



SOCIETY FOR  
TECHNICAL  
COMMUNICATION

# Newsbrief

Monthly Publication of the Mid-South Chapter

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## March Meeting Program: Word and Image, Warp and Weft: Threads in the Same Fabric

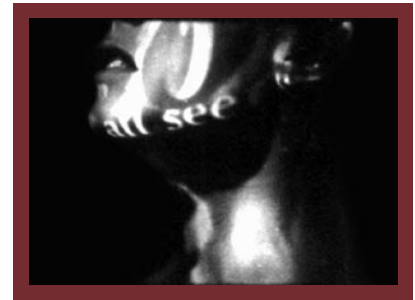
by Alison Masilak

In producing an effective piece of communication, words are only part of the picture. Add images to the words and the communication takes new life. At our March 7 chapter meeting, Dr. Michael Schmidt, director of the University of Memphis (U of M) Center for Multimedia Arts, will illustrate how text and graphics interplay.

Dr. Schmidt has taught courses in graphic design for ten years and is currently an associate professor of graphic design at the U of M. He has received numerous awards for his print design work, and his works and writings on design have appeared in journals such as *designer*, *Graphic Design: usa*, *Print*, *Émigré*, *Business Publishing*, *News of the Whirled*, and *How* as well as in several anthologies.

The Center for Multimedia Arts, housed at the U of M FedEx Institute of Technology, is a creative digital media environment where partners from the community, education, and business work collaboratively to improve communication, enhance comprehension, and enrich human experiences. The center is now operational and conducting projects for the National Civil Rights Museum, St. Jude Children's Research Hospital, STAX Museum, STAX Music Academy, and several university research partners.

Join us for this meeting at the New Horizons Computer Learning Center, 4775 American Way. Networking will begin at 5:30 p.m., and the program, at 6:30 p.m. For more details, see page 6. ◆



A graphic designed by Dr. Michael Schmidt, who will speak to the Mid-South chapter on Monday, March 7, about the integration of text and images in documents.

### Chapter Officer Elections

Would you like to become more involved in the Mid-South chapter? Now is the perfect time. The chapter nominating committee is seeking nominees for 2005–2006 officer positions.

Here is the current ballot:

President: Alison Masilak (according to chapter bylaws, the outgoing vice president becomes president)

Vice president: Apryl Cox

Secretary: Becky Derych

Treasurer: No nominees

If none of those positions are right for you, consider becoming a manager. For example, the education and publicity manager positions will be open soon. Feel free to contact the appropriate officer or manager listed on page 2 for more information.

If you'd like to volunteer yourself or someone else for any of these positions, contact chapter president Glenn Sanders at [glenn.sanders@fedex.com](mailto:glenn.sanders@fedex.com).

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## From the Editor

by Apryl Cox

This month's *Newsbrief* is focused on one of the greatest benefits of our chapter: monthly chapter meetings. Catch up on meetings you might have missed with the December, January, and February Meeting Notes by chapter secretary Gail Spake. Look throughout this issue for bits and pieces about upcoming meetings.

Because our meeting topics vary greatly from month to month, you have the opportunity to learn something completely different than you did the month before. Each meeting is also preceded by networking time so that you can catch up with old friends, meet new colleagues, and find out what's happening on the job front. As always, I hope see you soon at a chapter meeting, perhaps at the one on Monday, March 7. ♦

### Member News

Congratulations to Loel Kim for becoming a senior member of STC, which is conferred after 5 years of Society membership. Loel, an associate professor at the University of Memphis, has been published in the STC journal, *Technical Communication*, and presented at the annual conference. She also currently serves as the Mid-South chapter's education liaison.

### Join the Hunt

The Mid-South chapter is seeking a new home for our chapter meetings. Share your opinions and suggestions by completing our survey, available at <http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.asp?u=29629910492>, by April 13, 2005.

## December Meeting Notes: Tools and Tips Gift Exchange

by Gail Spake

The winter holiday season conjures images of hectic shopping, planning for travel, and last minute deadlines as we wrap up our year's affairs, and best of all, the anticipation of time spent celebrating with family and friends and the renewed spirit of giving. In that spirit, the 10 members and 2 nonmembers who attended the Mid-South chapter meeting on Monday, December 6, 2004, at the Cottage at the Four Seasons enjoyed a delightful, convivial meeting, where interesting gifts that catered to our varied interests were presented—gifts sure to enhance our professional practice.

Several attendees presented brief summaries of books, websites, and handouts, each describing the value that might be derived from exploring these excellent resources. Shirley Hancock talked about a book that encourages professionals to better understand and adapt to change, which is inevitable in business environments. Alison Masilak, discussed an excellent, highly recommended book on design, something we must all consider when architecting our information and presenting it in various media formats.

A lively discussion evolved from a review of a handout that Elizabeth Webb presented with a list of URLs for resources on the web that ranged from dictionaries to software utilities and included an excellent list of Windows shortcuts. The handout

was created by a group effort of local *December Notes* continued on p. 3



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

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*A sharing community creating opportunity*

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

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# Newsbrief

*Newsbrief* is the monthly newsletter of the Mid-South chapter of the Society for Technical Communication, a nonprofit organization. We create the newsletter 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.
- Photos as JPG or TIFF (for TIFF, file resolution  $\geq$  150 dots per inch (dpi)).

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

Articles published by *Newsbrief* may be reprinted in other STC publications if credit is given to the author as well as the Mid-South chapter and a copy of the reprint is sent to the *Newsbrief* editor.

## Subscription

To receive *Newsbrief* (for free) every month, give your email address to the editor.

## 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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*December Notes* continued from p. 2

medical editors and writers in the Scientific Editors' Roundtable. David Armbruster mentioned that the list has been well received by that group's participants. It was suggested that the Mid-South chapter of STC might develop an ongoing list URLs for sites that our members find useful.

Diana Fedinec presented a link to a site for management resources, explaining that management, like writing, spans many diverse professional areas. Diana has used this site often and finds its extensive resources to be very useful.

For those who are interested in website design, David mentioned that the National Cancer Institute sponsors research in evidence-based website design, much of which can be found on the usability.gov site. Apryl Cox discussed a site devoted to making documents and websites usable for people with vision problems. She shared another site that has a navigation stress test, which can be used to assess how easy it is for visitors to maneuver a website you've created.

Michael Huggins introduced us to an online search engine for internet and technology definitions and mentioned another dictionary that provides audible pronunciation of terms. David commented on the fun and helpfulness of subscribing to the "word of the day" feature of some websites. Michael also noted the value of membership in online user groups for getting answers to questions about software, hardware, and business practices, but he suggested creating an email account specifically for participating in user groups to avoid receiving spam at your personal or professional email address.

The December meeting was certainly aligned with the spirit of the holidays. We can all benefit from each other's "gift" offerings; shared resources can enrich our professional practice. All in attendance seemed delighted to share resources with such a lively and accomplished group of professional peers.

*Note:* The gift list created for the December meeting will be posted online for Mid-South chapter members at a later date. Check the website (<http://www.stc-midsouth.org/>) or an upcoming *Newsbrief* for details. ♦

## January Meeting Notes: Content Management Systems

by Gail Spake

On Monday, January 3, 2005, the Mid-South STC chapter hosted a joint meeting with The Toad, a local nonprofit group of technology professionals. Glenn Sanders, the STC chapter president, started the meeting by welcoming the 11 Mid-South chapter members and 18 nonmembers. Glenn encouraged everyone to visit the websites of the Mid-South chapter (<http://www.stc-midsouth.org/>) and The Toad (<http://www.thetoad.org/>). Ray Fleming, a member of Toad, also emphasized the common interest of the two groups and invited members of STC to visit future Toad meetings.

Then Toad members Tom Kirstein and Jeff Milton began their presentation on content management systems

(CMS) used to store information and

*January Notes* continued on p. 4

distribute select bits on websites. Jeff, chief technology officer and creative director of GMOTION.com, explained that content management systems give clients the control to tailor content and facilitate interaction on the World Wide Web. Tom, president of Mind Over Data, described CMS as business-oriented systems that pull information content from a central repository into websites.

For this talk, Tom and Jeff divided CMS into three types, on the basis of how they are created and modified: open source systems, proprietary systems, and custom systems. Jeff's expertise and development focus is on the use of open source systems, which are created by an individual or group who then release the code so that anyone else in the community may further develop the CMS. He pointed out many advantages for open source systems: they are easily edited, well documented, and adaptable with modules that enable users to add features to the base system. Jeff explained that a potential drawback for open source systems is that they have no support phone number; someone with expertise in source code development must be available to solve problems or facilitate enhancements.

Neither Tom nor Jeff use proprietary systems right out of the box. These "shrink wrapped" CMS are developed and sold by a software company. Both presenters said that someone who does not need to customize a CMS may find proprietary systems adequate. However, they emphasized that many businesses have specific needs for publishing content online for which a proprietary system will be insufficient. Tom also noted that proprietary systems generally include easily accessible technical support from the manufacturer—but not if the manufacturer decides to discontinue the software.

Tom's preferred type of CMS sometimes makes use of the positives of proprietary systems; he creates custom systems. Custom systems can be developed from scratch or as modifications of proprietary systems. Tom described the benefit that custom development would have for a client: the product is built to meet the client's specific needs, often to fit a unique purpose. Jeff added that custom systems also enables a client to start small and grow in the direction he or she wants to grow. The person or company that created the custom system should be able to provide software support to the user.

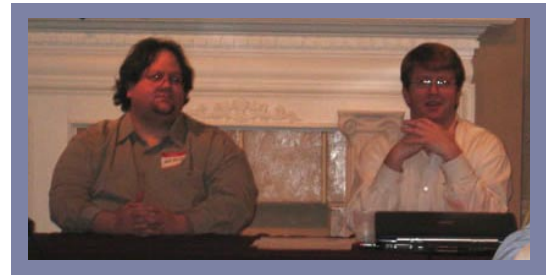
Tom and Jeff gave an informative introduction to the merits and limitations of each type of CMS. Hundreds of content management systems exist; this discussion provided an interesting overview of issues a client would consider when researching what type of CMS to develop and the expertise and reliability of the developer need to create and maintain a CMS.

#### *Content Management Resources:*

GMOTION.com, Inc. (<http://www.gmotion.com/>), the web development company founded by Jeffrey Milton  
Mind Over Data (<http://www.mind-over-data.com/>), the company headed by Tom Kirstein that uses technology to find solutions to business challenges

*The Rockley Report* (<http://www.rockley.com/TheRockleyReport/>), a quarterly journal on content management that includes STC members as contributors

"Web Content Management Systems: What They Can Do and How You Can Acquire One," an article by Aba Maison (<http://www.techsoup.org/howto/articlepage.cfm?ArticleId=485&topicid=13>) ◆



Jeff Milton (left) listens as fellow presenter Tom Kirstein answers and audience member's question about content management systems.

#### **New: Local Jobs Email List**

If you want to be one of the first to know when a new job becomes available in the area, join our new jobs email list. Send your email address to [jobsnotices@stc-midsouth.org](mailto:jobsnotices@stc-midsouth.org).

You can also view local job listings at <http://www.stc-midsouth.org/jobs.html>. If you would like to share a job notice, contact Paige Marshall at [paige.marshall@fedex.com](mailto:paige.marshall@fedex.com).

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## February Meeting Notes:

### Trends in the Current and Future Practice of Technical Communication

by Gail Spake

The STC Mid-South chapter's February meeting was held Monday, February 2, 2005, at the Unity Church of Memphis. Even with a last-minute location change, 19 attendees, including 12 chapter members, came to hear Michael J. Albers, Ph.D., a Mid-South chapter member and an assistant professor at the University of Memphis, discuss a special issue of the STC journal, *Technical Communication*, that he is editing.

Mike began by explaining how for this special issues, which is scheduled to be published in August 2005, contributors were invited to submit articles on the current and future theory and practice of technical communication. Many good articles were submitted; those that focus on the practice of technical communication will be included in Mike's issue, and those on academics and research have been reserved for another special issue, which is to be published in 2006.

At the chapter meeting, Mike talked about primarily two articles, which were studies on the practice of technical communication. During this conversational presentation, Mike and the audience added their own observations that complemented the study results and asked questions of one another about the future of the field.

Mike noted that the practice of technical communication transcends the ability to write, now assumed to be a basic skill by employers or clients. The field also incorporates features of human computer interaction, information architecture (mainly the domain of web designers), information design (which includes document design), human factors (often practiced in engineering to determine how people interact with the environment and devices), and management and business acumen.

Employers report that they care more that technical communicators have adequate technical knowledge to communicate competently with other technical professionals than that they have existing expertise on particular tools. However, many job descriptions list tools with which the applicant should be proficient and mention little about writing and editing skills. Mike commented that despite the focus on using tools, many companies' current training models are primarily vendor driven. Training emphasizes how a product works, not how to use the tool to accomplish specific job-related tasks.

Interestingly, few technical communicators define technology as an integral component of their jobs. However, as one of the studies found, technology impacts all they do. They are fully dependent on technology to produce documents, websites, and other publications as well as communicate with subject matter experts and colleagues.

Being able to get along with and communicate effectively with others, i.e., people skills, were ranked as the most desired skill by employers. People skills, in addition to familiarity with understanding of how a business works, such as how tools impact business objectives, are essential for accomplishing a company's goals. However, technical communicators are often found to be weak in relating to their company's strategic mission and may prefer to work independently instead of on a team.

Mike and the audience discussed how the skills lacking in many technical communicators but valued in practice can be taught in academic programs. One attendee commented that in some professions, core competencies are better defined and tested than in technical communication. It was proposed that maybe a future issue of *Technical Communication* could address effective methods for teaching the less technical skills that communicators need in today's market. ◆

#### WANTED: Laptops for April Meeting

The Mid-South chapter needs laptops for our April 12 meeting, which will showcase award-winning technical publications and art. Each laptop will be used to display a few winning online publications, which will be available on disc. A volunteer will stay with the laptops to help users and make sure everyone keeps the hors d'oeuvres away. If you would like to share your laptop, please contact Alison Masilak ([ajoyner@memphis.edu](mailto:ajoyner@memphis.edu)).

#### Presenting at the STC Annual Conference? Warm Up at the May Chapter Meeting

The Mid-South chapter invites anyone presenting at the STC annual conference this May to speak at our May chapter meeting. Presenting at this meeting gives you the chance to test run your presentation in front an audience similar to the one you'll encounter at the conference. To volunteer, contact Alison Masilak ([ajoyner@memphis.edu](mailto:ajoyner@memphis.edu)) for more details.

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## Upcoming Chapter Meetings

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

### Monday, March 7, 5:30–7:30

*Topic:* Word and Image, Warp and Weft: Threads in the Same Fabric

*Speaker:* Michael Schmidt, director of the Center for Multimedia Arts at the University of Memphis

*Format:* Presentation

*Location:* New Horizons Computer Learning Center, 4775 American Way (Click here for a map.)

*Cost:* \$5 for student members, \$10 for non-student members, \$10 for student non-members, \$15 for non-student non-members

### Tuesday, April 12, 6:00–7:30

*Topic:* Career night and traveling exhibit of award-winning technical publications and art along with recognition of recent achievements by chapter members

*Format:* Brief presentations and exhibit

*Location:* Central branch of the Memphis/Shelby County Public Library, 3030 Poplar Ave.

*Cost:* FREE

### Monday, May 2, 5:30–7:30

*Topic:* Preview of local technical communicators' STC 52nd annual conference presentations

*Speakers:* To be announced

*Format:* Presentation

*Location:* To be announced

*Cost:* \$5 for student members, \$10 for non-student members, \$10 for student non-members, \$15 for non-student non-members

*More information:* If you will be presenting at the annual conference and would like one last chance to run through your presentation in front an encouraging audience, please contact Alison Masilak (see below).

If you would like additional details, visit <http://www.stc-midsouth.org>. If you have ideas for future meeting topics and speakers, contact Alison Masilak ([ajoyner@memphis.edu](mailto:ajoyner@memphis.edu) or 901.274.0215). ♦

### Upgrading or Modifying Existing STC Membership

If you would like to upgrade your membership or add chapters or SIGs to your existing membership, mail or fax a completed STC Membership Change/Upgrade Form to the STC office. The form can be downloaded and printed from the STC website at <http://www.stc.org/chapterResources.asp> (after you log into the site). Or email [membership@stc.org](mailto:membership@stc.org).

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## Other Meetings of Interest to Technical Communicators

The Mid-South chapter has received notices about the following events.

### March 15–17, 2005

The Memphis Chapter of Project Management International will hold a 3-day preparation course for those taking the Project Management Professional exam. The course will be held at the Hampton Inn Southwind/Hacks Cross. For more information, contact Kenneth Watkins at [education@pmimemphis.org](mailto:education@pmimemphis.org) or go to <http://www.pmimemphis.org>.

### March 23, 2005

Sankey V. Williams, M.D., from the University of Pennsylvania at Philadelphia will present "Writing for Medical Journals: How to Impress Editors." This

presentation is part of a joint research conference held with the sponsorship of the Division of General Internal Medicine, the Department of Medicine, and the Department of Preventative Medicine at the University of Tennessee Health Science Center. The lecture will be 10:00–11:00 a.m. in rooms F302–F306 of the Coleman College of Medicine building, 956 Court Ave. For more information, call 901.448.5751.

### May 8–11, 2005

The 52nd annual conference of STC, Experiencing Technical Communication, will be held in Seattle, Washington. For more information, go to <http://www.stc.org/conference.asp>.

Please submit any announcements of meetings interest to technical communicators in the Mid-South to [newsletter@stc-midsouth.org](mailto:newsletter@stc-midsouth.org). ♦