stock Exchange needs to ensure its management is accountable for producing accurate financial statements. But it doesn't go into specifics and since it's new, we're all feeling our way through the darkness towards the light.

Two sessions dedicated to SOX convinced me that we're on the right path, warned me of a couple things that could have easily slipped by us (but not the auditors) and opened up a whole new glossary of acronyms to wrestle with. It also introduced me to people who have the same struggles—some of whom are light years ahead and others who are struggling along the paths that we trudged last year.

Work and Personal Enlightenment

I always think "this year there won't be enough sessions that will give me something new". And then I look through the preliminary schedule and draft a short list of—maybe 30—possible sessions to attend. This year I took a new slant. I attended several sessions that were specific to my work (after all, the company was paying for me to eat that seafood), but I also made a point of going to a couple "me" sessions. By balancing work needs to personal enlightenment, I stayed fresh and eager.



Favourite Sessions

To see descriptions of two of our members' favourite sessions, read Margie Yundt's and Fei Min Lorente's [article](#). ♦

About Carol Lawless

Carol has been a member of our profession since 1993 and is a senior STC member. She currently leads a team of writers who produce system documentation within the IT division at Sun Life Financial. This is Carol's third year as our treasurer. Outside of the STC and work, Carol's special interest is Ancient Civilizations, which is why she is currently visiting Greece and Turkey. In her spare time, she runs Mom's taxi and loves to read (while waiting for the next taxi run!)



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52nd Annual STC Conference: These are a few of my favourite things



by [Fei Min Lorente](#), Volunteer Manager and [Margie Yundt](#), Management SIG Co-ordinator and Copy Editor

Editor's Note: *For a general description of the conference, read Carol Lawless's [article](#).*

So many sessions, so little time but here are some highlights from the conference this year from a couple of your council members who were lucky enough to attend—enjoy!

Managing Implementation of Structured Authoring

by Fei Min Lorente

This presentation was delivered by Sarah O'Keefe, and if you've used FrameMaker for any length of time, you'll know that she's one of the authors of *FrameMaker 7: The Complete Reference*, as well as other FrameMaker books. It was akin to meeting a favourite author when I shook her hand and she remembered my name from the FrameMaker online user group.

Well, it turned out that Sarah is also a wonderful presenter. Her expertise in the topic was obvious, and she delivered her information with a sense of humour that made us laugh at all the inevitable mistakes that people make when converting to structured documentation; this also made us remember to avoid those mistakes. She took us through the process of implementing a structured documentation system from getting the budget to using the system to produce documentation. She used her personal experience to point out real-world facts you have to face, such as:

- making a business case for investing the money it will take to convert your documentation and your processes; companies won't let you do XML because it's cool
- the costs you have to consider, including hidden ones like reduced productivity while people learn a new system
- the importance of stating your requirements, defining your workflow, and making sure you have measurements for success

She also shared solutions to the challenges she had to overcome in her implementation of a structured authoring environment. For instance, she cautioned against making small incremental changes to your defined structure

because it would invalidate any documents that had already used that structure. She suggested treating the structure definition as a piece of software with versioned releases.

Two of the gems of information that I picked up are:

- XSL-FO (the language you use to format XML for print) isn't quite as comprehensive as FrameMaker, so you may have to be satisfied with "good enough" formatting. For example, XSL-FO does not do rotated text.
- The FrameMaker XML converter does not handle callouts that you've added to screen shots, so use Photoshop instead and layer the callouts.

I wish you could have been there to hear her yourselves, but failing that, you can see her presentation slides at <http://www.scriptorium.com/StructuredAuthoringSTC.pdf>. I wish we could afford her consulting services, but I'll have to make do with her books. If you've ever posted on www.frameusers.com, though, you may have received free advice from Sarah. She's just helpful that way.

Bill, We Need to Talk

by Margie Yundt

After wrestling with Microsoft Word for over a decade, you'd think I'd have it mastered by now, but sadly no. Every time I think I have it figured out, Bill throws me a curve ball. So, I thought I would attend the "Tips for Using Word for Documentation" session at the conference, couldn't hurt, right? Besides, the session description read "learn how to prevent corruption and create stable documents in Microsoft 2003." Okay, so I hoped this had nothing to do with Enron and everything to do with commiserating with other like-minded writers and sharing our "epic" battles...venting is good, right?

Well, this session was much more enlightening, amusing, and cathartic than I could have ever imagined. The first thing our hosts Elizabeth Rogers (consultant extraordinaire) and Jerry Franklin (technical writer) told us was "It's Not You. It's Microsoft." Okay, this is not a newsflash, but it does feel good when someone actually says it...sniff.

Elizabeth started off by telling us that with every release of Word (since 95), Microsoft had changed its native file format to the latest flavour of the day. It started with binary on 97, then off to HTML in 2000, XML in 2002 (XP) and finally an entirely new style of XML in 2003. No wonder porting Word documents between versions can leave your head spinning like the unfortunate little girl in The Exorcist (and yes, I swear I've come close to spewing green bile a couple

of times!). And in case you missed her point, Elizabeth brought a Lego tower, which yes, was in pieces by the time she passed it through several people. Hello? Anyone taping this for Bill and his crew?!

Elizabeth's advice? DON'T ROUNDTRIP DOCUMENTS between versions, but if you must, strip out all the formatting when going between versions—and copy all but the LAST paragraph mark (which contains all the document formatting information particular to that specific version of Word—the "bad stuff") and paste it into a NEW document. Oh, and turn off all the automatic formatting in Word, and for goodness sake, don't use the "automagic" toolbar buttons—they don't work either and can also lead you unwittingly down the path to corruption. This I knew, but it still felt good to know it wasn't just me...

Oh, and then we talked about numbered lists. I was ready for the heated discussions and expletives, but thankfully Jerry got right to the point and said, "yeah, this doesn't work either, but here's how to tame the beast." He then went on to provide very detailed instructions on what to do and more importantly what NOT to do when incorporating lists into your documents. It was poetry to me—and I could not even begin to do it justice with the few lines I have left (yes, Debbie, I am wrapping up—see?).

So, check it out for yourself—here are the links to the presentation:

<http://www.stc.org/52ndConf/sessionMaterial/dataShow.asp?ID=233>

...and the Jerry's numbered "to do" list:

<http://www.stc.org/52ndConf/sessionMaterial/dataShow.asp?ID=234>

It is really worth the trip to the STC web site, and, for that matter, the STC conference if you can swing it—and who knew, I actually learned something besides it really does rain a lot in Seattle. Next year the conference is in Las Vegas, sequins optional. See you there! ♦

About Fei Min Lorente

Fei Min is back in the Waterloo area after graduating from UW and spending 10 years in Calgary. She is currently working at Dspfactory Ltd., running her own business called Articulated Concepts on the side, and happy to get involved in STC business after the dust settled from the Big Move. When she's not doing technical writing or family stuff, Fei Min fills in the spare minutes with scrap booking.





About Margie Yundt

Margie is a senior member in our local STC chapter and has been kicking around the Kitchener-Waterloo/Guelph area since...well, forever it seems. She is a technical writer at heart and enjoys mentoring her kids in the Art of Plain English. She lives in Guelph with her family and enjoys a daily commute into Waterloo to join her many co-workers at Research In Motion.

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Membership News

by [Leanne Rollins](#), Membership Manager



New Members

Elizabeth Houser

Geoff Miller

Braden Speers

When the warm weather comes, many lesser people might let their minds wander so that they can spend their time thinking about vacation plans. Luckily, our new STC members are still thinking clearly.

It's great to see that people are still joining the STC, and specifically our chapter. I am also pleased that one of our new members has taken the time, since his recent return from vacation, to submit his biography as a way of introducing himself to us.

In addition, there is a link later on this page to a great article about how to get the most out of your STC membership.

Biography of Braden Speers

During my studies at the University of Guelph, I was often commended for my analytical skill and my concise writing style. After completing an English BA (Honours) degree in 1996, I sought a practical outlet that would enable me to combine my analytical skills with my writing skills. Naturally, I was drawn to technical writing and went on to receive my "Technical Writing Certificate" at Humber College in 1997.

Through my studies in technical communication and my work in the technical writing field, I developed an interest in technology. It was this interest that led me to obtain some education in computing and to gain some experience in the field of information technology. My objective was to acquire the technical skills necessary to become a more effective technical communicator.

Since 1999, I have been employed as a "Network Administrator" and, as the sole technical employee at my workplace, I have been responsible for developing all network policies, procedures, and end-user technical documentation. Although I have enjoyed learning about a variety of technologies, I still feel that educating staff and creating documentation are the most interesting and enjoyable aspects

of my work. For this reason, I have turned my attention, once again, to technical writing and, through my membership with the STC, I hope to re-enter the field of technical communication.

Seven Habits of Highly Effective STC Members

The following is a link to the PDF version of Rebecca S. Taylor's article about how to get the most out of your STC membership.

http://www.stc.org/intercom/PDFs/2005/200505_28.pdf

This article was most recently published in the May 2005 issue of *Intercom*. ♦

About Leanne Rollins

Leanne recently became a self-employed contractor, escaping management roles for the first time in years. This newfound freedom has allowed Leanne to take on extra-curricular activities such as a more active role in the STC. When not writing or playing with her kids, Leanne enjoys running and soccer.



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May General Meeting Recap

Cooking the Books: A Practical Guide to Documentation Design



by [Marisa Latin](#), Hospitality Manager

May's general meeting was about using product classes to help determine what type of information is needed for almost any product.

After 20 years of designing, writing, editing, and publishing just about every kind of technical document there is, Tim Grantham has learned that products can be classified into six basic groups, and each class of product requires certain types of documentation. Tim also shared with us what kind of information these documents should include. Thank you, Tim! So here's what is in Tim's McHappy Meal of Documentation Sets (and I call it that because he was really cooking, and it was really good, and we got to bring home a [copy of the presentation](#)).

Six Product Classes

Here's Tim's classification of products:

Type	Size	User Interface
Hardware: any physical product, not just equipment, including embedded software	Small	Simple: any interface that a novice can learn to use in one hour; for example, a debit card terminal or consumer digital camera Rich: any interface that a novice can learn to use in one hour; for example, a debit card terminal or consumer digital camera
	Large: any hardware product requiring special site preparation	Simple: any interface that a novice can learn to use in one hour; for example, airport kiosks Rich: includes programming interfaces; for example, commercial aircrafts

Software: a non-physical product, one that does not require any user documentation of hardware

Simple: any interface that a novice can learn to use in one hour; for example Wizards or browsers

Rich: includes programming interfaces; for example, database application or desktop publishing.

Six Types of Documentation

The following table specifies the type of document that is required for each product class. The method of distribution depends on the type of audience, type of customer relationship, and costs (printing, distribution, and maintenance). Note that a product with different types of users may belong to more than one product class.

	Unpacking Guide	Site Prep. Guide	Install. Planning Guide	Install. Guide	User Guide	Service Guide
Small Hardware, simple UI	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	Maybe
Large Hardware, simple UI	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Maybe
Small Hardware, rich UI	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	Maybe
Large Hardware, rich UI	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Maybe
Software only, simple UI	No	No	No	Yes	Maybe	No
Software only, rich UI	No	No	Maybe	Yes	Yes	No

About the Speaker

Tim Grantham is the user documentation standards team leader for Thermo Electron Corporation, a global manufacturer of instrumentation products with US \$2.2 billion in annual revenues. He also supervises a small documentation team at the company's Laboratory Automation and Integration business unit in Burlington, Ontario. Tim's documents have won several awards in the annual STC chapter-level competitions, including Excellence and Distinguished. ♦



About Marisa Latin

Marisa has been a technical writer for over ten years and is currently at Inscriber. She lives with her lively family and long list of pets. In her spare time, you can find her seeking nature's wonders and capturing 'life' on camera.



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Health Care: Which country has the right idea?



by [Diane Russell](#), Feature Writer

Canada's health-care system: some say it defines us as Canadians, yet some say it short-changes us. Recent articles in both *Readers Digest* and *Macleans* indicate that, although an overwhelming majority of Canadians agree in principle with universal health care, a significant number are dissatisfied with certain aspects, including wait times and access to primary care physicians. Nonetheless, most Canadians would be quick to point out how much worse our neighbours to the south have it. After all, hasn't everybody heard about a family somewhere who lost their house in order to pay a hospital bill? Exactly how bad do the Americans have it?

My quest for answers is by no means conclusive. I haven't the means to question health-care experts, and have limited my pool of interviewees to members of my Toastmasters and hiking clubs. Their insights may surprise you, and I leave you to draw your own conclusions.

Some pay for it

Many people have health care insurance through their employer, and there are plans available to the self-employed to purchase. Deductibles customarily range anywhere from \$2K-\$10K; most also have some sort of co-payment, either a dollar figure or percentage cost per visit. I know a man in his fifties whose premiums are \$336/month for single coverage; he must also pay 20% of the cost of each visit. His "catastrophic" coverage will pay up to \$2 million, but with a \$10K deductible.

And some do not

Anyone earning under a certain income is automatically covered by Medicaid. The State pays for everything. In addition, low-income workers with no insurance can purchase Medicaid coverage at subsidized rates. No insurance? I'm told that if someone presents at a hospital, that hospital is legally obligated to treat them, regardless of coverage.

However, any shortfall the hospital incurs (as a result of treating those with no insurance or Medicaid) is apparently compensated for by charging more to those with insurance plans or who can pay privately.

Waiting times

Ah, the bane of Canadian health care. Personally, I have waited 6 months for an MRI, 3 months to see an orthopedic surgeon (that was just for the consult) and 10 months for the actual surgery. That was 2 years ago, but some well-placed phone calls to the same orthopedic surgeon's office last week ascertained those times are still the norm.

In America, an MRI can be booked and completed within a week. Most hospitals have one, and there are also mobile units. Need cardio-vascular surgery? If you present to Dartmouth-Hitchcock hospital, you could receive it within 24 hours; or immediately if an emergency.

A lady in my hiking club said she plans to have shoulder surgery in September and a knee replacement 2 months later. Neither appointment is booked yet, but she knows wait times will be less than 2 months. I stared, open-mouthed, while she told me this. You can actually plan what time to have surgery? We Canadians take whatever we can get!

Physiotherapy

Need physiotherapy treatment? Facilities on either side of the border can usually see you within a few days. However, facilities in Kitchener-Waterloo charge an average of \$42 per visit after the initial visit. I paid \$90 in Vermont for each visit.

User fees—do they help contain costs?

My pet peeve: those who visit emergency rooms for non-emergency purposes. Happens all the time in Canada, where many perceive health care to be "free".

A hospital administrator confirmed that it happens in the USA too— with one significant difference. Those engaging in hospital visits for "every little ailment" tend to be those who pay nothing for their coverage. An emergency room visit is automatically more expensive than the same visit at a physician's office (yes, in Canada too). Those who must co-pay a portion of each visit tend to think twice before utilizing the assistance of a hospital.

So, do Americans envy Canadians for their health care?

Those without any health-care insurance certainly do. How about those who pay those hefty premiums? Surprisingly, many I asked were quite comfortable with deductibles and co-payments. It would appear that people generally accept whatever they are accustomed to; health care is no exception. ♦

About Diane Russell

Diane Russell is dividing her time between Canada and Quechee, Vermont. She welcomes questions and comments.

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Building Brand into Your Product or Web Site



by Kasia Novak, Quill Contributor

This is a brief summary of the STC telephone workshop, "Building Brand into Your Product or Web Site", presented by Robert Barlow-Busch. The target audience for this workshop included:

- Technical Communicators
- Interface Designers
- Information Architects
- Design and Usability Specialists
- Marketing

What is brand?

A brand represents all information about a product or service that distinguish it from other products or services. It consists of a name, identifying mark, logo, visual images or symbols, or mental concepts. Marketers think of a brand as a set of aligned expectations in the mind of its stakeholders—from its consumers, to its distribution channels, to the people and companies who supply the products and services they make.

Brand is connecting a buyer with a seller

Why is brand important? A successful brand proves that you know your audience. When you know your audience, your company's promises meet your customers' expectations. Have you noticed how people choose a car? If a car is for a male driver, he probably chose a standard transmission. A female driver would choose an automatic. Why? Because of our "user experience"—men like to be in control, women like comfort.

The term "user experience" refers to a concept that places the end-user at the focal point of design and development efforts. The user experience is subjective and may be positive, negative, or neutral. Brand has a huge impact on the bottom line and provides the Return on Investment. How do you convince others of the value added by the brand? The answer is through user experience. Brand creation is an expensive, time-consuming task, meant to generate an emotional response from the intended audience. If it is successful, customers not only recognize the brand but can also recite its attributes. The brand may be

described as comfortable, safe, or reliable.

Brand as a promise to deliver the same value consistently

Brand is marketed through mass communication to persuade consumers to buy a specific brand. It is used as a promise to deliver a certain quality product every time and all the time. Consider these three brands: Disney, Sony, and Adidas. Disney promises consumers a magical experience in family entertainment. Sony promises consumers a status quo through high-tech, quality products. Adidas sells a promise of achievement through high quality sporting goods. The brand experience is the marketing promise that is build into the product during its development.

Designing a product around brand

A mantra for technical communicators: know your audience. Is product documentation supporting marketing's mantra for branding? What kind of experience are we delivering to our customers? Look at product requirements—business, technical, brand, and user. A brand is described by attributes, such as simplifying, engaging (users feel engaged when they use a product), connecting, unencumbered (we offer what they need and no more). As technical communicators, do we know what product attributes we should be supporting and how do we reinforce them? If we do not know the brand, it is time to talk to marketing.

Discover what users think about your product

Supporting a brand goes beyond the usability test that aims to reveal what is wrong with the product. Brand is telling customers what is good for them. As technical communicators, let's think beyond function and aim for values.

A mantra for usability specialists: understand your audience and design for them. Look beyond function and explore how the user experience creates meaning. Use projective techniques that present ambiguous situations, which elicit people's assumptions, attitudes, beliefs, and experiences.

Use the following projective techniques:

- Brand families
- Thought bubbles (cartoons characters with call-outs to fill out the conversation bubbles)
- Sentence completion (to avoid assumptions)

- Product transformation (if our product were a car, what kind of car would it be?)
- Obituary (imagine the product/company died)
- Photo collage (helpful technique for visual people). Give participants a stack of photos of people, objects, places, scenes, and so on. Have them build a collage by selecting photos that, in their minds, describe an organization or product. Discuss the photos and ask what the reasons were behind the selection. Using this technique you can determine your brand's promise.

Checking if a brand keeps the promise

Before a usability test, have participants do a photo collage on their expectations of the brand. After performing the usability test, have participants do a photo collage on their experience with the product they tested. Compare the results and explore the disconnects between the expectation of the brand and the true experience of the brand.

Designing for brand—the brand ladder

A brand is intangible and exists in the mind of the consumer. This definition helps us understand the idea of brand loyalty and the 'loyalty ladder.' Different people have different perceptions of a product or service, which places them at different points on the loyalty ladder. A brand is built through the total experience that it offers.

The Michelin Tires Brand Ladder

- Values (a selection of attributes inherent to the brand or held by customers). Michelin's message: Be a good parent.
- Customer Benefit (An implicit or explicit benefit that supports the customer's pursuit of goals). Michelin's message: Safety.
- Product Benefit (An implicit or explicit benefit offered by the product). Michelin's message: Improved traction.
- Feature (An objectively observable function, detail, attribute, or quality of the product). Michelin's message: Shape of the thread.

Repeat the mantra: know your audience

If brand is defined as a user experience, you must think beyond the function of the product and aim for the values. Go beyond fixing what is broken. Celebrate

what is different and reinforce what is great.

Do you know what your company brand means? If not, it is time to talk to your marketing department. ♦

About Kasia Novak

Kasia is an editor at Raytheon Canada Limited, a supplier of Air Traffic Management Systems. In her previous positions, she was a technical writer at CheckFree i-Solutions and MKS. Born in Poland, Kasia's interest in books, languages, and technology brought her into the fascinating field of technical communication.

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Recap of the May Council Meeting

by [Opal Gamble](#), President



We had a longer than normal meeting this month, but the time just flew by... that's what happens when we let ourselves get into brain storming mode.

The year is quickly drawing to a close. The council has some great end of year news for you.

Nominations

On a happy note, our incoming council is very close to being full once again. There are only two positions that we need to fill. We need a Competition Manager to share the workload between the Southwestern Ontario and Toronto chapters, as well as a Vice President.

Are you interested in helping our chapter, but don't want a portfolio to manage? That's okay, there's always the option to be on a committee. Any kind of help is always appreciated!

Contact [Opal](#) or [Heidi](#) today!

Chapter Happenings

Our financial year is drawing to a close, and Carol is doing her final tallies to submit our financial report to head office.

The barbeque looks like it's going to be a great hit. Peter has really raised the bar with this event!

Lori will be continuing the ever-popular phone seminars this summer: stay tuned for details.

The Storm

Put eight tech writers in a room and allow them to dream about how to make the chapter run even more smoothly... you end up with over three pages of notes!

Among the bright ideas:

- Launch a contractor directory on our chapter Web site to help match companies and contractors
- Consider "friend of the chapter" discounts for chapter events like phone seminars and the February education sessions.

- Collaborate with other Ontario STC chapters to exchange ideas and build a larger network.

There was even more, but we'll keep you wondering for next year.

Meanwhile, a great big round of applause goes out to our portfolio holders and volunteers who worked so hard to make the 2004-2005 year such a success—not to mention all of our enthusiastic chapter members who participated in our programs this year. Thank you, everyone! ♦

About Opal Gamble

Technical writer, web monkey, and general geek, Opal's wanted to be a tech writer since high school; she became a STC-SOC council member in 1997. A graduate of UW's co-op Rhetoric and Professional Writing program, Opal is a contract Technical Writer at [Campana](#). She also runs her own freelance business, [SiO2](#).

When she's not doing STC business, Opal participates in autocross events (with a hybrid car, no less!) and tries to cultivate a green thumb in her garden.

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Upcoming Chapter Events



by [Peter Szabo](#), Program Manager

This is it! The end of the STC chapter year. So we'll send off the 2004-2005 year with a barbecue party at Wellington Brewery in Guelph, and then slow ourselves down for vacations and long summer weekends.

However, just because there are no more council meetings or general meetings, it doesn't mean we can't squeeze in some more learning over the summer. That's right; we'll be offering remote seminars throughout the summer (free to STC members and for a very reasonable \$35 to non-members). The June and July seminar events are listed below.

We're not sure which of the August seminars to offer, so do us a favour and visit the STC seminar listing at www.stc.org/seminarsList.asp, and then send an e-mail to the ([Phone Seminar Manager](#)) to tell her which seminar you'd prefer.

By the way, I'll be signing off as Program Manager this year so thank you STC council members for your advice, hard work, and support. Thanks also to the new and familiar members who showed up at various program events this year. It was a real pleasure giving you a place where you could learn a little, share war stories with colleagues, network for a job, and make some new friends. I'm sure you'll provide the incoming Program Manager, Donald Johnstone, with the same valuable feedback, welcoming smiles, and warm encouragement that I felt.

Happy tech writing to you all!

Tuesday, June 7, 2005 (Annual Year-end Barbecue—Networking Event)

Open to members and non-members

Time: Brewery Tour: 6:30, Main Event: 7:00-9:00 p.m.

Location: Wellington Brewery—Iron Duke House, 950 Woodlawn Road West, Guelph

Cost: One free drink plus free brewery tour (optional), and free BBQ food and fixings. Additional beer and wine at \$1.50 per drink!

RSVP Required: Hopefully, you already sent me your RSVP by May 31, 2005.

Wednesday, June 8, 2005 (STC Remote Seminar)

Topic: Adding Interactivity to Online Documents

Host: William Horton

Passive reading, watching, and listening may allow users to gather simple information, but these methods are seldom effective in acquiring skills, gaining knowledge, or developing judgment. More and more, we need to make our documents interactive. This seminar will demonstrate simple ways to fill your online help, electronic documents, and Web pages with meaningful interactivity that makes learning more like playing a video game than reading the dreaded manual.

Time: 1:00-2:30 p.m. EDT (Doors open at 12:30)

Location: CheckFree i-Solutions, 455 Phillip Street, Waterloo (for both seminars) [[455 Phillip Street, Waterloo](#)].

Cost: FREE for members and \$35 for non-members.

Wednesday, July 13, 2005 (STC Remote Seminar)

Topic: Upgrading Your PowerPoint Presentations: Basics of Organization and Illustration

Host: Ann Jennings, Ph.D.

PowerPoint presentations add several dimensions of communication uncommon to documentation and other static forms of writing. The verbal and visual content of a slide presentation require special attention, whether you are the speaker or whether you are creating the slides for someone else to present. This seminar will introduce you to the following essential elements of PowerPoint displays:

- Presentation sequences and organizational patterns
- Essentials of public speaking that can be built into slide content
- Visual design principles and techniques that can support the words on your slides

Time: 1:00-2:30 p.m. EDT (Doors open at 12:30)

Location: CheckFree i-Solutions, 455 Phillip Street, Waterloo (for both seminars) [[455 Phillip Street, Waterloo](#)].

Cost: FREE for members and \$35 for non-members.

If you have any questions about upcoming chapter events, or if you have a suggestion for a meeting topic, feel free to e-mail [Donald Johnstone](#) (Program Manager).

For questions about upcoming STC telephone or Web seminars, contact [Lori Jankowski](#).

For details about our chapter's events for the rest of the year, as well as last minute updates or additions to the schedule, be sure to check our local [STC chapter calendar](#). ♦

About Peter Szabo

Peter has been a technical writer in one form or another for ten years. For the past five years, Peter has worked for CheckFree i-Solutions, a software firm in Waterloo, and is currently the Manager of Technical Publications.

Born and raised in Toronto, Ontario, Peter moved to Guelph in 1997, where he currently lives with his wife, Irene, and six-year-old son, Taylor. He is working on his first feature-length screenplay.



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Freelance 101: The Fine Art of Cold Calling



by [Leanne Rollins](#), Membership Manager

Warning: *The following article deals with possible rejection, fear, and sheer guts. Reader discretion is advised.*

Mastering the fine art of cold calling

The weather suited a Wednesday perfectly—dreary, cold, gunmetal grey skyline. I sat alone in my home office facing the telephone—oddly, the precise colour of the sky outside. I sat and contemplated the previously unthinkable—pick up the phone; call a complete stranger; try to sell my services...my writing services, that is. You see, just a few weeks earlier, I decided to throw myself into the challenging world of freelance writing. For better or worse, I put together a business plan; set up a Web presence; and purchased the necessary startup equipment. The only thing missing was, well, work.

There are many different ways to find clients: networking, responding to posted ads, begging, pleading, etc. My favourite method is networking—I've landed ALL of my contracts to date through networking. But when I was getting started the results of networking were slow to show themselves. At the time, I was working with a career transition counselor who sagely informed me that "80% of job placements result from direct contact by the job seeker." She went on to tell me that most jobs were created off the cuff—the company didn't even know they needed a service until it literally smacked them in the face.

In other words, she wanted me to start COLD CALLING!

What makes cold calling so scary?

Put simply, it's simple fear of rejection. Now, I'm not easily intimidated (those who know me might wonder if I've EVER been intimidated). And yet, the idea of picking up the phone and calling a total stranger made my palms sweaty and my heart rate speed up. Having suffered rejection from my job loss just a month before, did I really have the guts to pitch my services to a complete stranger? After a little reflection, I realized I wasn't afraid to make the pitch—I just didn't really know WHAT to pitch or WHO to pitch it to.

So if 80% of jobs aren't even posted, how do you figure out who to target?

I needed a plan. I sat down and mapped out my objective, which turned out to be ridiculously easy. I had to find companies who needed documentation. With all

the high- tech companies in Waterloo, this wasn't a big challenge.

Here are a few things I did (and continue to do):

- I spent a lot of time browsing the Communitech Web site. This provided a pretty comprehensive list of high tech companies doing Research and Development (R&D) in the area. By searching each company's Web site, I could tell whether or not they even created documentation. I could also tell how many employees they had. Typically, if a company has less than 50 employees, they don't employ in-house writers, and likely haven't outsourced yet either.
- I browsed the newspapers for companies that had recently received grants or funding. With money in their pocket to develop new projects, opportunities for hiring writers (especially short-term) were possible.
- I kept a close eye on Gary Will's Tech Digest, and I watched the market to see whose stock was doing well, and whose was tanking. Sounds crazy, but opportunities for freelancers often exist in companies who just did a layoff. (Although you take a risk that they might not be able to pay you!).

From my search, I compiled a list of companies that had no documentation posted on their site, had poor quality docs posted, or had fewer than 50 employees. Rather than contacting the HR group for each company on my list, I used their Web site and easily got the name of the Chief Technical Officer (CTO) or Head of R&D. If a position doesn't exist, you can bet HR won't be able to help you. Instead, go as high up the food chain as you can. The CTO is a good bet.

But, what do you say?

So I had a contact list. Here's the best tip I can give you—hit up your network and find out if anyone knows somebody at ANY of the companies on your target list. When you call, the best thing you can start off with is a reference from a person they know. It creates an instant connection, and the person on the other end of the phone will be much more willing to hear you out.

Now, I needed to start placing the calls. To do that, I had to figure out what to say. That's where my company research came in handy. I realized I had to target my pitch specifically to each company's needs. A generic call wasn't going to cut it. I prioritized my company list, and then typed up a value proposition statement for the first few on my list. "Hello, my name is Leanne, and I am a freelance technical writer. Person x, who works at your company, recommended I contact you about the possibility of..." You get the idea.

The people I called were really nice and accepting of what I had to say. I had to

chase one guy down for about a week, but my persistence paid off with an interview. In the end, I placed only two cold calls, and I landed meetings for both!

How do you close the deal?

I had actual scheduled meetings! I dressed up and looked my professional best. I met the CTOs in question and was my usual enthusiastic self. However, I learned a harsh lesson at this point. I managed to sell my services so well to one CTO that he definitely wanted to hire me. FULL-TIME. He saw the value in what I proposed, and realized that he had the amount of work and the budget to support a full-time role. Someone out there should thank me because the company has since filled the role (I turned it down because I wanted to give freelancing a real go).

What lessons did I learn?

I learned a few lessons from my first cold-calling attempts.

First, people are really nice, and the worst they will do is say "no, thank you".

Second, pitch only portions of your value-add and after you get one contract out of the deal, pitch other areas in which you can provide your services. For example, don't pitch both docs and training all at once, or even end-user and service docs all at once—instead, target your pitch on a specific area that won't require you to be onsite 24x7x52 or you will talk yourself into a full-time job.

Third, there a lot of interesting and exciting opportunities out there just waiting to be revealed. You never know where you'll find them, or when they'll find you!

This is my summer cliff hanger. You'll have to wait until September to find out how to develop your own personal network, and how to lose the weight after you enjoy many networking lunches. ♦

About Leanne Rollins

Leanne recently became a self-employed contractor, escaping management roles for the first time in years. This newfound freedom has allowed Leanne to take on extra-curricular activities such as a more active role in the STC. When not writing or playing with her kids, Leanne enjoys running and soccer.



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Babel Not: Machine Translation for the Technical Communicator



by [Sandra Bologna](#), Quill Contributor

Long ago the world had one language and few words. One day, a group of architects decided to write a manual containing sensitive information about the design of a tower they were building in their city. The tower was to reach the sky and would ultimately determine their greatness. Their pride and confidence took over and they soon ignored their boss. As punishment, their boss scattered the architects across the entire earth and made them all speak different languages. This created much confusion, and so the city was named Babel. Many years passed and no one could unlock the secrets of the tower, at least until the birth of the great Babel Fish.

What is Babel Fish and why is it so great?

Babel Fish belongs to a larger category of translation called Machine Translation. Machine Translation will give you a rough translation of that German document that's been sitting on your desk baffling you, in less than one minute. How's that for great?

As amazing as that sounds, Machine Translation (MT) is not perfect, and it does have its drawbacks. So how do you know if Machine Translation is right for you? Researching MT software and reading feedback from actual users will help you get the full picture.

Types of Machine Translation

For those of you new to this term, Machine Translation is the automatic translation of text from one language (source language) into another language (target language) without human intervention. In general, MT use is grouped into two categories: MT-enabled (Unassisted MT) and MT-enhanced (Assisted MT). Figuring out which of these two categories best suits your needs is a first step in determining if MT is right for you:

- MT-enabled (Unassisted MT): the automatic translation of text with no human post-editing. This can produce a translation that is unpolished, but is extremely useful for material that would be impossible or inconvenient for human translation due to overwhelming volume, time-consuming nature, immediate turn-around requirements, and/or the expense of human translators.

- MT-enhanced (Assisted MT): automatically translating text with the intent of using a human translator for post-editing. Used in the form of Computer- Aided Translation, Assisted MT is useful for creating a base translation for proofreaders, which drastically decreases the amount of time they have to spend translating.

When is MT useful?

Controlled Environment

MT works well for translations where source documents are controlled, such as technical documents. Controlled authoring avoids ambiguity; clear and concise source text produces clear and concise machine translation. Documents to be machine translated should feature both of these traits—see Basic Controlled Authoring Methods: Getting Ready for Machine Translation.

Weather reports and stock market data use controlled authoring. According to Steve Silberman, "The classic example of MT that works is the Météo system, developed in Montreal, which has been translating Canada's weather bulletins between English and French on a daily basis since 1977. In the world of Météo discourse, 'front' always means a weather system."

Large Repetitious Documents

Large volumes of documents, particularly those with much repetition, are ideal for MT use. Machine Translations usually contain terminology dictionaries that can be tailored to fit the subject material and modified as needed. This is a good thing, because constantly updating highly repetitious documents leads to translator attrition. According to Steve Silberman, "The translation of forecasts was so boring that before Météo took over, the Canadian government had a hard time keeping translators on the job for more than a couple of months."

When Human Translation is Impossible

Extremely large volumes of material with impractical turn-around times where translations must be updated frequently make human translation impossible. As one member of webmasterworld.com wrote "I run a site full time for a company and we use the machine translation service ...90% of our content is dynamically generated each week from a database of about 12000 new products each week so it would be a huge translation job where we'd need full time staff on doing it. The machine translation works quite well for us and gets customers who have no clue of English. We also use the machine translation type text in box for a translation for all email contact with them - even though the translation is vague!"

Gisting

To use MT for obtaining a rough idea of the source text content is called 'gisting' (from the phrase 'get the gist of it'). Individuals or corporations who must obtain information from documents in a foreign language use MT for gisting purposes when they don't need an official translation or to determine if an official translation is necessary. Gisting is the most popular use of MT today.

Real-Time Translation

Depending on the language, a translator can translate approximately 250 words per hour. Let's say that you outsource your weather report indicating a sunny forecast to a French translator. Two hours later you receive the translation, but now it's raining. You outsource again. Let's face it—data is constantly changing. MT provides quick translation of real-time data, such as weather reports and stock prices. For real-time information, delays are not acceptable, and the cost of human translation would again be enormous due to the high volume of data.

Communication

Think about the dozens of emails you receive and send in one day. Now think about a US company who receives hundreds of emails weekly from their international client in Italy who doesn't know English. This demonstrates only one example of where human translation would be out of the question.

Emails, instant messaging, and chat all require extremely fast turnaround. Translation needs to be immediate and needs to be available 24/7. Since translators cannot produce immediate translation, are not free, and live in different time zones, it is impossible to have these forms of communication translated by human translators. MT is available 24 hours a day regardless of multiple time zones and can produce the high-volume automatic translations necessary for real-time communication. MT for communication purposes also increases privacy of confidential information by eliminating third-parties such as translators and editors. It is ideal for companies working with international vendors who receive emails and data in foreign languages.

Assimilation

Assimilation refers to translating material from a variety of languages into one target language. Translating foreign text into your language is necessary for intelligence gathering. MT allows you to identify what information is relevant in documents written in a foreign language with little to no delay. MT can automatically translate large volume of material that would be impossible, time-consuming, or prohibitively expensive for human translators.

Dissemination

Dissemination is the need to transform material in one language into several

other languages. The traditional process of localization is a prime example. MT for this purpose is used as human-assisted MT. It can speed up the localization process by providing a draft translation for human translators to edit instead of requiring them to start from scratch. Since MT automatically maintains consistency of terminology, it also saves translators time in having to research and check terminology.

Right now you're probably wondering why you should still bother using human translators; MT easily replaces them, right?

No. MT will not replace human translators. As I mentioned before, MT works well for technical documents because they use controlled authoring, and the MT dictionary can be tailored to their specific terminology. MT does not work as well for literary works. The machine translation of Romeo and Juliet would produce a train wreck of text, leaving Shakespeare that much more difficult to understand. It is difficult for MT to properly translate such documents because literary texts are not structured and often use word play, metaphors or other non-literal phrases. Human translators, on the other hand, have the ability to grasp the message of the text, and can properly translate the material even if it is conveyed imprecisely.

This is not to say that human translators always create perfect translations, for even the best-qualified translator will not know the source text better than the author. Still, using highly qualified, professional translators will produce better translations than MT software. MT systems have a more limited knowledge of grammar and vocabulary than human translators and MT dictionaries are limited to what developers were able to implement, which is generally much less than what is necessary. It is important to determine what your needs are and what you plan to accomplish with a MT system.

What are the costs of MT?

When you purchase your MT system, the initial costs will be in the license, customization, annual fees, and maintenance fees. Initially, the cost is high, but using MT regularly for repetitious, large volume documents pays off quickly.

For five languages, the initial cost and maintenance could be close to \$154,000, but let's look at the long-term cost. Let's say that in one year you translated 1,000,000 words. After only the second year of using MT, the total cost for 1,000,000 words would be \$116,450 (\$100,000 for revision, \$7,000 for maintenance, \$9,450 for the annual fee) and would take about 250 days to complete. The cost to have the same 1,000,000 words translated by human translators into five languages at a rate of \$0.10 per word would be \$500,000

and would take about 400 days to complete.

MT runs at a fixed cost independent of volume; this means you can end up saving money over time due to reduced translation cost, reduced delivery time, around the clock availability, and consistency in terminology.

Most commercial MT systems are Transfer-based MT systems. This type of MT lets linguists build grammar rules for the system. The system can then analyze the source language text, map grammatical structures to the target language, and then generate the translation.

However, Transfer-based systems are time-consuming and expensive to develop. When the rules have not yet been developed, poor analysis of sentences will result. Also, this approach can take up to two years to develop since it is knowledge- intensive.

Another type of MT system is Data-driven MT. Only a few commercial MT systems use this method. This method uses statistical methods to calculate which parts of the source and target languages match by gathering large numbers of example translations. The dictionary and translation correspondences are built automatically since text can range from single words to entire sentences. This method may only take a few weeks to develop, but the output is generally of lesser quality.

It is also important to realize that MT systems cannot handle every language combination. Generally, MT systems can translate common language combinations such as French to German or English to French. But rarer language combinations such as Japanese to Swahili have not been developed.

Basic Controlled Authoring Methods: Getting Ready for Machine Translation

Have you decided to buy a Machine Translation system, but can't produce good translations from your new purchase? MT requires a controlled authoring writing style. Here are a few points on using MT efficiently.

1. The most important rule for MT writing is: limit sentence length. Sentences longer than 25 words often become ambiguous and too complex for MT to correctly translate. Keeping sentences to a minimum word length will improve the quality of the output.
2. Avoid metaphors, jokes, slang, puns, idiomatic expressions and regional or national expressions. Since these are often translated literally, they tend to lose their meaning, creating an unintelligible translation. The literal translation of 'break a leg', for example, will not make sense to the target

reader.

Instead of: "You say that your sales will increase by 10 times by the end of this year? Don't count your chickens before they hatch."

Use: "You say that your sales will increase by 10 times by the end of the year? Do not be too confident. Wait until you get the final results."

Instead of: "Don't get me wrong; I love sports, but I hate basketball."

Use: "Do not misunderstand me; I love sports, but I hate basketball."

3. Avoid abbreviations, acronyms, contractions, and common Latin terms (etc., i.e., e.g.) as these do not always have equivalents in different languages. Spell out the entire word instead. Machine Translations do not always recognize abbreviations and will leave them untranslated.

Instead of: Sr, Jr, FDA, TV, etc.

Use: Senior, Junior, Food and Drug Administration (FDA), Television, et cetera

4. Keep pronouns to a minimum. The meaning of pronouns can be lost after translation because different languages use different word orders and gender-specific languages may use different genders for certain objects. For example, in French 'il' could mean 'he' or 'it', so your subject may be unclear to a French reader. Replace pronouns with nouns wherever possible.

Instead of: He is interesting. It is interesting. When translated into French, this becomes: Il est intéressant. Il est intéressant.

Use: Marc is interesting. The book is interesting. This avoids ambiguity when translated, becoming: Marc est intéressant. Il est intéressant.

5. Use simple, direct sentences with basic grammatical construction. Ensure that the sentence structure is grammatically correct and do not omit words.

Instead of: Make sure you use grammatically correct sentence structure.

Use: Make sure that you use grammatically correct sentence structure.

6. Avoid ambiguity. To produce a clear translation, reduce the amount of words and sentences with multiple meanings.

Words: The word 'right' can mean 'correct' or 'right' in terms of direction (right or left).

Sentences: The sentence 'They fed her dog biscuits' can be understood as 'she was fed dog biscuits by them' or 'her dog was fed biscuits by them'.

Instead of: 'They fed her dog biscuits' to mean 'her dog was fed biscuits by them'

Use: They fed biscuits to her dog.

Instead of: 'They fed her dog biscuits' to mean 'she was fed dog biscuits by them'

Use: They fed her some dog biscuits.

7. Avoid compound verbs as they are often mistranslated. Use a thesaurus to simplify uncommon usages.
8. Use the International Standard Date Format (International Standard Date Format) for writing dates. Date order varies from country to country, but the standard numerical year-month-day (YYYY-MM-DD) format will eliminate problems arising from translating dates.
9. Use the infinitive form of the verb rather than present participles because present participles do not always have equivalents in all languages.

Instead of: Click here for selecting the icons and viewing the images.

Use: Click here to select the icons and to view the images.

10. Include a list for the translator of all words that should remain in the source language. These can be anything from proper names and titles to product or company names.
11. After completing the source document, run a draft through the machine translation and back into the source language to see where problems may be occurring.

Conclusion

Machine Translation, though useful in certain cases, is still not, and may never be the one-size-fits-all solution for translation needs. Any translation used for commercial or professional purposes must be at the very least checked and double-checked by human translators, if not translated by humans altogether. For those other cases where the benefits of using an MT far outweigh the drawbacks, MT may be the key that unlocks the mystery of languages. And so, as the story goes, with a little help from the Fish, architects all across the globe were able to read and understand the secrets of the tower and climb to the top.





About Sandra Bologna

Sandra Bologna is a translation project manager with [WTB Language Group](#), a Canadian based translation company that provides technical manual translation services in over 140 languages. Sandra can be reached by phone at 519 256 8897 ext. 101, or by email [sandra \(at\) wintranslation.com](mailto:sandra@wintranslation.com) .

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The Quill Wins "Best of Show"

by [Debbie Kerr](#), The Quill Editor



In last month's issue, I announced that our newsletter had won two awards: Distinguished and Most Improved for Chapters with Membership Counts from 76-150.

Today, I have one more award to announce...Best of Show. For an editor, and for our chapter, this is a great way to end the year.

Judges' Comments

As you read the judges' comments, keep in mind that they apply only to the first three issues of the newsletter (September, October, November). So, if you wrote something great in a later month, the judges didn't get to appreciate your contribution.

The following are just a few samples of the judges comments:

- "Only in Canada...Pity!" is a good discussion of the differences in education between Canada and the US. (Living in California, but having been born and raised in Toronto, this rang very true for me. And I understood the reference to the Red Rose Tea commercial! ;-))
- Use of regular columns gives the reader something to look forward to in each issue. This is particularly true of "View From the Other Side...the other side of the tracks." This also gives an interesting perspective into the experiences of a technical communicator in another country.
- "Writing Effective Introductions and Overviews" is a good discussion of basic skills. It is also a review of a phone seminar, which is not often seen in a newsletter, but is very helpful, especially to those members that can't take time off to attend.
- "Seven Ideas for Sprucing Up Help" is an excellent discussion of more technical skills.
- The articles are quite good. They are appropriate and timely, and cover a wide range of topics. For example:
 - "Technical Communication at Toronto Pearson International Airport" is a good discussion of our profession in a different industry (as opposed to software or other more common industries).
 - "Another Audience to Consider: Identifying ages as significant user groups" is a good discussion of basic skills. The article also has

some excellent graphics.

- "Cascading Style Sheets" is a good discussion of software skills.
- I really enjoyed the Presidents Message, "The English Degree Bites Back." I don't have an English degree, but I am a compulsive editor and the article is an interesting look at the personality traits of technical communicators. Opal also provided a good discussion of taking our profession into other industries, especially those in which we have a personal interest.
- Use of regular columns gives the reader something to look forward to in each issue. This is particularly true of "View From the Other Side...the Other Side of the Pond."
- "Improving the Readability of Your Docs" is a good discussion of basic skills. The Before and After examples were an excellent addition to the article.

Accomplishments Through Statistics

Sometimes when you are struggling to keep up with your life, you don't have the time to realize just how much you have accomplished until someone sits down and does it for you. In an effort to show you the level of commitment that there has been to this newsletter, here are a few statistics.

- There were nine issues published between September 2004 and June 2005.
- There were approximately 35 different people who submitted articles over the year. This does not include one-time articles by people who were campaigning for an STC position or articles that were taken from another source.
- There were approximately 110 articles published.
- Some people, like Opal Gamble, Peter Szabo, and Nancy Halverson, submitted articles each month.
- There was one book review thanks to Carrie Spira.
- Articles came from three different countries: Canada, England and the United States.
- Healthcare (Debbie Davy), Toronto Pearson International Airport (Scott Russell), and financial training (Roxanne Eszes) were three areas of technical writing that were discussed, which showed the variety of career options available to you as a technical communicator.

Thanks for a Job Well Done!

I salute each and every one of you for contributing to the success of the newsletter. As an editor, it is one thing to come up with ideas, but it is quite another to make them happen. Without the support and co-operation of many people, the quality of this newsletter would have been a lot different. For anyone who has ever submitted an article—whether the topic was given to you, like a meeting or seminar recap—or you came up with your own topic, I want to thank you as the editor, and on behalf of the chapter. Our success is your success. ♦

About Debbie Kerr

In the 20 years that Debbie has been writing documentation, she has worked in a variety of industries: government, retail, software, and insurance. She is currently employed at The Economical Insurance Group in Kitchener writing design specifications.

Debbie has been a member of the STC since 1994 and has held several council positions over the last several years.



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Becoming STC



by [Jonathan W. Baker](#), STC Director/Sponsor Region 1 (Outgoing)

This is my last article in my role as Director/Sponsor for Region 1. I wouldn't have missed this experience for the world. When I came onto the board in 2002 one thing became clear, this wasn't the job I thought it would be. First, the Sponsor portion of my job was reduced simply because of finances and the groundwork was being laid to move the role off the board. Second, the Director part of the job was just beginning to emerge.

The Roles

As Directors, our job is to manage STC through policy and other tools. Three years ago this was a new idea for the board. Today, it is the operating condition. Yes, the Sponsor role is still in transition, but there seems to be lots more comfort and confidence around the way the role will be managed in the future. One of the outcomes of the recent board meeting is that a Community Affairs standing committee has been created made up of three directors. This committee will provide both oversight of the Leadership Resource Community and act as a communications channel between the board, the new Leadership Resource Community, and the communities themselves. In addition Judy Glick-Smith will be heading up the Leadership Resource Community.

Over the next year or so, while the Sponsor role is evolving, Cynthia Currie, my successor, will be responsible for Region 1 sponsorship. I know that she will do a first class job, both as a Director and as a Sponsor. You can reach Cindy by email at ds1@stc.org.

The Transformation

Another interesting observation for me that came out during the annual conference was that the Transformation seems to now be old news. The board held a number of public sessions during the conference with most being lightly attended. This says to me that either the members are comfortable with what is happening or understand that many of the changes will not really impact them directly. The board did have at least one meeting in which it became clear that the membership is getting it, because there were several 'Ah Ha' moments expressed by members.

The truly interesting aspect of this is that it means that STC is starting to turn slowly. The Transformation is taking hold and moving forward. We are about to become the STC of the future. We are finally turning our orientation from inward

to outward. There is still a great deal of exciting work to be done. The new Assistants to the President have their hands full with new opportunities and challenges. This is a terrific time to be part of the action.

The Finances

I should also mention that finances are in better condition than when I started on the board. The STC had a small surplus last year and, I would hope, will show a slightly larger surplus this year. The conference has had an uptick in attendance. Ad revenue for the publications is up slightly from last year. But, we still need to work on our membership numbers.

The Future

That said, I am winding down one STC life and hoping to take on another STC role. I am interested in hearing your concerns and issues, and I hope to carry them back to the board in 2006. If you would like to know more about my plans for the future, please contact me at jbaker2525@earthlink.net. I am always happy to talk about the STC and making it successful, which means making STC fit your needs. ♦

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View from the other side...the flip side of travelling in England



by [Nancy Halverson](#), Feature Writer

Another summer coming on...the garden needs work and the evenings are long again. Our kids are off next week for their 'Spring half-term' holiday, and it's a long weekend coming up for us.

We've all still got too much to do to enjoy any nice weather that comes our way, but I try to get out with the sunshine when it's possible. Our ambitions always out-pace reality, but at least we never seem to be bored!

The South of England

Our next trip takes us down into the south of England—well, south of us anyway. We need to go to Bedford for interviews about the French exchange that we're hoping to do with our girls this fall. Since we'll be down in that part of the country, we're hoping to see some of the places on our list—Bath, Oxford, etc. Of course, I have to be at work on Monday, so it'll be a quick trip for me, but Ryan and the kids will be travelling around for another day or two.

The Price of Accommodations

A small note here about the price of accommodation on these little jaunts of ours. Although there are many ways to save money on hotels etc.—discount Web sites, camping, hostels and friends—you can't always find these when you need them. Many people who travel in England book their trips well in advance, and so many of the best deals are no longer available by the time we know when and where we're travelling. Charm costs money here—if it's a lovely little B&B, it could cost much more than you'd think.

And don't forget that many hotels or B&B's charge 'Per person, per night' rather than by the room. It can cost a lot of money to stay in some places—for our trip to Bath for instance, we're choosing to stay at a hotel well away from Bath and saving a lot of money. There was a nice farm B&B in nearby Wiltshire that could take us, but my husband gagged at the price for all of us to stay (our family of four plus another room for my in-laws). The two rooms for two nights would have cost over \$1000 Canadian. Like I said, charm costs.

Make Mine a Double

Another little travel note—rooms may sound the same as in North America, but

they're not. Ask for a 'double' in North America and you get something with two double or larger beds. A double here gets you one bed with room enough for two people. To accommodate families like ours, we have to look for specific 'family' rooms, which allow two adults and two children—the kids usually get a sofa bed to sleep on rather than a real double bed. Often though, I'll be almost through the booking process before I'm told that there's a limit of three people in total for a room. The things you have to check if you're planning on travelling around!

About Travelling Solo

I'll also be going to London for our STC annual general meeting (AGM) in June and, this year, the family's staying at home. I don't know if I'll know what to do with myself, in a hotel without having to take care of any appendages. I'll probably just end up shushing the furniture to keep in practice. (By the way, that room will cost me £80 or so per night, but it is right beside the venue.)

I'm really hoping to make it to at least one gallery on the Sunday, to make my trip worthwhile. Art without kids in tow will truly be an experience.

About the AGM

Our AGM is a day long event, with some socializing in the evening. Most of the day will be seminars, with the actual business part of the AGM taking just a few minutes.

The AGM this year is at the British Library, so I'm probably going to tour the British National Library. As collectors go, this country has a huge reputation, and according to my sources, the British Library building is about the only thing that Thatcher did right. Although I question the preservation of a lot of the buildings in this place, I'll never question the preservation of books and other information artifacts. However, I know that the English bureaucracy has buried more information about stuff than the rest of the world combined, and to give access to it all would mean finding another planet to contain it. I just hope that I don't react to all that dust.

Our Next Council Year

It should be a big year ahead for our little chapter, as we're going to try to recharter this year. We're also hoping to increase our membership and create stronger ties to other associations. Plus, we'll attempt to get more events in and somehow publish our newsletter more regularly. It's going to be a fun ride!

Congratulations

I have to send my congratulations to the newsletter team— especially Debbie—for the great result in the competition. When Debbie asked me to write some articles about work and life in England, I knew that she was looking to expand the scope of the Quill. Aim high and keep to the path seems to be her motto. She brought the Quill forward in so many ways, and I'm really happy to have been able to contribute a little towards its success. You've raised the bar pretty high now Debbie...but I know there's always better stuff to come.

Have a great summer all. ♦

About Nancy Halverson

Nancy grew up in Toronto, but has lived in Ottawa, Melbourne, Waterloo, and now Sheffield. She has travelled through the South Pacific, Australia and Indonesia, which is where she met her husband, Ryan Wilson (another Canadian), along the way.

A career switch introduced her to the STC in 1997. Her writing experience has included several contract positions and a position at Inscribe for several years. She has two daughters and has been living in England for over two years.

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