



# the Quill

the Newsletter for the Southwestern Ontario Chapter STC



SEPTEMBER 2005 (Volume 17 Number 1) [About the Quill](#)

## In This Issue

### President's Message

Debbie Kerr is enthusiastic about her new role as Chapter President, and issues a challenge to all chapter members to try something new. You know you're a technical communicator when... ♦

### General Meeting Announcements

It's the start of the STC season, and we have a full plate again this year and lots of fun in store. Read about what we have planned for September and October... ♦

### Council Meeting Minutes

Speaking of the new year, the council is already busy planning for the year ahead. Read about what the council discussed at their meeting in August, and learn a few things you maybe didn't want to know. ♦

### Evolution of an Editor: From Quill to Quarry to Qantas

Patrick Hofmann, Quill editor from issues past and legendary local graphics guru, takes us through his evolution from editor to author and all the stops in between—what a ride! ♦

### Director Sponsor's Message: The Seasons and the STC are a Changin'

Cindy Currie, new Director Sponsor of Region 1, reflects on the recent changes to the STC executive, her immediate goals, and the focus areas for the STC board over the next year. Welcome Cindy! ♦

### Freelance 101: Chronicles for the Self-Employed

Need some tips on networking? Want the inside track on making yourself known and building a contracting business? Take it from Leanne, she knows... ♦

### Council Spotlight: Student Awards & Volunteer Coordinator

Interested in volunteering on the council? Don't know what's involved?

### **Message from the Editor**

Welcome to the new STC year, and my first issue as The Quill editor (gulp). I only hope I can measure up to the phenomenal job of those who came before me—Debbie, Andrea, Patrick, Lisa, phew...I'll try not to let you down. Really.

### **Best of Breed?**

Right out of the gate, let me be perfectly honest—you can't do any better than the STC Best of Show award. You just can't.

Instead, you can blaze your own trail and hope that the path is interesting and enlightening enough for others to follow. Along the way, my hope is to have fun, learn, and inspire you as writers and human beings.

My aspiration for this year is to bring my own perspective and style to The Quill. I know that makes those of you that know me very nervous, but I promise to keep the very pink sneakers (flyers!) in the closet—for now. However, the very yellow smiley shoelaces are coming out. You've been warned.

### **How many writers does it take to...**

But I can't do this without all of you—you (my contributors or yet-to-be contributors) provide the substance and voice for each issue, and I have the privilege of working that material into a newsletter that I sincerely hope you will get something out of each

This council spotlight focuses on Student Awards and Volunteering. ♦

## Membership Update

Leanne Rollins, Membership Manager, welcomes the new members to our chapter and shares her objectives for the year. ♦

## Information Architecture and Content Management

Ann Rockley provides a primer for understanding information architecture as it relates to content management (CM), including detailed descriptions of the building blocks required for success in CM. ♦

## View from the Other Side: What I Did on My Summer Holidays...

She's back...at least from her many travels over the summer and a break from hearing what is going on in England or at least the other side of the globe. ♦

## Launch of the STC Training Program

Choose from five different two-day courses in the kickoff session for a new STC Training Program in October—there's something for everyone! ♦

month...so please keep those ideas and articles coming.

Heard a good technical writer joke? Want to vent about Word? Have a success you want to share? Tried out some nifty new tool that made your job easier? Discovered a cool website that is a plethora of information? Don't like the word "plethora"? Think you can do better? Go ahead, email me (Margie) at [quill@stc-soc.org](mailto:quill@stc-soc.org). I look forward to hearing from you!



## **Term of the Month: Buzzword Salad**

**Definition:** Using a multitude of trendy terms or phrases to obscure meaning.

### **Examples:**

"I utilized a multitined tool to process a starch resource."\*

**Or** *I used my fork to eat a potato.*

"Existing is being unique. Existence, reality, essence, cause, or truth is uniqueness. The geometric point in the center of the sphere is nature's symbol of the immeasurable uniqueness within its measurable effect. A center is always unique; otherwise it would not be a center. Because uniqueness is reality, or that which makes a thing what it is, everything that is real is based on a centralization."\*

**Or** *I think, therefore I am.*

Order up!

\*Examples courtesy of "The Dilbert Principle" by Scott Adams and an unknown philosophy student.

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



## About The Quill

by [Margie Yundt](#), 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. In **2004**, we won Most Distinguished, Most Improved, and STC Best of Show.

### Publication Policies and Frequency

The Quill is published monthly, with the exception of January, so there are nine issues published from September 2005 to June 2006.

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 19
November	October 17
December	November 21
January	No Quill
February	January 23
March	February 20

April	March 20
May	April 17
June	May 22
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](mailto:quill@stc-soc.org) OR mail two paper copies to the mailing address below.

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## Chapter Officers

President: [Debbie Kerr](#)

Past President: [Opal Gamble](#)

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](http://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.

Web site: [www.stc.org](http://www.stc.org).

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

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## President's Message: September Marks the Start of Something New



by [Debbie Kerr](#), President

Some of us celebrate the coming of September because it means that our children return to school. Others celebrate the beginning of the new STC year. Still others, who don't have air conditioning, celebrate the fact that the end of the humidity may be in sight. Still others celebrate life, so September is as good a reason as any to get excited about something new.

Since this newsletter is about the STC, I won't bore you with the details about one of my children starting high school and my other one entering Grade 5. I also won't tell you that we don't have air conditioning, which is why I included a comment about the humidity. Instead, I will focus on what we have to celebrate as members of the STC.

### **The STC Year**

September marks the beginning of the new STC year. For those of you who have volunteered to be on the council, this means that many of you have already attended a planning session in August to establish goals on two levels for the 2005-2006 year: goals that are specific to our portfolios and goals that are for the common good of our chapter. The start of the STC year marks the start of building on your existing skills and developing new ones.

If you are not on this year's council, have no fear; you still have something to celebrate. You get to learn by making use of the various activities and opportunities that this chapter provides. You also have the opportunity to get to know other people who are in the same field. No matter whether you are just starting in the field, or you are a "seasoned" professional, everyone has something to give and get during the year.

### **Reasons to Try Something New**

As your new chapter president, I am trying something new. I have never been the president of anything, but I thought it was time to give it a try. Choosing to be president has nothing to do with enjoying the feel of being able to boss people around, although my children might tell you otherwise. I took on the position for many reasons, and one of them is to expand my comfort zone. It's fine doing only those activities that you feel comfortable doing, but it can be pretty boring and, with that boredom, you can start to lose the edge you need to stay

passionate about what you do. The other thing is that if you don't keep advancing your skills and your experiences then you can be left behind — both personally and professionally.

I also decided to try something new because I thought I had something to bring to the position. As someone who has been a technical communicator for over 20 years, I have had a variety of experiences that might prove useful to others who are just entering the field. I also enjoy finding new ways of doing things so that activities that have become routine can look fresh and new again. I am always open to suggestions, and I always welcome ideas and suggestions. Since we are taught to write in the active voice, as writers, we should be able to be active when it comes to recognizing good work and resolving any issues. Let people know when they have done something you like and, if you don't like something, you can comment on it, but make sure you are proactive and help come up with a solution.

For example, if have been thinking about submitting some documentation to our annual competition, why not help to find a Competition Manager, so that you can ensure that the competition can actually take place and you can see if you win an award?

## **Knowing the Thrill of Being a Technical Communicator**

Since some people have contacted me about becoming a technical communicator, I thought I would include this last section. For those who are not new to the profession, this list should make you smile. The items listed are in no particular order.

Although we are not rednecks, there are definite signs when you should be a technical communicator. For example, you might be a technical communicator if:

1. You just experienced a sudden thrill because you found a typo in the lead in to this sentence. If you find any other typos in this newsletter, remember Margie (the Quill editor) or I (copy editor) intentionally left them there to give you a new thrill and to keep your attention to detail sharp.
2. You find it annoying to write pages of documentation to fix a usability problem that could be resolved with a few code changes.
3. The thought of learning something new excites you, and the challenge of explaining it to someone else turns that excitement level up even more.
4. You can't understand why others don't see the problem with a process or a design. It's clear to you that there is an easier way to group fields, lay out

a screen, or name a field. Making your dream a developer's reality can be priceless.

5. The thought of shortening some text to make it more clear and concise is more exciting than writing something long and convoluted, even though the longer text may "sound" more impressive.
6. You can smile to yourself hours later because you found a typo or grammatical error in some published writing. It can be in a newspaper, a book, or a magazine. The source is not important; finding it is the thrill. I know this was covered in the first item, but since it is so near to my heart, I thought I would mention it again.
7. Your skin crawls when you hear or read the word utilize, because you can't believe that the utilization of the word is so rampant. You hope that your expertise in keeping things simple will some day eradicate the use of the word "utilize". You may not save lives, but you will still make a difference.
8. You can explain complex things like the internal workings of a PBX (Public Branch eXchange in the telecommunications world), but you struggle to make people at your work understand that your skills go well beyond writing.
9. Your heart rate increases as you create a table or diagram to explain something complex. Being a technical communicator is knowing that how you say it is just as important as what you say.
10. You recognize that vowels are the key to everything: **A**nalysis, **E**ducation – both yourself and others, **I**nterface – both with the product and with subject matter experts), **O**ptimism, and **U**sability. **Y** becomes a vowel when you say things like: "Why me?", "Why are these software changes happening now?", and "Why am I being asked to do this in such a short time?" The list goes on, but I don't want to continue and risk losing the optimism.

I am more than optimistic about the new STC year, especially if you find the courage to try something new. ♦

### ***About Debbie Kerr (President)***

*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 three years.*



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## General Meeting Announcements



### September 6 Going Head to Head with Communication



Do you interact with non-writers on a daily basis at work? Most of us do, and it can be frustrating getting non-writers to understand writing processes and requirements. Barry Clegg to the rescue! Barry will share his experience running a project for an IT department to promote the importance of communication and boost non-writers' writing skills. Learn how to manage the challenges of getting project approval, getting suitable content, and getting people to listen.

**Join us @ the University of Waterloo Davis Centre, Room DC 1304 7:00 PM (doors open at 6:30 PM)**

Barry Clegg is a senior member of the STC Toronto Chapter, a Professional Engineer with a BA from Cambridge and an MSc. in Solid Mechanics from Aston University (don't ask!). Barry spend 30 years in IT development and management and he now works as a freelance communicator. He as written articles (serious and less than serious) for in-house and external publication in user manuals, technical documentation, reports, newsletters, websites, conference papers, speeches, skits, poetry and a coffee-table book.

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### October 4 Card Sorting 101



No, this is not a seminar on antique computer building! Communicators often use card sorting to map out architecture and navigation models. This method of getting at mental models gives great bang for the buck – it's affordable and useful in everything from organizing a user guide to determining the information architecture and navigation for a web site or enterprise web application.

In this session, Sherry McMenemy will go through the basics of card sorting, including planning, conducting sessions, analysis,

implementation, and follow-up. She'll also share some tips and tricks to add some "finesse" to the process.

**Join us @ the University of Waterloo Davis Centre, Room DC  
1304 7:00 PM (doors open at 6:30 PM)**

Sherry McMenemy is a senior STC member with experience in technical communication, information management and, user interaction design. She uses card sorting at work, where she manages an IT Knowledge Operations team, and is a consultant to local companies. ♦

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# The Trials and Tribulations of an STC Council



by [emily layng](#), Recorder

We're Ba-a-a-a-a-ak! Did you miss us?

had our first Council meeting of the year in the community room in the new Zehrs in Guelph. The room was really nice; it has a full kitchen, and lots of room to spread out. They supply the food and everything, so it looks like, depending on availability, that's where you'll find us on the third Tuesday of every month.

The first order of business was introducing ourselves and giving out one piece of information about ourselves that no one else knows.

Did you know that...

- Debbie is from Walkerton
- Peter is from Toronto
- Margie has two psycho cats
- Kim has a lovebird that does yoga

And that...

- Heidi has lived in three continents
- Leanne has had spaghetti come out her nose (is there no end to her talents?)
- emily (that's me) hitchhiked across South America
- Opal is a 5'2" walking anomaly (and has no desire to meet an Australian shoe spider)
- Donald has a teenager who knows everything and a puppy who knows nothing.

Sorry, we couldn't get anything out of Lori except that she read a newspaper article that says 4% of men are raising someone else's children and don't know it. Huh?

After that, we discussed our goals for the year, at the Chapter level and at the Portfolio level.

**At the Chapter level:**

We really want to increase awareness of the STC in the community, improve communication both inside and outside our chapter, and hopefully break even. Pretty down to earth goals. We discussed the possibilities of a few contests, fund-raising events, promotional giveaways, among other things.

### **At the Portfolio level:**

The council members spoke about the goals they had set for their particular portfolio. Everyone is pretty enthusiastic about increasing membership, getting more people out to the meetings, providing new functionality on our website, getting really cool speakers...whew, it's going to be a busy year...

So don't be shy and come on out, the pizza's great. ♦

### **emily layng (Secretary/Recorder)**

*Emily is currently working at ATS, in Cambridge, and has recently been promoted to Team Leader of Systems 1. As part of a busy group, long days and short weekends are the norm. She has been a technical writer since 1996, and has created documentation for both hardware and software companies. Outside of ATS, she is involved with a local Astrology group that is putting together correspondence courses for learning Astrology.*



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# Evolution of an Editor: From Quill to Quarry to Qantas



by [Patrick Hofmann](#)

My inaugural Quill submission for this year wouldn't be appropriate without first congratulating Debbie Kerr for her great work last year, and Margie Yundt for taking on the job with such enthusiasm this year. It's already been a decade since Lisa Bater and I first held the reins of Newsletter Editor, and it's utterly remarkable how the world has evolved since—in terms of our roles as technical communicators and our adoption of new technologies, let alone the fantastic transformation of The Quill itself.

## My History with The Quill

If I remember correctly, Lisa and I began our Quill editorship without email or internet access at home, without mobile telephones, and, egads, without a printer. Gone are the days of retyping hardcopy submissions into Aldus PageMaker, of printing our hardcopy proofs at Kinko's at 3:30 am, and of waiting for three days for our freshly published copies at M&T Instaprint. Not only has The Quill evolved to become an online newsletter, it has blossomed into a far more comprehensive and interactive source of information for our chapter.

## My Career Path

It's marvelously coincidental then, that the transformation of The Quill seems to parallel that of my career. At the same time as starting as Quill co-editor, I was hired as a technical illustrator at Quintext Information Engineering—now the Interaction Design team at Quarry Integrated Communications. As technology expanded and our customers' needs grew, my role as technical illustrator of hardcopy documentation evolved into that of interaction designer and usability consultant—of digital information. What a blessing that was! Instead of having to compensate for a product's design weaknesses in my technical documentation (usually by adding more complexity and content to the docs), I became more actively involved in building userfriendliness, instinctiveness, or inherent instruction into the product itself—making the instructions way easier to document, if they were even needed.

## My Addiction to Visual Design

It has been a busy but glorious journey ever since. My addiction to visual language and usability has granted me many opportunities both here and

overseas. Last November, I was invited by a university in Christchurch, New Zealand to develop a post-graduate Information Design curriculum for one of their online diplomas. I must confess, I was initially overwhelmed. How do I take the basic principles of my seven-hour visualization workshops and stretch it across a 16-week course curriculum?

## **My Epiphany, My Goal**

What resulted was an epiphany: an opportunity to take ample time to provide an exhaustive 'brain-dump' of everything trapped inside my head. From this activity, I experienced what was perhaps the greatest creative spurt of my life. It made me realize that transcribing my thoughts, experiences, and opinions was similar to starting a documentation project from scratch—identifying audiences, outlining objectives, developing structures, grouping areas, organizing information, and so on.

This activity also resurfaced an unfulfilled goal of mine: to write a book about 'writing without words'. It's something I began outlining in the UK back in 2000, yet I never had the time or focus to complete it since then.

## **My Journey to the Land Down Under**

So, five years later, I decided to sit down with my bosses and my peers at Quarry, and share with them my new objectives. In April, after nearly a full decade at Quarry, I asked them if I could embark on a new career path, continue the creative spurt I enjoyed in New Zealand, finish my book (now numbering three, it seems), and keep up-to-snuff by consulting independently. They were 110% supportive, and I'm now actively on my way to achieve these goals.

Over the next seven months, I'll be New Zealand and Australia, continuing my work in Christchurch and setting up in Sydney as my base for some R&R = research and (w)riting. I'll try to keep in touch during this time, and keep you informed of how my book is growing and how my life is evolving. Here's to growth and evolution, and to a happy year for both our chapter and The Quill! ♦

### **About Patrick Hofmann**

*Though evidently a speaker who can never stop, Patrick's reputed to be a "man of few words" as he teaches the virtues of visual language and graphic instruction to technical communicators around the world. While he continues his solo consulting, book writing, and other global exploits, he's eager to receive your favourite visual guffaws: [phofmann@n0rmal.com](mailto:phofmann@n0rmal.com).*



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## Director Sponsor's Message: The Seasons and the STC are a Changin'



by [Cindy Currie](#), STC Region 1 Director Sponsor

When I decided to run for Region 1 Director, I took the slogan the times; they are a changin' thinking mostly at that time about the Transformation and STC's new operating model. But, boy, the times are a changin' even more than I was thinking! And, here in southern New Hampshire, my home for the past 17 years, the first telltale signs that autumn is on the way are already evident—that initial blush of fall colour is just starting to paint the leaves on the trees in my yard. Thus, change is on my mind, the kind that bursts into glorious fall colour! And, yes, I'm referring to the STC here as well as autumn.

### The Search for an ED

By now, most of you are aware that Peter Herbst, STC's Executive Director (ED), tendered his resignation in early July. Pete will continue to serve as ED—a position he has held since Bill Stolgitis' retirement in 2003—until early October of this year. Pete served the STC as its Deputy Executive Director for many years prior to serving as ED. We truly wish Pete all the best in whatever the future may bring him.

The Board now has the opportunity to hire a new Executive Director. This is very exciting and challenging! Current STC President, Suzanna Laurent, has organized an ED Search Committee, chaired by past STC President Annette Reilly, which has been hard at work for several months now mobilizing for the search and determining the hiring criteria. An interim ED may be needed until a permanent ED is found, so there is also a committee, chaired by past STC President Thea Teich, which is working on this possibility. Look for Suzanna to distribute more information and announcements as these committees continue their work.

### Recharter anyone?

Rechartering, if not a *fait accompli* for your chapter, should be a goal for this upcoming year. There are a number of chapters in the region that have rechartered already, so there are experienced boards and councils and lessons learned to be shared with those of you who have not rechartered yet. If you would like assistance (even a sanity check to be sure you're on the right track!), please be in touch with me by sending email to [dir1@stc.org](mailto:dir1@stc.org). The STC Rechartering Committee would like to see more communities recharter this year and I'd like to see great representation from Region 1 in this important STC

activity.

## **Board Changes and Meetings**

The next STC Board of Director's meeting will be held September 21-25 in Denver. Yes, the Board meets face-to-face three times as year: May (always in conjunction with the Annual Conference), September, and January. The minutes of this meeting as well as those of the January 2005 and May 2005 Board meetings are available online at <http://www.stc.org/chapterResources.asp> and all future Board meeting minutes will be posted as well. I encourage you all to read them as the reports are full of details that both members and leaders seem to be looking for frequently.

There have been a number of changes to the Board of Directors since early summer. These include:

- The resignation of Mike Bates as First VP. Mike is replaced by Paula Berger, who was Second VP, so she moves up a link in the presidential chain
- The appointment of Linda Oestreich as Second VP (Linda was already on the Board as AP for Competitions)
- The appointment of Lory Hawkes as AP for Communication
- The appointment of Rich Maggiani (Vermont Chapter, go Region 1!) as AP for Competitions

See [http://www.stc.org/PDF\\_Files/OrgChart.pdf](http://www.stc.org/PDF_Files/OrgChart.pdf) for an updated org chart of the 2005-2006 STC Board of Directors.

## **My Goals**

Lastly, one of my goals for this STC year is to revitalize the Region 1 website, which you can visit at <http://www.stcregion.org/region1>. I will be using this site as a hub for my communications to Region 1 communities and will posted items, such as a monthly message to you all, on this site. I will also distribute my article directly to newsletter editors and webmasters; however I encourage you all to look into RSS feeds so that you can receive updates from both the STC website and the Region 1 website automatically. I am slowly but surely making decisions about the type of information I'd like to see this site contain and I'm openly asking for your ideas as well. The webmaster, Rich Feitelberg, has been just great in helping me get started and he's quick to implement all that I've given him thus far, so we need design ideas and content suggestions. Thanks!

## Board Objectives

Some of the focus areas for the 2005-2006 Board include:

1. Retaining and increasing membership by ensuring that all current and potential members are fully aware of the value that STC brings to its members. The STC has so much to offer its members now. (Did you know that STC has just launched a new training program? Go to <http://www.stc.org/training/> for details.)

And, the Board is very actively working on ways to provide even greater value to the membership. I will share these new ideas and plans just as soon as they are evolved enough to be shared.

I can help you now if you'd like to discuss strategies for membership retention and growth. The fall is often a time of membership drives, so if you are planning such an activity, please let me know. It might good to have a forum in which many STC communities can share their strategies, plans, and learnings and help support each other's potential for success.

2. Improving communication throughout STC, from the Board to the members, from the members to the Board, among committees, and among all communities (chapters and SIGs). To this end, President Laurent has appointed an Assistant to the President for Communication. The AP for Communication will create strategies and plans for ensuring that goals around improved communication can be met, and will lead the Board in the preparation of communications about Board activities and committee work, among other things.
3. Making the STC a truly global organization. To this end, President Laurent has appointed an Assistant to the President for Global Interests. The AP for Global Interests will focus on ensuring that global perspectives on many topics are known and fully considered by the Board before actions are taken, and providing input to global strategic growth goals, strategies, and plans. As part of the Strategic Growth team, the AP for Global Interests will focus on developing partnerships and alliances worldwide. The aim is to reach out to other technical communication organizations whose offerings complement those of STC, as well as to develop STC's relationships with other organizations where technical communication is part or all of their activities. Working with the AP for Conferences, the AP for Global Interests will start to develop the plans for non-North American based conferences.

Your ideas and suggestions on any of the above are most welcome. I am usually available by email or telephone and am happy to discuss any of your STC issues

or concerns (or hear all about your successes—I know that these stories are out there too!), so please be in touch by emailing me at [dir1@stc.org](mailto:dir1@stc.org) or calling (603) 884-1249. ♦

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# Freelance 101: Chronicles for the Self-Employed



by [Leanne Rollins](#), Membership Manager

## Networking is the key to freelancing

Up until a few months ago, I held a very traditional view of networking. To envision how I viewed networking, think of a room full of potential job seekers, who are striking up stilted conversations with anyone in earshot hoping to reach that one person who might put them in touch with an opportunity. It's enough to make me shudder.

The bad news is that this form of networking actually takes place. Worse still, there are many people out there who seem to feel that this is the best way to seek out work. But I have realized that networking takes many forms, most of which are more natural and more successful than the scene described above.

## Creating your circle of friends

You know those ugly little stone 'circle of friends' thingamajigs that were in vogue a decade ago? I think of that little circle when I think of my own network. A network is simply a broad range of people, placed in a metaphorical ring all around one person. What makes your own circle significant is that these people in your network know **you**, and more importantly, they know **what you do**.

When you are looking for a full-time job, your circle is important and can land you that one great opportunity at the perfect time. When you freelance, your circle is CRUCIAL and you can NEVER stop building and refreshing your network.

## Building your network

So how do you build a network? Everyone networks differently, but here are a few of my methods:

1. Make a list of past co-workers that would recommend your work, and then try to find those co-workers today.

If you haven't tried Linked In, you should: (<https://www.linkedin.com>)

This web-based tool can help you track down past friends and peers on an international scale. Okay, so I first used this site to locate an ex-boyfriend, but I quickly realized that the site is also an invaluable business tool. Not only can you search by name, but you can also search by employer. Most people have listed all previous employers, as well as their current one, so

it's easy to track people down if they're in the database. Once you find those co-workers, make every effort to initiate a lunch or a coffee, and then stay in touch. You never know when one of your former associates will turn out to be VP of some startup who needs a writer.

2. Keep in touch with every manager you have ever reported to, whether you liked them or not.

True story—I recently landed a contract with an ex-manager whom I didn't particularly get along with as a full-time employee. However, since we both left the company, I made an effort to stay in touch and we have lunch together every couple of months. It turns out he is great at managing contractors and is now much more reasonable about dates and deadlines!

3. Tell everyone you meet what you do, and be specific.

An acquaintance just bought a restaurant in town (Okay, it's my cleaning lady). She's been cleaning our house for five years, and she's taken an interest in what I do since I started freelancing. She called me this week to ask if I could take on the job of wording her menu selections and designing the look and feel of her marketing collateral for the restaurant kickoff. Remember that commercial for a shampoo product in the 80's that went 'and she told two friends, and so on, and so on'? Oddly, it's true—keep the explanation of what you do very simple and people **will** remember you when the time comes. Someone they know will mention a related task or a need, and suddenly your name will pop up.

4. Share clients with a real estate agent.

Okay, this sounds a little odd, but think about it. Real estate agents, good ones that is, know EVERYONE. They have the most diverse client range, and they are constantly meeting new people, chatting them up, and solving their problems (not just related to housing either). Make sure your agent friend is well aware of your niche, and whenever a conversation involves technology or the like, your agent friend can possibly slide you into the conversation. The best part is that you can reciprocate this service for your agent. You likely know a number of people who plan to move in the future and who will need a good agent.

5. Be a joiner.

This one is hard for me—I am absolutely not a joiner under any normal circumstance. However, in the interest of networking (and paying the bills), I bite the bullet and I actually show up in person for some things.

Fortunately STC meetings are painless, and I learn a lot to boot. But, don't just attend the meeting. Show up early, introduce yourself to others (yes, even those you don't know), and stay afterward to chat because council members are always the last stragglers and you know they have pretty good contacts. If you find me at a meeting (good luck, I'm so short I get easily lost in the group), I'll introduce you to everybody and we can be joiners together. Remember to bring your business cards!

## **Refreshing your network**

Once you've connected with people, don't let them forget you. You don't need to pester; just send a gentle follow-up email, or even a snail-mail letter to thank contacts for their time (who doesn't love getting letters?). I prefer the high-tech method of communicating, so I tend to rely on email follow-up and avoid the telephone whenever possible. I figure a follow-up email is non-threatening, and the person can read it on their own terms, which makes it seem less intrusive. Even if you've lost touch with people over the years, it's never too late to reconnect. Natural curiosity will get a reply to most "Hi, how you have you been, want to have lunch" emails. Offer to pay for the lunch, and you'll have an instant networking lunch date (and a tax write-off). I have lost count of the number of lunches that I've eaten since January that were mainly for the purpose of reconnecting. I average two lunch dates per week, although I have to reschedule often due to client demands.

My best advice is to think of your network as a reciprocal arrangement. You do for me; I do for you. There are lots of ways to do this, but a few simple ways I use are:

- Offering to provide a reference for those that I've worked with and feel confident about endorsing
- Forwarding jobs (especially unposted jobs) for full-time roles to contacts who might be considering a leap
- Sharing information about methods, templates, or particular resources that help me find contacts and clients

In my opinion, a broad network is key to successful freelancing. It's definitely been an overwhelming factor in my early success—to date, all contracts I've landed (except one) can be directly attributed to individuals within my circle of friends. How cool is that?

*I'd love some input about what you'd like to see here next month. How to estimate projects? How to handle tough clients? How to make sure you get paid?*

Email me at [leanne@leannerollins.com](mailto:leanne@leannerollins.com) and let me know of any special topics you'd like me to write about. ♦



### **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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## Council Spotlight: Student Awards & Volunteer Coordinator



*My name is Heidi Marr, and I am our chapter's new **Student Awards Manager**. For several years, I have been a judge of the Heidi Thiessen Memorial Award submissions and, because I know the quality of those submissions, I am even more excited about my new role.*

### About the Awards

The *Heidi Thiessen Memorial Award* recognizes outstanding technical writing by full-time students who are in their 3rd or 4th year of study at the University of Waterloo, the University of Guelph, or Wilfrid Laurier University. With a history of winners from both the arts and sciences, this award honours strong academic performance, and the integration of effective communication and a technical aptitude.

The *Fanshawe College Technical Writing Award* recognizes the top academic performer in the Fanshawe College Technical Writing Certificate program.

### The Timing of the Awards

In the past, the competition has received entries from exemplary young writers, which is why I am keen to read their work in the fall and meet the talented winners when I present the awards at the March Wine and Cheese. Two months later, I have the pleasure of giving out the *Fanshawe College Technical Writing Award* at our chapter's June general meeting.

### Want to help Judge or Submit an Entry?

Watch our chapter's website ([www.stc-soc.org](http://www.stc-soc.org)) and future issues of The Quill for more details about judging opportunities and competing for the *Heidi Thiessen Memorial Award*. You can also email me at [awards@stc-soc.org](mailto:awards@stc-soc.org).



*My name is Fei Min, and I am back again as the **Volunteer Coordinator** because I have unfinished business. One of my mandates is to help volunteer organizations with their technical communication needs by finding them volunteers from our chapter.*

## Postings for Volunteers

In June, we implemented a system to allow volunteer organizations to post positions on our website, so I drafted a letter to send to organizations to let them know about this avenue to our skills, and let them know what we can do for them. I sent the letter to a few organizations, but no response. I have to research and find more organizations in our area to contact, and follow up on the ones I sent to make sure the word gets out, and then you can check the job bank for possible volunteer positions. I'll keep you posted on our progress.

## Want to Volunteer?

To get involved in STC chapter activities, email me at [volunteering@stc-soc.org](mailto:volunteering@stc-soc.org) and I'll try to match up your time and interests with work that we have to do. 🍀

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## Membership News



by [Leanne Rollins](#), Membership Manager

You know that television commercial where the woman sees a red leaf drop to the ground and screams in horror? That happened to me while I was running this week. Really. I was jolted into realizing that fall is coming quickly and therefore our new STC season is also fast approaching. I hiked it home and made a stab at getting a handle on the membership portfolio that same day.

Although the council was on hiatus (and clearly, so was I) over the summer months, our chapter still managed to grow. Over the past three months we've enriched our chapter with 10 new members. We look forward to welcoming these new members to our chapter at an upcoming STC SOC chapter meeting:

- Graham Jones
- Stephanie Knoke
- Susan Meldazy
- Jane Taylor
- Rod Currie
- Tim Bishop
- Karin Ikavalko
- Angela Roorda
- Janet Erickson
- Manpreet Sagoo

I hope to meet these new members and learn a little bit more about them in the next few months. That's just one of my goals for the membership portfolio. Here are a few others:

- Increase meeting attendance by 15% by Christmas. I hope to accomplish this goal by making sure my friendly face is at every meeting ready to put people at ease. I also plan to wage a telephone campaign to nag everyone to come out to a meeting.
- Increase chapter membership by 5% this year. Since we're sitting at 151 members today, that means ensuring an additional 8 people join throughout the year.
- Personally seek out feedback about how to improve our chapter. If I ask you what you expect from our chapter—answer me truthfully! I'll be

providing this feedback to the council each month, with the hopes of guiding our meeting topics, our culture, and our offerings to meet real needs of today's technical communicators.

It's going to be a good year—I can feel it! See you at the next chapter meeting. ♦

### **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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# Information Architecture of Content Management



by [Ann Rockley](#), The Rockley Group

*This article originally appeared in the subscription-only publication, The Rockley Report and is reprinted here with permission. Learn more about the Rockley Report here: <http://www.rockley.com/TheRockleyReport/>*

When people think about content management, they generally think about it from a systems perspective, focusing primarily on tools and technology. While it is true that content management usually requires a technological solution, it also requires that content be designed for reuse, retrieval, and delivery to meet your authors' and customers' needs. Content management requires that tools be configured to support authoring, reviewing, and publishing tasks, but first, those tasks must be designed. Designing content and the processes to create, review, and publish it is what information architecture is all about.

This article is meant to serve as a primer for those interested in understanding information architecture as it relates to content management. Whether you use Adobe FrameMaker or some other authoring tool, developing insight into information architecture will help you improve your chances for content management success.

Information architecture has become synonymous with information architecture for the web. However, as more organizations are adopting content management systems to manage both web and enterprise content, there is a new area of information architecture emerging—the information architecture of content management. One of the key factors for a successful content management implementation is a solid information architecture. Too often organizations implement content management without identifying the authors' needs, without looking closely at the content to determine how it could be most effectively structured to support user/customer needs, and without analyzing their current and desired content life cycle. This results in resistance to adoption, increased costs, and failure to achieve the desired results. Information architecture can make a significant contribution to the success of your content management solution.

This is a view supported by Lou Rosenfeld, ([www.louisrosenfeld.com](http://www.louisrosenfeld.com)), an information architecture consultant and co-author of *Information Architecture for the World Wide Web: Designing Large-Scale Web Sites* [1]. Rosenfeld has been instrumental in establishing the industry of information architecture for the web and points out:

When it comes to making content accessible, content management and information architecture are two sides of the same coin. Authors and end users alike, benefit from intelligent design and well-organized processes. [2]

People like Lou Rosenfeld, Peter Morville, Christina Wodtke and others in the information architecture and information design industry have laid the groundwork for a move to information architecture for content management beyond the web.

## **The Components of Information Architecture**

There are a number of components of information architecture that are key in building a solid base for a content management implementation. They include analysis, content models, granularity, metadata, reuse and repository architectures, reuse management, and content management.

### **Analysis**

Good information architecture requires that you start with a thorough analysis of your organizational needs, your current and desired content life cycle, your customers' needs, the state of your current content, and your technological requirements. During the analysis phase, you need to look at your content very closely to determine how it's put together and the types of content it contains. This will help you to determine opportunities for reuse. You also need to talk to the people who create and use the content to learn what their issues are. This will help you to determine problem areas in work processes that can be addressed in workflow.

### **Content models**

One of the most critical phases of your information architecture is building the content models on which your content management strategy is based. Content modeling involves identifying and documenting the structure of your content in detail. During the content modeling phase, you determine the elements required for each information product (or output) and how each information product will be designed for optimum usability and reuse. Content models define the structure and organization of your information products, indicating which individual elements they contain, their frequency, and their usage (e.g., is an element optional or mandatory). Models become the road map for your content and are used to develop DTDs/schemas (if you are using XML), or content frameworks and templates.

### **Granularity of content**

Designing the granularity of your content can sometimes be problematic. Authors

typically like content very granular so they know exactly what to put into an element (e.g., overview, procedure step). Very granular content usually results from more semantic models (models with tags that indicate the meaning of the element such as "overview" instead of tags with generic names such as "body" or "para"). Highly semantic models are more problematic for style sheet designers because all unique elements require an individual style. Because semantic names by their nature are unique, all semantically-named elements require their own styles.

Granularity also affects how you reuse content. Content that is too granular can be difficult to manage in your content management system, but content that is not granular enough may not be as reusable. Accordingly, CMS developers may push back on the level of granularity, opting for content that is not granular. Analysis of reusability, authoring processes, and tools is important when determining granularity and as you develop your information architecture, you will make changes to your granularity as you determine the optimum level of granularity for everyone.

### **Metadata**

There are typically two types of metadata: categorization metadata and element metadata. Users tend to retrieve information based on categorization metadata, whereas authors tend to retrieve information based on element metadata. Categorization metadata is used extensively on web sites to categorize content for effective retrieval. It is also used extensively in document management to classify documents for storage. Authors, on the other hand, use element metadata to classify elements of content for reuse, retrieval, and tracking. Care should be taken to ensure that you can retrieve your elements once stored. Your ability to reuse information is only as good as your ability to find it. And if you employ systematic reuse (see Reuse architecture) your metadata must be very thorough so that the system can correctly find and populate the content into the required information products and into the required places within information products. Like granularity, metadata design also continues to develop as you refine your architecture.

### **Reuse architecture**

Content can be reused within an information product, across information products, and potentially across the enterprise. Traditionally, the most common form of reuse has been opportunistic, meaning that authors make a decision whether to reuse content or not. However, opportunistic reuse is also the least efficient because it requires that authors know a reusable element exists and what it is called, then find the element and reuse it in their information product.

In addition, if authors are not aware that an element already exists, they may recreate it causing multiple elements to proliferate in your content management system. This also makes it difficult to know which of the multiple elements is the definitive one.

Alternatively, systematic reuse is automatic reuse. Once specific content has been identified as reusable in a specific location, it is automatically inserted (auto-populated) into the appropriate locations. Authors do not have to determine if the reusable content exists or search for, retrieve it, and insert it into the appropriate places. Systematic reuse ensures that content is automatically reused where necessary, thus reducing the burden on authors. When designing your reuse architecture, considerable analysis of information products is required to decide which elements are systematically reusable and where.

Once you've decided which elements are systematically reusable, you create content and structure reuse maps as part of your reuse architecture. The content reuse maps identify where content can and should be reused and if it should be reused identically or can be used derivatively (with change). Content reuse maps are used by your content management system to programmatically (automatically) ensure that content is reused. In addition to identifying content reuse, you need to identify structural reuse as part of your reuse architecture. Structural reuse identifies where common structures are reused. For example, you might have a product description element in a brochure, but you would also have a product description element on the web. Even though those product description elements may be structurally the same, they may contain different content. Structure reuse maps are used by DTD/template developers in creating consistent structures for authors to follow.

### **Repository architecture**

The repository architecture defines how you will structure your repository. For example you may have "building block" directories that include content that is frequently reused (e.g., glossary, procedures, product descriptions) and the remainder of your content stored in information product directories (e.g., all brochures) that are further organized by product. Or you may decide to organize your content by product with each of the information products as a subset of the product. You need to determine what is the most effective repository structure for your needs. Note, however, that the identified structure is not a physical file structure. Content is stored in the database, not in directories. The repository structure enables your authors to easily find information.

### **Reuse management**

An area of information architecture that is frequently overlooked is that of reuse

management. If authors opportunistically reuse content and create derivatives of the content, it quickly becomes difficult to identify which element is the definitive one. Your content management system will end up looking like your current file structure and you will have no clear idea of what is source content, where content is reused, and if there are multiple versions of the same piece of content. Reuse management means creating rules to manage your reusable content. The reuse rules are formalized in your content management system through workflow and in your system configuration.

### **Content control**

Content control, as part of your information architecture, identifies how your content should be managed. You need to determine how content should be controlled through its life cycle and what security should be applied to it. Content control is tightly integrated with your reuse management strategy and business practices and like reuse management, it is formalized in workflow.

### **Summary**

Bob Boiko ([www.metatorial.com](http://www.metatorial.com)), Director of the University of Washington's iSchool Content management system evaluation lab, content management expert, and best-selling author of Content Management Bible on content management [3], sums up the discussion of information architecture and content management very well:

“Content management is the dynamic organization of information architecture, business management, software and network engineering, content creation, and publications development. If you don't master each of these areas, CM will fail.

If you don't get them to integrate, CM will fail. Information architecture is the structuring of information for effective management and presentation. While the discipline has focused more to date on the presentation side of structure, it is now turning solidly toward management. As it does, the tight connection between content management and information architecture is becoming crystal clear. Information architects, like the building architects before them, create structures. They lay the foundations under and the frames around information. Content managers gather and dynamically deliver masses of information. Without a solid information structure at the core, a CMS effort can't get off the ground. At best, it will be hugely inefficient and at worst it will crumble under its own weight. Information architects have the skills to structure a content domain so that information can flow in a reasoned and efficient way. It flows in according to well understood rules of relevance, segmentation and tagging, and it flows out according to well understood rules of audience interest and use. So, CM needs


IA. But IA needs CM as well. CM provides a wider context for IA. It makes IA not just about the best page, or even the best site, but rather about the best system behind all the pages, sites and myriad other outlets for information. CM centralizes IA in the organization. It 'upstreams' IA toward the center of the organizational information systems infrastructure. It integrates IA with business management, software and network engineering, content creation, and its old friend publications development toward a new concept of what it means to be an organization in the information age." [4]

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### **About Ann Rockley**



*Ann Rockley is President of The Rockley Group, Inc, a consultancy that has an international reputation for developing content management strategies with a focus on unified content, and information architecture for content management. Rockley is a frequent contributor to trade and industry publications and a featured speaker at numerous conferences in North America and Europe. She has been instrumental in establishing the field in online documentation, single sourcing (content reuse), enterprise content management, and information architecture for content management. Rockley is President of Content Management Professionals, a member organization that fosters the sharing of content management information, practices, and strategies. Rockley is a Fellow of the Society for Technical Communication and has a Master of Information Science. Rockley is the author of the best-selling book "Managing Enterprise Content: A Unified Content Strategy" with TRG Senior Consultants Pamela Kostur and Steve Manning, New Riders Publishing ISBN 0-7357-1306-5.*

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# View from the Other Side: What I Did on My Summer Holidays...



by [Nancy Halverson](#), Feature Writer

It's been a busy summer.

If you have kids, you know that summer doesn't actually start until they're out of school. Here, of course, that's not until the third week of July, but that doesn't mean we waited until then to start our summer vacation.

## France for the weekend

We left on a Friday, in mid-July, to drive to France—just for the weekend. We had to drive through most of England down to Dover—it took just over four hours. I took that portion of the drive. Luck was with us, as it was a lovely clear and warm day. Time and weather were both important factors—we had a seven hour drive ahead of us in France.

Ryan got to do the driving in France—I wasn't comfortable driving on the 'normal' side of the road in a car driven from the right-hand side. There are too many crossed synapses for me to handle. We had to drive to meet our daughter's exchange family in a suburb of Nantes.

## Bilingual by March

Maddie, my 10 year-old, is going to live with this other family from October to March, and then we host the francophone girl from the French family. Yes, it's a long French exchange, but it's the quickest way to get her bilingual. Plus, it's a great chance to get friends in France—always an advantage! We really enjoyed our weekend in Nantes—sunny and very hot, with fantastic food and great company. Of course, there was a bit of a language barrier—it wasn't as difficult as you'd think, dragging out our French and making ourselves understood. Luckily, our exchange family doesn't speak much English, so Maddie is going to get a real immersion.

## Special exchange program

This isn't the normal sort of exchange for people in England either—it was arranged by a group of families who decided it was a good way to teach children second languages. Since children acquire languages easily, we're hopeful that we'll get both our girls through these fantastic experiences with a real understanding of French language and culture. Since we can't get them a

bilingual education in Canada, this is our best option.

### **Summer vacation: a week in Italy**

After the kids were finished school for the year, we finally got our chance for some real summer. Naturally, we needed to go out of England to find it. We went to Italy for a visit with a fellow-Canadian and his Italian partner. It was hot and sunny and wonderful. Throw in some great food and a bit of historical touring, not to mention a chance to ride bikes around the monuments of Rome. Too bad it was only a week! (Both my kids want to go back to spend a year in Italy learning Italian now... they've caught the bug I think—so have we!!)

### **Summer vacation: two weeks in Spain**

After Italy, we went to Spain—the Costa Blanca, which is near Valencia. It's a part of Spain that's got lots of tourism, but as usual, we had another agenda. We have friends who live there, so it was another opportunity to visit friends and get some sun. It's scenery presented red dry dirt, scrubby bushes on minor mountains, and tons of blue sky and azure seas. It was heaven to the rain-soaked people of the British Isles. It was such a great feeling to arrive in our villa and know that we had two weeks to live there and experience sun, sand, water, and (again) wonderful food. Nice.

### **Reality, and the STC**

Okay, so now I'm back in the land of the working. Work, deadlines, school starting again for the kids, and STC. I spent this weekend at a hotel in the middle of highway service centre (yes, it's true!) planning our STC activities for the coming year. It's a little bit more planning than we usually do to tell you the truth, and it was a difficult exercise to get through all of our tasks in the allotted time (we had to put aside many discussions to another forum), but we came away with definite goals and strategies. We're hoping to put more events together for our members, and increase the depth of our management team. Ambitious, insane, and just a little bit possible—if everyone makes the effort that they've committed to this weekend.

Because we can't get together very often, our executive council needed a central venue that we could all reach within a few hours—we also needed a concentrated period of time so that we could get through a backlog of issues that had simply not been addressed in any of the previous councils. It was a time of growing up for our chapter in many ways. The STC UK has bumped and bumbled along for a few years now, getting people out to a few events each year. Well, now it's

getting a bit serious.

Plans, budget, succession, leadership, re-designed website and newsletter, and many more opportunities to meet with our members are all areas that need to be addressed. It's going to be a very interesting year of course, and I may be a bit busy to write much, but I'll continue to write a few words each month.

## **Canada, eh?**

I've actually got another trip in the works—we're flying back to Canada to attend my mother's wedding. I'm really happy to be making the trip, even though we'll have to take the kids out of school for a week. We're also going to spend a few days in Waterloo, visiting old friends.

Unfortunately I won't be there for a chapter meeting, but I'll think of you as I walk by the university. You've got to admit that you've got an easy STC life—a predictable venue, lots of members within an easy drive, a chance to meet in person more than a few times a year. I know envy isn't pretty, but you've got to appreciate the compliment that I'm trying to pay—you've got a well run group there, with lots of participation and a great deal of experience. Don't let yourselves get complacent, but make sure that you take full advantage of all your local chapter opportunities.

## **Gas prices**

Oh, and if you're interested, gas prices are now breaking the pound per litre mark here—North America is by no means the only place suffering from the effects of higher gas prices resulting from the wide-spread damage caused by the current hurricane season. Let's see, that works out to roughly \$2.20 Canadian per litre. I hope you're not quite there yet, since I'll be driving between Toronto, Peterborough county, and Waterloo again in a few weeks time.

Thanks for reading, and congratulations to the newsletter team on their win. Well done. ♦

## **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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## STC Training Program - October 20-21, 2005



Imagine a two-day course covering the things you need to advance your career in technical communication—an in-depth, focused course taught by some of the most respected names in the field.

Now imagine that you have a choice of five such courses, each covering a different subject within technical communication. That's the STC Training Program—a new learning venue designed for today's professionals and scheduled for October 20-21.

The five two-day courses, described in detail at [www.stc.org/training](http://www.stc.org/training), cover the following subjects:

- **The Architecture of Content.** Instructor: Jonathan Price, STC Fellow
- **Creating and Using Personas to Improve Usability.** Instructor: Whitney Quesenbery, STC Associate Fellow
- **Focusing on Content: Making Web Sites Work for Users.** Instructors: Janice (Ginny) Redish, STC Fellow, and Caroline Jarrett
- **Leadership in Information Management: Developing the Business Framework and Implementation Roadmap for Single Sourcing, Content Management, and Knowledge Management.** Instructor: Benhong Rosaline (Roz) Tsai, STC Associate Fellow
- **XML: From Hand-Coding to WYSIWYG Authoring.** Instructor: Neil Perlin, STC Associate Fellow

The STC Training Program will take place at the Hyatt Regency Crystal City, Crystal City, Virginia (near Washington, DC). Register by September 21, 2005, and the cost for STC members is \$1,095 (with hotel, \$1,295\*) and \$1,255 for non-members (with hotel, \$1,455\*). After September 21, costs increase \$150.

Don't miss out on this unique opportunity. For information or to register, please visit [www.stc.org/training](http://www.stc.org/training).

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\*Hotel accommodations include up to three nights lodging in Crystal City, Virginia.

Registration includes two breakfasts and two lunches. Discounts are available for multiple registrants from the same company. ♦

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# the Quill

the Newsletter for the Southwestern Ontario Chapter STC



SEPTEMBER 2005 (Volume 17 Number 1) [About the Quill](#)

## In This Issue

### President's Message

Debbie Kerr is enthusiastic about her new role as Chapter President, and issues a challenge to all chapter members to try something new. You know you're a technical communicator when... ♦

### General Meeting Announcements

It's the start of the STC season, and we have a full plate again this year and lots of fun in store. Read about what we have planned for September and October... ♦

### Council Meeting Minutes

Speaking of the new year, the council is already busy planning for the year ahead. Read about what the council discussed at their meeting in August, and learn a few things you maybe didn't want to know. ♦

### Evolution of an Editor: From Quill to Quarry to Qantas

Patrick Hofmann, Quill editor from issues past and legendary local graphics guru, takes us through his evolution from editor to author and all the stops in between—what a ride! ♦

### Director Sponsor's Message: The Seasons and the STC are a Changin'

Cindy Currie, new Director-Sponsor of Region 1, reflects on the recent changes to the STC executive, her immediate goals, and the focus areas for the STC board over the next year. Welcome Cindy! ♦

### Council Spotlight: Student Awards & Volunteer Coordinator

Interested in volunteering on the council? Don't know what's involved? This council spotlight focuses on Student Awards and Volunteering. ♦

### Membership Update

Leanne Rollins, Membership Manager, welcomes the new members to our chapter and shares her objectives for the year. ♦

### **Message from the Editor**

Welcome to the new STC year, and my first issue as The Quill editor (gulp). I only hope I can measure up to the phenomenal job of those who came before me—Debbie, Andrea, Patrick, Lisa, phew...I'll try not to let you down. Really.

### **Best of Breed?**

Right out of the gate, let me be perfectly honest—you can't do any better than the STC Best of Show award. You just can't.

Instead, you can blaze your own trail and hope that the path is interesting and enlightening enough for others to follow. Along the way, my hope is to have fun, learn, and inspire you as writers and human beings.

My aspiration for this year is to bring my own perspective and style to The Quill. I know that makes those of you that know me very nervous, but I promise to keep the very pink sneakers (flyers!) in the closet—for now. However, the very yellow smiley shoelaces are coming out. You've been warned.

### **How many writers does it take to...**

But I can't do this without all of you—you (my contributors or yet-to-be contributors) provide the substance and voice for each issue, and I have the privilege of working that material into a newsletter that I sincerely hope you will get something out of each

## Information Architecture and Content Management

Ann Rockley provides a primer for understanding information architecture as it relates to content management (CM), including detailed descriptions of the building blocks required for success in CM.

## View from the Other Side: What I Did on My Summer Holidays...

She's back...at least from her many travels over the summer and a break from hearing what is going on in England or at least the other side of the globe.

## Launch of the STC Training Program

Choose from five different two-day courses in the kickoff session for a new STC Training Program in October—there's something for everyone!

month...so please keep those ideas and articles coming.

Heard a good technical writer joke? Want to vent about Word? Have a success you want to share? Tried out some nifty new tool that made your job easier? Discovered a cool website that is a plethora of information? Don't like the word "plethora"? Think you can do better? Go ahead, email me (Margie) at [quill@stc-soc.org](mailto:quill@stc-soc.org). I look forward to hearing from you!



## Term of the Month: Buzzword Salad

**Definition:** Using a multitude of trendy terms or phrases to obscure meaning.

### Examples:

"I utilized a multitined tool to process a starch resource."\*

**Or** *I used my fork to eat a potato.*

"Existing is being unique. Existence, reality, essence, cause, or truth is uniqueness. The geometric point in the center of the sphere is nature's symbol of the immeasurable uniqueness within its measurable effect. A center is always unique; otherwise it would not be a center. Because uniqueness is reality, or that which makes a thing what it is, everything that is real is based on a centralization."\*

**Or** *I think, therefore I am.*

Order up!

\*Examples courtesy of "The Dilbert Principle" by Scott Adams and an unknown philosophy student.

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



## About The Quill



by [Margie Yundt](#), 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. In **2004**, we won Most Distinguished, Most Improved, and STC Best of Show.

### Publication Policies and Frequency

The Quill is published monthly, with the exception of January, so there are nine issues published from September 2005 to June 2006.

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 19
November	October 17
December	November 21
January	No Quill
February	January 23
March	February 20

April	March 20
May	April 17
June	May 22
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](mailto:quill@stc-soc.org) OR mail two paper copies to the mailing address below.

## Mailing Address

Margie Yundt,  
The Quill Editor, 52 Thompson Dr, Guelph, Ontario, Canada N1E 7A2

## The Quill Staff

Editor: [Margie Yundt](#)

Copy Editor: Debbie Kerr

Technical and Layout Advisor: Opal Gamble

Illustrator: Martin Eisenloeffel

## Chapter Officers

President: [Debbie Kerr](#)

Past President: [Opal Gamble](#)

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](http://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.

Web site: [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

Email: [stc@stc.org](mailto:stc@stc.org) 

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# President's Message: September Marks the Start of Something New



by [Debbie Kerr](#), President

Some of us celebrate the coming of September because it means that our children return to school. Others celebrate the beginning of the new STC year. Still others, who don't have air conditioning, celebrate the fact that the end of the humidity may be in sight. Still others celebrate life, so September is as good a reason as any to get excited about something new.

Since this newsletter is about the STC, I won't bore you with the details about one of my children starting high school and my other one entering Grade 5. I also won't tell you that we don't have air conditioning, which is why I included a comment about the humidity. Instead, I will focus on what we have to celebrate as members of the STC.

## The STC Year

September marks the beginning of the new STC year. For those of you who have volunteered to be on the council, this means that many of you have already attended a planning session in August to establish goals on two levels for the 2005-2006 year: goals that are specific to our portfolios and goals that are for the common good of our chapter. The start of the STC year marks the start of building on your existing skills and developing new ones.

If you are not on this year's council, have no fear; you still have something to celebrate. You get to learn by making use of the various activities and opportunities that this chapter provides. You also have the opportunity to get to know other people who are in the same field. No matter whether you are just starting in the field, or you are a "seasoned" professional, everyone has something to give and get during the year.

## Reasons to Try Something New

As your new chapter president, I am trying something new. I have never been the president of anything, but I thought it was time to give it a try. Choosing to be president has nothing to do with enjoying the feel of being able to boss people around, although my children might tell you otherwise. I took on the position for many reasons, and one of them is to expand my comfort zone. It's fine doing only those activities that you feel comfortable doing, but it can be pretty boring and, with that boredom, you can start to lose the edge you need to stay

passionate about what you do. The other thing is that if you don't keep advancing your skills and your experiences then you can be left behind — both personally and professionally.

I also decided to try something new because I thought I had something to bring to the position. As someone who has been a technical communicator for over 20 years, I have had a variety of experiences that might prove useful to others who are just entering the field. I also enjoy finding new ways of doing things so that activities that have become routine can look fresh and new again. I am always open to suggestions, and I always welcome ideas and suggestions. Since we are taught to write in the active voice, as writers, we should be able to be active when it comes to recognizing good work and resolving any issues. Let people know when they have done something you like and, if you don't like something, you can comment on it, but make sure you are proactive and help come up with a solution.

For example, if have been thinking about submitting some documentation to our annual competition, why not help to find a Competition Manager, so that you can ensure that the competition can actually take place and you can see if you win an award?

## **Knowing the Thrill of Being a Technical Communicator**

Since some people have contacted me about becoming a technical communicator, I thought I would include this last section. For those who are not new to the profession, this list should make you smile. The items listed are in no particular order.

Although we are not rednecks, there are definite signs when you should be a technical communicator. For example, you might be a technical communicator if:

1. You just experienced a sudden thrill because you found a typo in the lead in to this sentence. If you find any other typos in this newsletter, remember Margie (the Quill editor) or I (copy editor) intentionally left them there to give you a new thrill and to keep your attention to detail sharp.
2. You find it annoying to write pages of documentation to fix a usability problem that could be resolved with a few code changes.
3. The thought of learning something new excites you, and the challenge of explaining it to someone else turns that excitement level up even more.
4. You can't understand why others don't see the problem with a process or a design. It's clear to you that there is an easier way to group fields, lay out

a screen, or name a field. Making your dream a developer's reality can be priceless.

5. The thought of shortening some text to make it more clear and concise is more exciting than writing something long and convoluted, even though the longer text may "sound" more impressive.
6. You can smile to yourself hours later because you found a typo or grammatical error in some published writing. It can be in a newspaper, a book, or a magazine. The source is not important; finding it is the thrill. I know this was covered in the first item, but since it is so near to my heart, I thought I would mention it again.
7. Your skin crawls when you hear or read the word utilize, because you can't believe that the utilization of the word is so rampant. You hope that your expertise in keeping things simple will some day eradicate the use of the word "utilize". You may not save lives, but you will still make a difference.
8. You can explain complex things like the internal workings of a PBX (Public Branch eXchange in the telecommunications world), but you struggle to make people at your work understand that your skills go well beyond writing.
9. Your heart rate increases as you create a table or diagram to explain something complex. Being a technical communicator is knowing that how you say it is just as important as what you say.
10. You recognize that vowels are the key to everything: **A**nalysis, **E**ducation – both yourself and others, **I**nterface – both with the product and with subject matter experts), **O**ptimism, and **U**sability. **Y** becomes a vowel when you say things like: "Why me?", "Why are these software changes happening now?", and "Why am I being asked to do this in such a short time?" The list goes on, but I don't want to continue and risk losing the optimism.

I am more than optimistic about the new STC year, especially if you find the courage to try something new. ♦

### ***About Debbie Kerr (President)***

*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 three years.*



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## General Meeting Announcements



### September 6 Going Head to Head with Communication



Do you interact with non-writers on a daily basis at work? Most of us do, and it can be frustrating getting non-writers to understand writing processes and requirements. Barry Clegg to the rescue! Barry will share his experience running a project for an IT department to promote the importance of communication and boost non-writers' writing skills. Learn how to manage the challenges of getting project approval, getting suitable content, and getting people to listen.

**Join us @ the University of Waterloo Davis Centre, Room DC 1304 7:00 PM (doors open at 6:30 PM)**

Barry Clegg is a senior member of the STC Toronto Chapter, a Professional Engineer with a BA from Cambridge and an MSc. in Solid Mechanics from Aston University (don't ask!). Barry spend 30 years in IT development and management and he now works as a freelance communicator. He as written articles (serious and less than serious) for in-house and external publication in user manuals, technical documentation, reports, newsletters, websites, conference papers, speeches, skits, poetry and a coffee-table book.

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### October 4 Card Sorting 101



No, this is not a seminar on antique computer building! Communicators often use card sorting to map out architecture and navigation models. This method of getting at mental models gives great bang for the buck – it's affordable and useful in everything from organizing a user guide to determining the information architecture and navigation for a web site or enterprise web application.

In this session, Sherry McMenemy will go through the basics of card sorting, including planning, conducting sessions, analysis,

implementation, and follow-up. She'll also share some tips and tricks to add some "finesse" to the process.

**Join us @ the University of Waterloo Davis Centre, Room DC  
1304 7:00 PM (doors open at 6:30 PM)**

Sherry McMenemy is a senior STC member with experience in technical communication, information management and, user interaction design. She uses card sorting at work, where she manages an IT Knowledge Operations team, and is a consultant to local companies. ♦

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# The Trials and Tribulations of an STC Council



by [emily layng](#), Recorder

We're Ba-a-a-a-a-ak! Did you miss us?

had our first Council meeting of the year in the community room in the new Zehrs in Guelph. The room was really nice; it has a full kitchen, and lots of room to spread out. They supply the food and everything, so it looks like, depending on availability, that's where you'll find us on the third Tuesday of every month.

The first order of business was introducing ourselves and giving out one piece of information about ourselves that no one else knows.

Did you know that...

- Debbie is from Walkerton
- Peter is from Toronto
- Margie has two psycho cats
- Kim has a lovebird that does yoga

And that...

- Heidi has lived in three continents
- Leanne has had spaghetti come out her nose (is there no end to her talents?)
- emily (that's me) hitchhiked across South America
- Opal is a 5'2" walking anomaly (and has no desire to meet an Australian shoe spider)
- Donald has a teenager who knows everything and a puppy who knows nothing.

Sorry, we couldn't get anything out of Lori except that she read a newspaper article that says 4% of men are raising someone else's children and don't know it. Huh?

After that, we discussed our goals for the year, at the Chapter level and at the Portfolio level.

**At the Chapter level:**

We really want to increase awareness of the STC in the community, improve communication both inside and outside our chapter, and hopefully break even. Pretty down to earth goals. We discussed the possibilities of a few contests, fund-raising events, promotional giveaways, among other things.

### **At the Portfolio level:**

The council members spoke about the goals they had set for their particular portfolio. Everyone is pretty enthusiastic about increasing membership, getting more people out to the meetings, providing new functionality on our website, getting really cool speakers...whew, it's going to be a busy year...

So don't be shy and come on out, the pizza's great. ♦

### **emily layng (Secretary/Recorder)**

*Emily is currently working at ATS, in Cambridge, and has recently been promoted to Team Leader of Systems 1. As part of a busy group, long days and short weekends are the norm. She has been a technical writer since 1996, and has created documentation for both hardware and software companies. Outside of ATS, she is involved with a local Astrology group that is putting together correspondence courses for learning Astrology.*



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# Evolution of an Editor: From Quill to Quarry to Qantas



by [Patrick Hofmann](#)

My inaugural Quill submission for this year wouldn't be appropriate without first congratulating Debbie Kerr for her great work last year, and Margie Yundt for taking on the job with such enthusiasm this year. It's already been a decade since Lisa Bater and I first held the reins of Newsletter Editor, and it's utterly remarkable how the world has evolved since—in terms of our roles as technical communicators and our adoption of new technologies, let alone the fantastic transformation of The Quill itself.

## My History with The Quill

If I remember correctly, Lisa and I began our Quill editorship without email or internet access at home, without mobile telephones, and, egads, without a printer. Gone are the days of retyping hardcopy submissions into Aldus PageMaker, of printing our hardcopy proofs at Kinko's at 3:30 am, and of waiting for three days for our freshly published copies at M&T Instaprint. Not only has The Quill evolved to become an online newsletter, it has blossomed into a far more comprehensive and interactive source of information for our chapter.

## My Career Path

It's marvelously coincidental then, that the transformation of The Quill seems to parallel that of my career. At the same time as starting as Quill co-editor, I was hired as a technical illustrator at Quintext Information Engineering—now the Interaction Design team at Quarry Integrated Communications. As technology expanded and our customers' needs grew, my role as technical illustrator of hardcopy documentation evolved into that of interaction designer and usability consultant—of digital information. What a blessing that was! Instead of having to compensate for a product's design weaknesses in my technical documentation (usually by adding more complexity and content to the docs), I became more actively involved in building userfriendliness, instinctiveness, or inherent instruction into the product itself—making the instructions way easier to document, if they were even needed.

## My Addiction to Visual Design

It has been a busy but glorious journey ever since. My addiction to visual language and usability has granted me many opportunities both here and

overseas. Last November, I was invited by a university in Christchurch, New Zealand to develop a post-graduate Information Design curriculum for one of their online diplomas. I must confess, I was initially overwhelmed. How do I take the basic principles of my seven-hour visualization workshops and stretch it across a 16-week course curriculum?

## **My Epiphany, My Goal**

What resulted was an epiphany: an opportunity to take ample time to provide an exhaustive 'brain-dump' of everything trapped inside my head. From this activity, I experienced what was perhaps the greatest creative spurt of my life. It made me realize that transcribing my thoughts, experiences, and opinions was similar to starting a documentation project from scratch—identifying audiences, outlining objectives, developing structures, grouping areas, organizing information, and so on.

This activity also resurfaced an unfulfilled goal of mine: to write a book about 'writing without words'. It's something I began outlining in the UK back in 2000, yet I never had the time or focus to complete it since then.

## **My Journey to the Land Down Under**

So, five years later, I decided to sit down with my bosses and my peers at Quarry, and share with them my new objectives. In April, after nearly a full decade at Quarry, I asked them if I could embark on a new career path, continue the creative spurt I enjoyed in New Zealand, finish my book (now numbering three, it seems), and keep up-to-snuff by consulting independently. They were 110% supportive, and I'm now actively on my way to achieve these goals.

Over the next seven months, I'll be New Zealand and Australia, continuing my work in Christchurch and setting up in Sydney as my base for some R&R = research and (w)riting. I'll try to keep in touch during this time, and keep you informed of how my book is growing and how my life is evolving. Here's to growth and evolution, and to a happy year for both our chapter and The Quill! ♦

### **About Patrick Hofmann**

*Though evidently a speaker who can never stop, Patrick's reputed to be a "man of few words" as he teaches the virtues of visual language and graphic instruction to technical communicators around the world. While he continues his solo consulting, book writing, and other global exploits, he's eager to receive your favourite visual guffaws: [phofmann@n0rmal.com](mailto:phofmann@n0rmal.com).*



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## Director Sponsor's Message: The Seasons and the STC are a Changin'



by [Cindy Currie](#), STC Region 1 Director Sponsor

When I decided to run for Region 1 Director, I took the slogan the times; they are a changin' thinking mostly at that time about the Transformation and STC's new operating model. But, boy, the times are a changin' even more than I was thinking! And, here in southern New Hampshire, my home for the past 17 years, the first telltale signs that autumn is on the way are already evident—that initial blush of fall colour is just starting to paint the leaves on the trees in my yard. Thus, change is on my mind, the kind that bursts into glorious fall colour! And, yes, I'm referring to the STC here as well as autumn.

### The Search for an ED

By now, most of you are aware that Peter Herbst, STC's Executive Director (ED), tendered his resignation in early July. Pete will continue to serve as ED—a position he has held since Bill Stolgitis' retirement in 2003—until early October of this year. Pete served the STC as its Deputy Executive Director for many years prior to serving as ED. We truly wish Pete all the best in whatever the future may bring him.

The Board now has the opportunity to hire a new Executive Director. This is very exciting and challenging! Current STC President, Suzanna Laurent, has organized an ED Search Committee, chaired by past STC President Annette Reilly, which has been hard at work for several months now mobilizing for the search and determining the hiring criteria. An interim ED may be needed until a permanent ED is found, so there is also a committee, chaired by past STC President Thea Teich, which is working on this possibility. Look for Suzanna to distribute more information and announcements as these committees continue their work.

### Recharter anyone?

Rechartering, if not a *fait accompli* for your chapter, should be a goal for this upcoming year. There are a number of chapters in the region that have rechartered already, so there are experienced boards and councils and lessons learned to be shared with those of you who have not rechartered yet. If you would like assistance (even a sanity check to be sure you're on the right track!), please be in touch with me by sending email to [dir1@stc.org](mailto:dir1@stc.org). The STC Rechartering Committee would like to see more communities recharter this year and I'd like to see great representation from Region 1 in this important STC

activity.

## **Board Changes and Meetings**

The next STC Board of Director's meeting will be held September 21-25 in Denver. Yes, the Board meets face-to-face three times as year: May (always in conjunction with the Annual Conference), September, and January. The minutes of this meeting as well as those of the January 2005 and May 2005 Board meetings are available online at <http://www.stc.org/chapterResources.asp> and all future Board meeting minutes will be posted as well. I encourage you all to read them as the reports are full of details that both members and leaders seem to be looking for frequently.

There have been a number of changes to the Board of Directors since early summer. These include:

- The resignation of Mike Bates as First VP. Mike is replaced by Paula Berger, who was Second VP, so she moves up a link in the presidential chain
- The appointment of Linda Oestreich as Second VP (Linda was already on the Board as AP for Competitions)
- The appointment of Lory Hawkes as AP for Communication
- The appointment of Rich Maggiani (Vermont Chapter, go Region 1!) as AP for Competitions

See [http://www.stc.org/PDF\\_Files/OrgChart.pdf](http://www.stc.org/PDF_Files/OrgChart.pdf) for an updated org chart of the 2005-2006 STC Board of Directors.

## **My Goals**

Lastly, one of my goals for this STC year is to revitalize the Region 1 website, which you can visit at <http://www.stcregion.org/region1>. I will be using this site as a hub for my communications to Region 1 communities and will posted items, such as a monthly message to you all, on this site. I will also distribute my article directly to newsletter editors and webmasters; however I encourage you all to look into RSS feeds so that you can receive updates from both the STC website and the Region 1 website automatically. I am slowly but surely making decisions about the type of information I'd like to see this site contain and I'm openly asking for your ideas as well. The webmaster, Rich Feitelberg, has been just great in helping me get started and he's quick to implement all that I've given him thus far, so we need design ideas and content suggestions. Thanks!

## Board Objectives

Some of the focus areas for the 2005-2006 Board include:

1. Retaining and increasing membership by ensuring that all current and potential members are fully aware of the value that STC brings to its members. The STC has so much to offer its members now. (Did you know that STC has just launched a new training program? Go to <http://www.stc.org/training/> for details.)

And, the Board is very actively working on ways to provide even greater value to the membership. I will share these new ideas and plans just as soon as they are evolved enough to be shared.

I can help you now if you'd like to discuss strategies for membership retention and growth. The fall is often a time of membership drives, so if you are planning such an activity, please let me know. It might good to have a forum in which many STC communities can share their strategies, plans, and learnings and help support each other's potential for success.

2. Improving communication throughout STC, from the Board to the members, from the members to the Board, among committees, and among all communities (chapters and SIGs). To this end, President Laurent has appointed an Assistant to the President for Communication. The AP for Communication will create strategies and plans for ensuring that goals around improved communication can be met, and will lead the Board in the preparation of communications about Board activities and committee work, among other things.
3. Making the STC a truly global organization. To this end, President Laurent has appointed an Assistant to the President for Global Interests. The AP for Global Interests will focus on ensuring that global perspectives on many topics are known and fully considered by the Board before actions are taken, and providing input to global strategic growth goals, strategies, and plans. As part of the Strategic Growth team, the AP for Global Interests will focus on developing partnerships and alliances worldwide. The aim is to reach out to other technical communication organizations whose offerings complement those of STC, as well as to develop STC's relationships with other organizations where technical communication is part or all of their activities. Working with the AP for Conferences, the AP for Global Interests will start to develop the plans for non-North American based conferences.

Your ideas and suggestions on any of the above are most welcome. I am usually available by email or telephone and am happy to discuss any of your STC issues

or concerns (or hear all about your successes—I know that these stories are out there too!), so please be in touch by emailing me at [dir1@stc.org](mailto:dir1@stc.org) or calling (603) 884-1249. ♦

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## Council Spotlight: Student Awards & Volunteer Coordinator



*My name is Heidi Marr, and I am our chapter's new **Student Awards Manager**. For several years, I have been a judge of the Heidi Thiessen Memorial Award submissions and, because I know the quality of those submissions, I am even more excited about my new role.*

### About the Awards

The *Heidi Thiessen Memorial Award* recognizes outstanding technical writing by full-time students who are in their 3rd or 4th year of study at the University of Waterloo, the University of Guelph, or Wilfrid Laurier University. With a history of winners from both the arts and sciences, this award honours strong academic performance, and the integration of effective communication and a technical aptitude.

The *Fanshawe College Technical Writing Award* recognizes the top academic performer in the Fanshawe College Technical Writing Certificate program.

### The Timing of the Awards

In the past, the competition has received entries from exemplary young writers, which is why I am keen to read their work in the fall and meet the talented winners when I present the awards at the March Wine and Cheese. Two months later, I have the pleasure of giving out the *Fanshawe College Technical Writing Award* at our chapter's June general meeting.

### Want to help Judge or Submit an Entry?

Watch our chapter's website ([www.stc-soc.org](http://www.stc-soc.org)) and future issues of The Quill for more details about judging opportunities and competing for the *Heidi Thiessen Memorial Award*. You can also email me at [awards@stc-soc.org](mailto:awards@stc-soc.org).



*My name is Fei Min, and I am back again as the **Volunteer Coordinator** because I have unfinished business. One of my mandates is to help volunteer organizations with their technical communication needs by finding them volunteers from our chapter.*

## Postings for Volunteers

In June, we implemented a system to allow volunteer organizations to post positions on our website, so I drafted a letter to send to organizations to let them know about this avenue to our skills, and let them know what we can do for them. I sent the letter to a few organizations, but no response. I have to research and find more organizations in our area to contact, and follow up on the ones I sent to make sure the word gets out, and then you can check the job bank for possible volunteer positions. I'll keep you posted on our progress.

## Want to Volunteer?

To get involved in STC chapter activities, email me at [volunteering@stc-soc.org](mailto:volunteering@stc-soc.org) and I'll try to match up your time and interests with work that we have to do. ♦

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## Membership News



by [Leanne Rollins](#), Membership Manager

You know that television commercial where the woman sees a red leaf drop to the ground and screams in horror? That happened to me while I was running this week. Really. I was jolted into realizing that fall is coming quickly and therefore our new STC season is also fast approaching. I hiked it home and made a stab at getting a handle on the membership portfolio that same day.

Although the council was on hiatus (and clearly, so was I) over the summer months, our chapter still managed to grow. Over the past three months we've enriched our chapter with 10 new members. We look forward to welcoming these new members to our chapter at an upcoming STC SOC chapter meeting:

- Graham Jones
- Stephanie Knoke
- Susan Meldazy
- Jane Taylor
- Rod Currie
- Tim Bishop
- Karin Ikavalko
- Angela Roorda
- Janet Erickson
- Manpreet Sagoo

I hope to meet these new members and learn a little bit more about them in the next few months. That's just one of my goals for the membership portfolio. Here are a few others:

- Increase meeting attendance by 15% by Christmas. I hope to accomplish this goal by making sure my friendly face is at every meeting ready to put people at ease. I also plan to wage a telephone campaign to nag everyone to come out to a meeting.
- Increase chapter membership by 5% this year. Since we're sitting at 151 members today, that means ensuring an additional 8 people join throughout the year.
- Personally seek out feedback about how to improve our chapter. If I ask you what you expect from our chapter—answer me truthfully! I'll be

providing this feedback to the council each month, with the hopes of guiding our meeting topics, our culture, and our offerings to meet real needs of today's technical communicators.

It's going to be a good year—I can feel it! See you at the next chapter meeting. ♦

### **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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# Information Architecture of Content Management



by [Ann Rockley](#), The Rockley Group

*This article originally appeared in the subscription-only publication, The Rockley Report and is reprinted here with permission. Learn more about the Rockley Report here: <http://www.rockley.com/TheRockleyReport/>*

When people think about content management, they generally think about it from a systems perspective, focusing primarily on tools and technology. While it is true that content management usually requires a technological solution, it also requires that content be designed for reuse, retrieval, and delivery to meet your authors' and customers' needs. Content management requires that tools be configured to support authoring, reviewing, and publishing tasks, but first, those tasks must be designed. Designing content and the processes to create, review, and publish it is what information architecture is all about.

This article is meant to serve as a primer for those interested in understanding information architecture as it relates to content management. Whether you use Adobe FrameMaker or some other authoring tool, developing insight into information architecture will help you improve your chances for content management success.

Information architecture has become synonymous with information architecture for the web. However, as more organizations are adopting content management systems to manage both web and enterprise content, there is a new area of information architecture emerging—the information architecture of content management. One of the key factors for a successful content management implementation is a solid information architecture. Too often organizations implement content management without identifying the authors' needs, without looking closely at the content to determine how it could be most effectively structured to support user/customer needs, and without analyzing their current and desired content life cycle. This results in resistance to adoption, increased costs, and failure to achieve the desired results. Information architecture can make a significant contribution to the success of your content management solution.

This is a view supported by Lou Rosenfeld, ([www.louisrosenfeld.com](http://www.louisrosenfeld.com)), an information architecture consultant and co-author of *Information Architecture for the World Wide Web: Designing Large-Scale Web Sites* [1]. Rosenfeld has been instrumental in establishing the industry of information architecture for the web and points out:

When it comes to making content accessible, content management and information architecture are two sides of the same coin. Authors and end users alike, benefit from intelligent design and well-organized processes. [2]

People like Lou Rosenfeld, Peter Morville, Christina Wodtke and others in the information architecture and information design industry have laid the groundwork for a move to information architecture for content management beyond the web.

## **The Components of Information Architecture**

There are a number of components of information architecture that are key in building a solid base for a content management implementation. They include analysis, content models, granularity, metadata, reuse and repository architectures, reuse management, and content management.

### **Analysis**

Good information architecture requires that you start with a thorough analysis of your organizational needs, your current and desired content life cycle, your customers' needs, the state of your current content, and your technological requirements. During the analysis phase, you need to look at your content very closely to determine how it's put together and the types of content it contains. This will help you to determine opportunities for reuse. You also need to talk to the people who create and use the content to learn what their issues are. This will help you to determine problem areas in work processes that can be addressed in workflow.

### **Content models**

One of the most critical phases of your information architecture is building the content models on which your content management strategy is based. Content modeling involves identifying and documenting the structure of your content in detail. During the content modeling phase, you determine the elements required for each information product (or output) and how each information product will be designed for optimum usability and reuse. Content models define the structure and organization of your information products, indicating which individual elements they contain, their frequency, and their usage (e.g., is an element optional or mandatory). Models become the road map for your content and are used to develop DTDs/schemas (if you are using XML), or content frameworks and templates.

### **Granularity of content**

Designing the granularity of your content can sometimes be problematic. Authors

typically like content very granular so they know exactly what to put into an element (e.g., overview, procedure step). Very granular content usually results from more semantic models (models with tags that indicate the meaning of the element such as "overview" instead of tags with generic names such as "body" or "para"). Highly semantic models are more problematic for style sheet designers because all unique elements require an individual style. Because semantic names by their nature are unique, all semantically-named elements require their own styles.

Granularity also affects how you reuse content. Content that is too granular can be difficult to manage in your content management system, but content that is not granular enough may not be as reusable. Accordingly, CMS developers may push back on the level of granularity, opting for content that is not granular. Analysis of reusability, authoring processes, and tools is important when determining granularity and as you develop your information architecture, you will make changes to your granularity as you determine the optimum level of granularity for everyone.

### **Metadata**

There are typically two types of metadata: categorization metadata and element metadata. Users tend to retrieve information based on categorization metadata, whereas authors tend to retrieve information based on element metadata. Categorization metadata is used extensively on web sites to categorize content for effective retrieval. It is also used extensively in document management to classify documents for storage. Authors, on the other hand, use element metadata to classify elements of content for reuse, retrieval, and tracking. Care should be taken to ensure that you can retrieve your elements once stored. Your ability to reuse information is only as good as your ability to find it. And if you employ systematic reuse (see Reuse architecture) your metadata must be very thorough so that the system can correctly find and populate the content into the required information products and into the required places within information products. Like granularity, metadata design also continues to develop as you refine your architecture.

### **Reuse architecture**

Content can be reused within an information product, across information products, and potentially across the enterprise. Traditionally, the most common form of reuse has been opportunistic, meaning that authors make a decision whether to reuse content or not. However, opportunistic reuse is also the least efficient because it requires that authors know a reusable element exists and what it is called, then find the element and reuse it in their information product.

In addition, if authors are not aware that an element already exists, they may recreate it causing multiple elements to proliferate in your content management system. This also makes it difficult to know which of the multiple elements is the definitive one.

Alternatively, systematic reuse is automatic reuse. Once specific content has been identified as reusable in a specific location, it is automatically inserted (auto-populated) into the appropriate locations. Authors do not have to determine if the reusable content exists or search for, retrieve it, and insert it into the appropriate places. Systematic reuse ensures that content is automatically reused where necessary, thus reducing the burden on authors. When designing your reuse architecture, considerable analysis of information products is required to decide which elements are systematically reusable and where.

Once you've decided which elements are systematically reusable, you create content and structure reuse maps as part of your reuse architecture. The content reuse maps identify where content can and should be reused and if it should be reused identically or can be used derivatively (with change). Content reuse maps are used by your content management system to programmatically (automatically) ensure that content is reused. In addition to identifying content reuse, you need to identify structural reuse as part of your reuse architecture. Structural reuse identifies where common structures are reused. For example, you might have a product description element in a brochure, but you would also have a product description element on the web. Even though those product description elements may be structurally the same, they may contain different content. Structure reuse maps are used by DTD/template developers in creating consistent structures for authors to follow.

### **Repository architecture**

The repository architecture defines how you will structure your repository. For example you may have "building block" directories that include content that is frequently reused (e.g., glossary, procedures, product descriptions) and the remainder of your content stored in information product directories (e.g., all brochures) that are further organized by product. Or you may decide to organize your content by product with each of the information products as a subset of the product. You need to determine what is the most effective repository structure for your needs. Note, however, that the identified structure is not a physical file structure. Content is stored in the database, not in directories. The repository structure enables your authors to easily find information.

### **Reuse management**

An area of information architecture that is frequently overlooked is that of reuse

management. If authors opportunistically reuse content and create derivatives of the content, it quickly becomes difficult to identify which element is the definitive one. Your content management system will end up looking like your current file structure and you will have no clear idea of what is source content, where content is reused, and if there are multiple versions of the same piece of content. Reuse management means creating rules to manage your reusable content. The reuse rules are formalized in your content management system through workflow and in your system configuration.

### **Content control**

Content control, as part of your information architecture, identifies how your content should be managed. You need to determine how content should be controlled through its life cycle and what security should be applied to it. Content control is tightly integrated with your reuse management strategy and business practices and like reuse management, it is formalized in workflow.

### **Summary**

Bob Boiko ([www.metatorial.com](http://www.metatorial.com)), Director of the University of Washington's iSchool Content management system evaluation lab, content management expert, and best-selling author of Content Management Bible on content management [3], sums up the discussion of information architecture and content management very well:

“Content management is the dynamic organization of information architecture, business management, software and network engineering, content creation, and publications development. If you don't master each of these areas, CM will fail.

If you don't get them to integrate, CM will fail. Information architecture is the structuring of information for effective management and presentation. While the discipline has focused more to date on the presentation side of structure, it is now turning solidly toward management. As it does, the tight connection between content management and information architecture is becoming crystal clear. Information architects, like the building architects before them, create structures. They lay the foundations under and the frames around information. Content managers gather and dynamically deliver masses of information. Without a solid information structure at the core, a CMS effort can't get off the ground. At best, it will be hugely inefficient and at worst it will crumble under its own weight. Information architects have the skills to structure a content domain so that information can flow in a reasoned and efficient way. It flows in according to well understood rules of relevance, segmentation and tagging, and it flows out according to well understood rules of audience interest and use. So, CM needs


IA. But IA needs CM as well. CM provides a wider context for IA. It makes IA not just about the best page, or even the best site, but rather about the best system behind all the pages, sites and myriad other outlets for information. CM centralizes IA in the organization. It 'upstreams' IA toward the center of the organizational information systems infrastructure. It integrates IA with business management, software and network engineering, content creation, and its old friend publications development toward a new concept of what it means to be an organization in the information age." [4]

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### **About Ann Rockley**



*Ann Rockley is President of The Rockley Group, Inc, a consultancy that has an international reputation for developing content management strategies with a focus on unified content, and information architecture for content management. Rockley is a frequent contributor to trade and industry publications and a featured speaker at numerous conferences in North America and Europe. She has been instrumental in establishing the field in online documentation, single sourcing (content reuse), enterprise content management, and information architecture for content management. Rockley is President of Content Management Professionals, a member organization that fosters the sharing of content management information, practices, and strategies. Rockley is a Fellow of the Society for Technical Communication and has a Master of Information Science. Rockley is the author of the best-selling book "Managing Enterprise Content: A Unified Content Strategy" with TRG Senior Consultants Pamela Kostur and Steve Manning, New Riders Publishing ISBN 0-7357-1306-5.*

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# View from the Other Side: What I Did on My Summer Holidays...



by [Nancy Halverson](#), Feature Writer

It's been a busy summer.

If you have kids, you know that summer doesn't actually start until they're out of school. Here, of course, that's not until the third week of July, but that doesn't mean we waited until then to start our summer vacation.

## France for the weekend

We left on a Friday, in mid-July, to drive to France—just for the weekend. We had to drive through most of England down to Dover—it took just over four hours. I took that portion of the drive. Luck was with us, as it was a lovely clear and warm day. Time and weather were both important factors—we had a seven hour drive ahead of us in France.

Ryan got to do the driving in France—I wasn't comfortable driving on the 'normal' side of the road in a car driven from the right-hand side. There are too many crossed synapses for me to handle. We had to drive to meet our daughter's exchange family in a suburb of Nantes.

## Bilingual by March

Maddie, my 10 year-old, is going to live with this other family from October to March, and then we host the francophone girl from the French family. Yes, it's a long French exchange, but it's the quickest way to get her bilingual. Plus, it's a great chance to get friends in France—always an advantage! We really enjoyed our weekend in Nantes—sunny and very hot, with fantastic food and great company. Of course, there was a bit of a language barrier—it wasn't as difficult as you'd think, dragging out our French and making ourselves understood. Luckily, our exchange family doesn't speak much English, so Maddie is going to get a real immersion.

## Special exchange program

This isn't the normal sort of exchange for people in England either—it was arranged by a group of families who decided it was a good way to teach children second languages. Since children acquire languages easily, we're hopeful that we'll get both our girls through these fantastic experiences with a real understanding of French language and culture. Since we can't get them a

bilingual education in Canada, this is our best option.

### **Summer vacation: a week in Italy**

After the kids were finished school for the year, we finally got our chance for some real summer. Naturally, we needed to go out of England to find it. We went to Italy for a visit with a fellow-Canadian and his Italian partner. It was hot and sunny and wonderful. Throw in some great food and a bit of historical touring, not to mention a chance to ride bikes around the monuments of Rome. Too bad it was only a week! (Both my kids want to go back to spend a year in Italy learning Italian now... they've caught the bug I think—so have we!!)

### **Summer vacation: two weeks in Spain**

After Italy, we went to Spain—the Costa Blanca, which is near Valencia. It's a part of Spain that's got lots of tourism, but as usual, we had another agenda. We have friends who live there, so it was another opportunity to visit friends and get some sun. It's scenery presented red dry dirt, scrubby bushes on minor mountains, and tons of blue sky and azure seas. It was heaven to the rain-soaked people of the British Isles. It was such a great feeling to arrive in our villa and know that we had two weeks to live there and experience sun, sand, water, and (again) wonderful food. Nice.

### **Reality, and the STC**

Okay, so now I'm back in the land of the working. Work, deadlines, school starting again for the kids, and STC. I spent this weekend at a hotel in the middle of highway service centre (yes, it's true!) planning our STC activities for the coming year. It's a little bit more planning than we usually do to tell you the truth, and it was a difficult exercise to get through all of our tasks in the allotted time (we had to put aside many discussions to another forum), but we came away with definite goals and strategies. We're hoping to put more events together for our members, and increase the depth of our management team. Ambitious, insane, and just a little bit possible—if everyone makes the effort that they've committed to this weekend.

Because we can't get together very often, our executive council needed a central venue that we could all reach within a few hours—we also needed a concentrated period of time so that we could get through a backlog of issues that had simply not been addressed in any of the previous councils. It was a time of growing up for our chapter in many ways. The STC UK has bumped and bumbled along for a few years now, getting people out to a few events each year. Well, now it's

getting a bit serious.

Plans, budget, succession, leadership, re-designed website and newsletter, and many more opportunities to meet with our members are all areas that need to be addressed. It's going to be a very interesting year of course, and I may be a bit busy to write much, but I'll continue to write a few words each month.

## **Canada, eh?**

I've actually got another trip in the works—we're flying back to Canada to attend my mother's wedding. I'm really happy to be making the trip, even though we'll have to take the kids out of school for a week. We're also going to spend a few days in Waterloo, visiting old friends.

Unfortunately I won't be there for a chapter meeting, but I'll think of you as I walk by the university. You've got to admit that you've got an easy STC life—a predictable venue, lots of members within an easy drive, a chance to meet in person more than a few times a year. I know envy isn't pretty, but you've got to appreciate the compliment that I'm trying to pay—you've got a well run group there, with lots of participation and a great deal of experience. Don't let yourselves get complacent, but make sure that you take full advantage of all your local chapter opportunities.

## **Gas prices**

Oh, and if you're interested, gas prices are now breaking the pound per litre mark here—North America is by no means the only place suffering from the effects of higher gas prices resulting from the wide-spread damage caused by the current hurricane season. Let's see, that works out to roughly \$2.20 Canadian per litre. I hope you're not quite there yet, since I'll be driving between Toronto, Peterborough county, and Waterloo again in a few weeks time.

Thanks for reading, and congratulations to the newsletter team on their win. Well done. ♦

## **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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## STC Training Program - October 20-21, 2005



Imagine a two-day course covering the things you need to advance your career in technical communication—an in-depth, focused course taught by some of the most respected names in the field.

Now imagine that you have a choice of five such courses, each covering a different subject within technical communication. That's the STC Training Program—a new learning venue designed for today's professionals and scheduled for October 20-21.

The five two-day courses, described in detail at [www.stc.org/training](http://www.stc.org/training), cover the following subjects:

- **The Architecture of Content.** Instructor: Jonathan Price, STC Fellow
- **Creating and Using Personas to Improve Usability.** Instructor: Whitney Quesenbery, STC Associate Fellow
- **Focusing on Content: Making Web Sites Work for Users.** Instructors: Janice (Ginny) Redish, STC Fellow, and Caroline Jarrett
- **Leadership in Information Management: Developing the Business Framework and Implementation Roadmap for Single Sourcing, Content Management, and Knowledge Management.** Instructor: Benhong Rosaline (Roz) Tsai, STC Associate Fellow
- **XML: From Hand-Coding to WYSIWYG Authoring.** Instructor: Neil Perlin, STC Associate Fellow

The STC Training Program will take place at the Hyatt Regency Crystal City, Crystal City, Virginia (near Washington, DC). Register by September 21, 2005, and the cost for STC members is \$1,095 (with hotel, \$1,295\*) and \$1,255 for non-members (with hotel, \$1,455\*). After September 21, costs increase \$150.

Don't miss out on this unique opportunity. For information or to register, please visit [www.stc.org/training](http://www.stc.org/training).

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\*Hotel accommodations include up to three nights lodging in Crystal City, Virginia.

Registration includes two breakfasts and two lunches. Discounts are available for multiple registrants from the same company. ♦

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