



SOCIETY FOR
TECHNICAL
COMMUNICATION

Newsbrief

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August Meeting Program

Staying on Top of Your Game: Discussing Trends in Technical Communication

by Alison Masilak

Just like athletes must keep informed about the latest training techniques and footwear innovations to stay at the top of their games, technical communicators must be aware of the latest trends in our field. On Monday, August 2, the Mid-South chapter will provide a forum for exploring these trends with a new “book club” style meeting.

We will discuss several articles from recent STC publications in a progression format. That is, each table will be the home base for a certain topic. The moderator for the topic will stay with the table as meeting attendees, after 20 minutes of discussion, rotate from one table to the next.

Topics will include working on remote teams/remote collaboration, writing for the Web, and on-screen editing. Each will be moderated by a technical communication professional who has experience with that topic.

Look up the articles listed below in your copies of *Technical Communication* and *Intercom*, or download them from the chapter website (<http://www.stc-midsouth.org/meetings.html>).

Working on Remote Teams/ Remote Collaboration

“When No One’s Home: Being a Writer on Remote Project Teams” by Nancy E. Larbi and Susan Springfield from *Technical Com-*

munication, February 2004, pages 102–108

Writing for the Web

“Writing for the Web Versus Writing for Print: Are They Really So Different” by Judy Gregory from *Technical Communication*, May 2004, pages 276–285

Editing On-Screen

“Implementing On-screen Editing” by Geoffrey J.S. Hart from *Intercom*, May 2004, pages 36–37

Even if you haven’t read the articles, we encourage you to come to the Cottage at the Four Seasons on Monday, August 2, at 6:00 p.m. and participate in lively discussions! For directions and more details, see page 6. ♦

CALL FOR CLIPPINGS

If you see a meeting or activity of the Mid-South chapter advertised in a local newspaper, please cut the notice out and bring it to our publicity manager, Diana Fedinec. She sends notices to many local papers including *The Commercial Appeal*, *Memphis Business Journal*, *Shelby Sun Times*, and *Germantown News*. Having 2 original copies of each notice to add to our publicity notebook increases our chances of winning a publicity award during the STC chapter competitions.

Bring in used cell phones!

The Mid-South chapter continues to collect used cell phones, batteries, and chargers. These items will be given to Cell Phones for Life, Inc., a nonprofit organization that reprograms phones to call only 911 and distributes them to shut-ins and victims of domestic violence. Help us reach our goal of 50 phones and chargers by May 2005!

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From the Editor

by Apryl Cox

This month, the chapter is offering you opportunities to broaden your knowledge of current issues in technical communication. As noted on page 1, at our August meeting, we're going to discuss articles on trends in our wide-ranging profession. Even if you're not actively involved in one of these trends, you'll get the chance to find out what your peers are up to.

Starting below and continuing to page 4 is information about a topic that will affect current and potential STC members: the transformation initiative. If you have any questions after perusing the

material in this issue, come to our October meeting and ask your questions directly to members of the Society's board of directors. In the meantime, please feel free to submit questions to Glenn and Alison, our chapter president and vice president. (See their contact information at right.) Or send a letter to the editor so that your question and the response you receive might benefit fellow chapter members.

Don't miss these opportunities to find out more about a variety of current happenings in our profession. I hope to see you at the Cottage on Monday, August 2! ♦

Transformation Update...or Introduction?

by Andrea Ames, STC President

Are you a chapter or special interest group (SIG) leader? If so, chances are you've heard of the STC transformation. If not, there's a good chance you haven't heard of the transformation. The following few paragraphs will provide a very brief introduction to the transformation work, and the following resources will provide Society members with more details, updates, etc.:

- transform@stc.org—Ask questions or provide suggestions, comments, etc., and you will get an answer or a response within 2 business days
- Transformation news listserver (transform@lists.stc.org)—Opt in and receive updates and news about the transformation, status/progress updates, notifications of website updates, etc. (sign up via the transformation website, beginning July 15)
- <http://www.stc.org/transformation>—Visit often

to see the main repository of transformation information, and sign up for the transformation news listserver for update information

What Started All This? And What's It Really All About?

Frankly, the economy started all this. In short, STC income—both membership dues income and conference income that underwrites the cost of memberships (you might not realize that your dues don't cover the actual costs of your membership)—began to drop a few years ago, and the STC Board of Directors' efforts to cut costs did not solve our problem. When we dug into the cause of our drop in income, we found that many former members, for example, were unwilling to renew, because it meant paying for memberships that their companies had formerly covered. In short, although the

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

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Region 3

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A sharing community creating opportunity

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Newsbrief

<http://www.stc-midsouth.org>

Newsbrief is the monthly publication of the Mid-South chapter of the Society for Technical Communication, a nonprofit organization.

Twelve issues of *Newsbrief* are published each year. We create the publication to

- Involve members and visitors more fully in professional development and service.
- Foster a sense of community among chapter members and visitors.
- Provide a link between professors and students at local universities.
- Promote the benefits of chapter membership to attract new members.

Submissions

If you would like to contribute an article to *Newsbrief*, submit

- The text portion of the article as a text (TXT), rich text (RTF), or Microsoft Word (DOC) file or as text incorporated within the body of an email.
- Photos as JPG or TIFF. If you choose to use a TIFF, please set the file resolution to 150 dots per inch (dpi) or higher.

Please send all submissions to the editor of *Newsbrief* by the 10th of the month to be considered for the next month's issue.

Copyright

Newsbrief invites writers to submit articles that they wish to be considered for publication. Please note, however, that by submitting an article, you implicitly grant a license to *Newsbrief* to run your article and for other STC publications to reprint it without permission. You as the writer nonetheless hold the copyright. 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.

Reprints

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Subscription

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Advertising

Newsbrief accepts advertisements relevant to technical communicators. Base prices are listed below, and discounts will be given for ads that run in at least two consecutive issues. For more information on how you can reach the more than 100 readers of *Newsbrief*, contact the editor.

Full page.....	\$60
Half page.....	\$40
Quarter page.....	\$20
Business card	\$10

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economy moved the Board to act, what we found was that finances were merely a symptom of a greater problem—perceived member value. That's what the transformation is really about: providing value that members want and need to develop professionally.

During our research, we confirmed something we already knew: our industry and our members are incredibly diverse, with interests ranging from usability to editing, with skills and experience ranging from entry-level to senior, working in industries from financial to scientific, etc. We asked ourselves, "Can one Society really meet the needs and provide significant professional development value in all of these areas and industries, to this entire range of people?" In answering this question, we confirmed something else we already knew: our strength is in our "communities"—what we currently call "chapters" and "SIGs." The Society does not provide direct value to members in any or all of these areas; instead, the Society provides infrastructure, mentoring, financial and administrative support, policy, etc., for those communities to exist and flourish, providing member value indirectly through those communities. Unfortunately, the Society support for and representation of communities today—and the members' experience across communities—is inconsistent.

The Bottom Line

Members want value, and value means something different to each of us. For the Society to rebuild—and increase—its membership ranks, we need to provide (among other things):

- Consistent, equitably supported and represented communities from which members will derive their personalized professional development value (through the communities, finance, and governance initiatives)
- A flexible membership model (through the membership initiative), enabling members to opt in and out of various services and community memberships to customize their professional development experience
- Rich content—education (through the education initiative), a knowledge base, research, intellectual property of all types—that provides depth of practice in member-identified practice areas (through the communities initiative by supporting practice-based communities) and is readily accessed (through the technology initiative)
- Richer opportunities to network, within and beyond

Transformation continued on p. 4

Coming From the Chapter in October...Ask Members of the STC Board of Directors Your Transformation Questions

At our October program meeting, the Mid-South chapter is offering current, former, and potential members a unique opportunity. Beth Tanner, who is our STC region director sponsor, and another member of the Society's board of directors will present an update on the transformation and answer your questions about how the changes will affect the Society as a whole and you individually. Don't miss this chance to receive the latest information from Society decision-makers. For more details, see upcoming issues of *Newsbrief* and our website (<http://www.stc-midsouth.org>).

geographies (through the communities initiative by supporting both geographic and brand new kinds of communities)

And we need to communicate information (through the communication initiative) about the transformation, its initiatives, and the changes and status of those as well as solicit feedback from members and leaders around the Society, to ensure that we all understand our options, make informed choices and decisions, and implement the appropriate changes during the transformation process.

What We're Doing About It: The Transformation

Some of these needs are met through today's community success stories—of which there are many! In our efforts to improve consistency and equality of support and experiences across communities, we're not losing sight of those that are working; instead, we're building on the foundation of their successes...and planning to go a step further to provide even more to those communities to enhance their successes. For communities that are struggling, the support we will provide is designed to help, not hinder, their progress toward providing as much member value as possible.

The work to meet all of these needs is complex...as we change our community support model to be more consistent, many changes are required—in the financial, governance, and technology (infrastructure) areas, as well as the expected community policy changes.

We have a high-level roadmap that we're following, outlining what we need to do at a very high level similar to the bulleted items above. We don't have all the answers. We

still need your input and your help. Contact us at transform@stc.org to contribute to the transformation.

Myths and Misinformation Abound!

If you have heard of the transformation, you might be concerned about some misinformation circulating. Here are a few of the most tenacious myths...debunked. For answers to frequently asked questions and more corrections to misinformation, sign up for the transformation news listserver to get notification when we add the FAQs to the Web site!

- STC is not a chapter-based organization; it is a member-based organization, according to our Bylaws.
 - The transformation is not about finances; it's about member value. Although the economic environment and STC's financial situation in that environment were symptoms that alerted us to the problem, the real issue was members' perception of the value of STC membership.
 - The transformation is not about marginalizing, de-emphasizing, or eliminating chapters—large or small. Chapters are communities, just as SIGs are. The goal of the transformation is to equally support and represent all communities—chapters, SIGs, and new, currently undefined communities.
 - We are not taking away any chapters' money. At a transformation Q&A session on leadership day at the STC conference in May, John Nardone, our transformation consultant, mentioned the well-known fact that STC's chapters have
- a greater net worth than the Society, and he suggested that chapters with large reserves might want to volunteer to donate some of those reserves to the transformation effort. (Interesting tidbit: Some chapters have contacted me to volunteer to support the transformation financially.)
- The transformation was not instigated by STC's Washington, D.C.-based organization. STC's decision-making, policy-setting body is the board of directors, your elected representatives, who are volunteers and live and work around the world. STC's implementation and operations body is the paid staff at the STC office, located in northern Virginia. Your elected board of directors voted to engage the transformation consultant (in May 2003) and to adopt the transformation roadmap (in January 2004) that the consultant and the initial transformation team proposed. The STC Office in northern Virginia does not determine how money is spent; they implement disbursements based on STC board decisions.
 - The current dues rebates that fund chapters are not part of the transformed financial model. The new financial model has not yet been developed. Until it is, the board of directors will continue with the chapter dues rebate process: according to STC Bylaws, each year the board analyzes the current financial situation—including the budget, membership renewals, and conference income—and determines an amount to rebate to chapters. ♦

July Meeting Notes

by Gail Spake

The Mid-South chapter toured the FedEx Institute of Technology at the University of Memphis on July 12, 2004, at 6:00 p.m. Glenn Sanders, chapter president, welcomed the crowd of 37, including 28 nonmembers—thanks to the efforts of our publicity manager, Diana Fedinec. Glenn briefly discussed STC and our local chapter, and he invited visitors to take a copy of our latest newsletter and to visit our website (<http://www.stc-midsouth.org>). Alison Masilak, our vice president, discussed upcoming programs and also invited everyone present to attend future chapter meetings.

We separated into two groups led by guides Joanne Gikas and Eric Mathews, who work for programs housed in the FedEx Institute. Joanne is an instructional design specialist at the Advanced Learning Center, which promotes integration of technology into curriculum. Eric is the associate director of research development for the FedEx Institute; associate director of the Institute for Intelligent Systems, which works with government, universities, and corporations on areas such as artificial intelligence, biological systems, and evolutionary modeling; and co-director of the Workforce Advanced Distributed Learning Co-Laboratory, which works to promote and improve e-learning.

The centers in the FedEx Institute are inter-departmental programs run by academic and technical professionals from a variety of backgrounds such as business, computer science, engineering, linguistics, and psychology. University of Memphis programs that are housed in other buildings can profile their research findings in small

rooms in the Institute called portals. The Institute's staff function as liaisons for the centers housed in the Institute and programs highlighted in the portals; they promote the new ideas they encounter by initiating collaborative projects to benefit University of Memphis faculty and students.

The Institute's building has state-of-the-art technology, including wireless internet access, flat-screen monitors throughout, and carts with pre-charged laptop computers available to check out for workshops. These features contribute to an environment where technology supports learning, innovation, and research.

Much of the interior design is experimental; the FedEx Institute is a guinea pig for ideas about workspace. Memphis Business Interiors and manufacturers such as Steelcase worked with the Institute to design the workspaces and furniture with an emphasis on collaborative activity. Much of the furniture throughout the Institute—in the offices, presentation rooms, and open seating areas—is mobile, not fixed as in traditional classrooms or theatres. One tour member



As meeting attendees settle into the comfortable swiveling chairs, tour guide Joanne Gikas (second from left) highlights the features of the 75-seat presentation theater at the FedEx Institute of Technology.

commented that the building feels pleasant because there is no clutter—no visual noise.

One of the Institute's most notable features is a room called The Zone, sponsored by AutoZone, Inc. The Zone holds 185 audience members; meeting participants sit at stations equipped with voting technology and a teleconferencing panel, allowing them to exchange ideas with the presenter and audience members both in the theatre and in remote locations.

For more information or to schedule meetings at the FedEx Institute, call 901.678.5051 or see <http://fedex.memphis.edu>. ♦



Tour guide Eric Mathews (second from right) shows off a portal where researchers can display posters and videos about their program as well as hold small meetings.

Upcoming Meetings

Please plan to attend the following upcoming events of the Mid-South chapter.

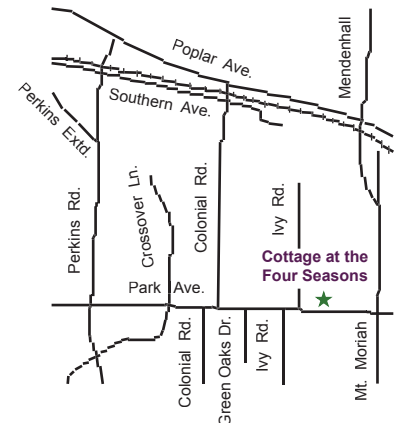
Unless otherwise noted, meetings cost \$10 (\$5 for students with a valid ID), and cash is requested.

Monday, August 2, 6:00–8:00

Topic: A progression (or “book club” style discussion) on recent articles from the STC magazine, *Intercom*, and the journal, *Technical Communication*

Location: The Cottage at the Four Seasons, 4930 Park Ave. (see map). The Four Seasons is next door to the Buntyn Cafe and across Park Ave. from Marquette Park. A free parking lot and the entrance are in back.

More information: For the list of articles to be discussed and more about the meeting format, see page 1. The articles may also be downloaded from the meetings page of our website (<http://www.stc-midsouth.org/meetings.html>).



Monday, September 13, 5:30–8:00

Topic: The current status and future of technology and biotechnology business in the Mid-South

Speaker: Bob Morris, attorney from Butler Snow, chairman of Technology Resource Foundation, and chair of the Tennessee Governor’s Board of Economic Growth

Location: The Cottage at the Four Seasons

Monday, October 11, 5:30–8:00

Topic: Presentation and Q&A on STC’s Transformation Initiative

Speakers: Beth Tanner, STC Region 3 director-sponsor, and another member of the STC Board of Directors

Location: To be determined

More information: See the Transformation article in this issue of *Newsbrief*.

Contact Alison Masilak for additional details (ajoyner@memphis.edu or 901.274.0215). ◆



Newsbrief

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