



SOCIETY FOR
TECHNICAL
COMMUNICATION

Newsbrief

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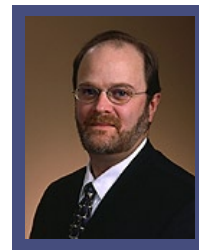
September Meeting Program: Emerging Technologies in the Mid South

by Alison Masilak

Beyond attending conferences, learning new software and networking, a key to successful professional development is to stay abreast of business developments in your community. We encourage you to learn with us about “Emerging Technologies in the Mid South” from attorney Bob Morris at our September chapter meeting, as we continue to explore the future of technical communication.

As an attorney with Butler Snow, Morris specializes in biotechnology, intellectual property and technology, and other business-related areas. He has held positions with many technology and business development organizations, including

- Chairman of the Technology Resource Foundation, a regional not-for-profit organization that provides support to area technology commercialization efforts
- Chair of the Tennessee Governor’s Board of Economic Growth
- Member of the board of the Tennessee Technology Development Corporation
- 2001 and 2002 chair of the Tennessee Governor’s Task Force on Biotechnology
- Former member of the executive board of the Memphis Area Technology Council



Attorney Bob Morris will speak to members of the Mid-South STC chapter and the Memphis Area Technology Council about regional technological trends.

As a bonus, we will have a special networking opportunity—members of the Memphis Area Technology Council have been invited to join us for Morris’ presentation.

We hope to see you at 5:30 p.m. for networking and 6:30 p.m. for the presentation at the Cottage at the Four Seasons on Monday, September 13. For directions and more details, see page 7. ♦

RECENTLY PUBLISHED

Congratulations to two chapter members for recently having articles published in internationally recognized journals.

Loel Kim and coauthor Christie Tolley

Fitting Academic Programs to Workplace Marketability: Career Paths of Five Technical Communicators. *Technical Communication* 2004;51(3):376–386

Sharese Terrell Willis

A Few Tips on Writing Well. *The Journal of the American Medical Women’s Association* 2004;59(3):157–159. Available at <http://www.jamwa.org/index.cfm?objectid=2A6351D1-D567-0B25-5DF805A6AC395065>

If you or another chapter member you know has recently had an article or book published, please tell us. Email newsletter@stc-midsouth.org.

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From the Editor

by Apryl Cox

Thanks to all of you who have already responded to the chapter's email survey about preferences on meeting times, locations, and topics. If you haven't yet, please respond by Saturday, September 18 via email or complete the survey at the September chapter meeting.

Unless you send us your suggestions, we better not hear any complaining from you later. Of course, I kid; the board always welcomes your feedback. You can even test that statement by sending questions, suggestions, or praise to one

of the officers or managers listed to the right or me at newsletter@stc-midsouth.org.

On another note, don't miss this month's chapter meeting. If you attend, you will have a unique opportunity to expand your networking base and knowledge of business in the community. Members of the Memphis Area Technology Council will join us to hear Bob Morris speak about new technologies in the Mid South.

I hope to see you at the Cottage on Monday, September 13! ♦

You Can Help

by Mary Sue MacNealy

Do you have a cell phone you no longer use? This phone could help a battered individual, an invalid, or a house-bound senior citizen reach 911 when they need emergency help. Just bring the phone to the next chapter meeting.

Last year we sent 35 phones to Phones for Life, an organization that reprograms the phones to dial only 911 and then distributes them to persons in need. Our goal this year is to collect 50 phones. We have a good start with 10 already turned in. Now it's up to you.

Hello from Portland

by Nell Johnson, 2001–2002 president of the Mid-South chapter

I think it's about time I sent some news of my whereabouts. Here's a quick list of the things I have done since I left Memphis last fall: driven 3,000 miles (my way of going northwest was by going east and then south); bonded with my 9-year-old Sheltie, Logan; bought a house (more of a "cottage"); climbed Mt. Hood (once was enough, but it was grand); written a variety of documentation (online help, web content, grants, policies & procedures); become an urban cyclist; learned how to ride a bus; planted an organic garden; painted the entire outside of my house

by myself (well, except the back door); learned to tango; become a coffee snob and my 5-year-old grandson's Friday night date. The send-off I received in Memphis was so wonderful. You don't know how many times I think back on the Mid-South STC group and what a rewarding experience it is for me to have worked (and played) with you all. The Willamette group here is huge and very active, but they meet in Beaverton, which is a suburb. I'm not active because of the logistics—there are

Hello continued on p. 3



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

Society President.....Andrea Ames

Region 3

Director-Sponsor..... Beth Tanner

Mid-South Chapter

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 ≥ 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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only a couple of highways going over the hill to Beaverton, the rush hour traffic can be brutal, and the bus takes over an hour. See? They have the same problems here! Suffice it to say that you all have a place to stay in Portland. Mi casa es su casa. And if you come in the winter, bring a raincoat.

The trip out here was epic. It was liberating to have all those days and nights to drive wherever I wanted to, sleep in whatever campground I could find, or have a swanky evening with my dog at Motel 6. (I could tell that Logan

preferred the Motel 6 to our tent, but he tried to act excited when we camped.) Some of the high spots of the trip out included the Smokies, Hot Springs, Houston, Big Bend National Park (where I swam to Mexico and back), Rocky Mountain National Park, Boulder, Arches National Park, Oak Creek Canyon, Sedona, White Sands National Monument, Joshua Tree National Park, LA, Highway 1, the beach, the wine country, and arriving in time to have Thanksgiving dinner with my son, Nicholas, his wife, Janice, and my grandson, Brennan.

Bumper stickers around town say "Keep Portland Weird." This is my kind of city. It took a while to get



Former Mid-South chapter president Nell Johnson enjoys climbing Mount Hood after her recent retirement from FedEx and move to Portland, Oregon.

some work, but when I finally got some, I got too much! Right now, I'm teaching an online course in technical writing at Portland Community College, writing web content for Earth Share of Oregon, and working downtown as a contractor writing policies and procedures 4 days a week. I'm working independently, as a sole proprietor, and that suits me well at this point in my career.

My personal email is still thnkmt@hotmail.com; let me hear from you. Some day soon I'll have my professional website up, and I'll send an announcement. Nelljohnson.com, that's me!

My love and highest regards to the lot of you. ♦

CALL FOR CLIPPINGS

If you see an 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, at the next meeting. She needs 2 original copies of each notice for the chapter's entry in the STC chapter publicity competition.

New Employment Manager

Thanks to Paige Marshall for volunteering to take on the role of employment manager for the Mid-South chapter! If you hear of a local job in technical communication or are searching for one, let Paige know. You can contact her at 901.263.2557 or paige.marshall@fedex.com.

Technical Communication: A View from Below

by Jonathan W. Baker, STC Region 1 Director-Sponsor

As August winds down, I am struggling to put some thoughts together about the field of technical communication. I don't know about you, but I am worn out talking about the economy, the changing technical communications field, the war in Iraq, terrorism, and just about everything else. In fact, I am so bummed that I want a special SIG set up for burnt out, fried, and otherwise abused technical communicators. Maybe we can call it the Walking Wounded SIG or the Burnt Up, Used Up, Dried Up SIG. OK. I am honestly trying to be funny. But there is some truth to the idea that this field is at least 3 years into perhaps the worst downward spiral we have experienced in 50 years. And many of us are feeling less than perfect, compared to how we felt about ourselves a few years back. I mean, don't you just want to have some fun, like back in the good old days of 1999? Everything was rock and roll, way back then. Jobs were plentiful, and if you didn't have one on Monday, you surely would have a choice between two or three jobs on Tuesday.

So, how do we go about feeling better about our field and ourselves? I would suggest that this is a great time to go back to school. Whether you take a course in RoboHelp or Java, whether you get into a degree program or take an evening school crafts course, you will be doing something to help yourself. Everything you learn eventually adds value.

Last spring, I took a motorcycle maintenance course. I thought this wasn't related to technical communication, but then I learned that there actually are technical communicators out there putting

together the motorcycle service manuals we used in class. It never occurred to me that my motorcycle skills could be used in this business. Another positive that came out of taking the class was that it got me out of the house and got me thinking about something other than work. There is LOTS of value in that.

A few years back I took a webmasters' certificate program from a local university. It gave my career a good kick at a time when I needed it. The interesting thing is that I really never became a webmaster, but it sure is great to have that knowledge in my inventory of skills. Employers liked to see my interest in learning too. I don't think it really mattered to them what the subject matter was; it showed that I was engaged and willing to learn. If you want to stay in this field for the near term, maybe it is time to sign up for that technical course to advance your skills and differentiate yourself from everyone else.

Personally, I do believe that many in STC want to do nothing more than be good basic technical communicators. And that is a great goal. Not all of us should move on to other things like information architecture, usability, or project management. Some writ-

ers simply want to be writers and some editors want nothing more than to edit. To stay in these areas, advanced technical knowledge is essential. The more you have, the better. Some of us will go on to those other disciplines, but it doesn't change the fact that we are all communicators and need to keep our skills—both technical and communication—fresh.

If you haven't been back to school in the last 3 years, it is time for you to give it serious thought. The STC website <http://www.stc.org/academic.asp> has listings of some educational programs that are meaningful to our field, but don't forget to check out your local colleges and universities. I just found out that there is a college in Massachusetts that is providing a very robust program in communication and information science. And yet, even with years of chapter experience in Massachusetts, I had never heard of this program. So the message is to get out there and turn over some stones to find some of the neat things going on in your own community. I am about to embark on my next learning adventure—a masters of science, human factors in information design. I recommend that you do the same.

View from Below continued on p. 5

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, our STC region director sponsor, and Thea Teich, the immediate past president of the Society, will present an update on the Society's transformation initiative. They will also 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 on transformation, see <http://www.stc.org/transformation>. For more details on the October meeting see the next issue of *Newsbrief* and our website (<http://www.stc-midsouth.org>).

On the STC front, the transformation is progressing. If you haven't heard about the transformation or aren't clear on what is happening with the transformation, contact one of the directors for further information. If we don't have the answers, we probably know someone who does. Be sure to check out the transformation pages on the STC website—<http://www.stc.org/transformation>. (Note: you no longer have to log in to get to this page.) The website is the authoritative source. There are still lots of transformation activities underway, and the Board will be reporting on the current status of our efforts soon after the September Board meeting. In addition, we are already planning sessions on the transformation for our annual conference in May. If there is something you want to see or hear from us, let us know.

Look for some changes in your membership renewal forms this year. We are beginning to roll out the new membership packages—Classic, Limited, E-Membership, and others—this fall. Again, if you have questions about these packages, contact a director. The office will also be able to answer any questions about the membership packages.

Finally, it is September. That means your chapter is about to get into full gear. You have a great group of chapter leaders working on your behalf. Get out and support them by attending chapter events. It is a great way to network and keep up with your local technical communication community. In fact, volunteer! Most chapters will welcome you with open arms. And chapter work is extraordinarily rewarding. So jump in and see what happens. ♦

Coming to Memphis in October: SIGDOC Annual Conference

by Mike Albers

SIGDOC, the Association of Computing Machinery (ACM) Special Interest Group for Design of Communication, will hold its annual conference this October 10–13 in Memphis. Taking place at the Fogelman Conference Center on the University of Memphis (U of M) campus, SIGDOC 2004 will bring together some of the top technical communication professionals throughout the world. This year's event promises to be among the most exciting in a long series of outstanding SIGDOC conferences, and we would like to invite all the local STC members to participate.

Highlights

- 10 paper sessions (2 tracks with about 40 papers total) and 3 workshops will be held.
- The opening keynote talk will be given by Dr. Art Graesser, U of M professor of psychology, editor of the journal *Discourse Processes*, and principal investigator on the web-based intelligent tutoring system AutoTutor.
- At Monday's luncheon, STC will receive the Diana award, which is given to an organization that has made a significant contribution to the field.
- Monday afternoon, we get a tour of the Institute for Intelligent Systems at the U of M FedEx Institute of Technology and get to work with the projects they have underway.
- At Tuesday's luncheon, Alan Cooper (he wrote *The Inmates Are Running the Asylum*) will receive the Rigo award, which is given for an individual's lifetime contribution to the field.

- On Tuesday night, we'll have the banquet at the Rum Boogie Café on Beale St.

The STC annual conference attracts a few thousand people versus SIGDOC's 50 or so. The smaller size gives you an opportunity to meet with and spend time talking to all the attendees. Since SIGDOC attendees typically have 5 or more years of experience in the field, the level of experience is reflected in session topics that address issues of interest to people that already understand the basics of technical communication.

If cost considerations are keeping your employer from paying for you to attend the STC annual conference this May, point out that SIGDOC 2004 is an international conference with no travel or hotel costs since it's local. The only expense will be the registration.

Like STC, SIGDOC is a society of students, experienced practitioners, and academics dedicated to furthering the technical communication profession. Members are from all technical and scientific disciplines, those who create documentation in the computing community and those who use computers to create documentation in many styles and media. ♦

For More Information

On SIGDOC 2004

<http://www.sigdoc.org/2004/sigdoc2004@acm.org>

Mike Albers, local arrangements
malbers@acm.org

On SIGDOC

<http://www.acm.org/sigdoc>

On the ACM

<http://www.acm.org/>

August Meeting Notes

by Gail Spake

On Monday, August 2, 21 attendees gathered at the Cottage at the Four Seasons to participate in a progression on trends in technical communication. Participants had the chance to join three 20-minute small-group discussions, each of which was led by a moderator who used a recent article from an STC publication to guide conversation.

Working on Remote Teams

Nina Pinsley moderated the table for remote project teams, referencing “When No One’s Home: Being a Writer on Remote Project Teams” by Nancy E. Larbi and Susan Springfield from *Technical Communication*, February 2004, pages 102–108. Nina currently works remotely from her home in Memphis as a writer for a software development company based in North Carolina. Her project team also has implementation, sales, and development members.

Nina led discussion on several aspects of working remotely, including the importance of setting project milestones, using version control and style guides, and evaluating the best media for communicating with team members. Nina finds that for the long distance relationships on a remote team to work well, everyone must be engaged, the team must have policies about accountability, and all team members must be aware of deadlines. She also mentioned some tools that are helpful for managing document control (e.g., Visual Source Safe) and conferencing (e.g., WebX) among remote team members.

Editing On-Screen

Sarah Brown led discussion on the benefits and challenges of on-line editing, with a focus on the ar-

ticle “Implementing On-screen Editing” by Geoffrey J.S. Hart from *Intercom*, May 2004, pages 36–37. Sarah cited her experience as an editor of *The Journal of Clinical Psychiatry*, which is published by Memphis-based Physicians Postgraduate Press. She described how online editing has helped her company streamline the editing process and improve clarity by eliminating errors introduced by unclear handwriting.

Some challenges she has encountered involving online editing have been authors’ perceptions that they have less control with online edits than with handwritten ones and authors’ confusion about how change-tracking software features work. Sarah noted that her company has opted to solve these problems by sending electronically marked-up documents in PDF format to authors so that they can see changes but leave electronic version control to the editor. Potential technical difficulties mentioned by Sarah and other discussion participants were some documents not being readable with both Macintosh and IBM-compatible computers and special characters not translating into the publisher’s font sets.

Writing for the Web

Alison Masilak led conversation about the differences between writing for the web and writing for print. As electronic communications coordinator at the University of Memphis, Alison has several years’ experience with developing websites and online newsletters. In the article that was discussed, Judy Gregory’s “Writing for the Web Versus Writing for Print: Are They Really So Different” from *Technical Communication*, May

2004, pages 276–285, the author noted that genre may be as suitable a guide for constructing both web and print content as any other. For example, whether in print or online, the content and design of a newspaper article is much different than that of a policy manual.

During conversation, differences in length of content in print and web material were addressed, and discussion centered around the notion that web content must be abbreviated. Participants noted that the material should be long enough to cover the subject but short enough to remain interesting.

Alison and others also noted that some elements of writing guidelines and design principles for print documents may be useful for web publications. However, web content is less linearly arranged than print content. As readers become more accustomed to reading online, expectations of web content may influence print content.

Alison and others mentioned the advantages of having a team to manage web design: a technical writer to create and manage content, a designer for visual components, and a technical person to write code and manage links and functionality. ◆

New on the STC Website: *Intercom* Online

STC members can enjoy early access to the current issue of *Intercom* as well as download PDFs of all articles dating back to October 1999. Nonmembers may access PDFs of selected articles from the current issue free of charge. Everyone can use the new full-text search to find archived articles. Visit <http://www.stc.org/intercom>.

Upcoming Meetings

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

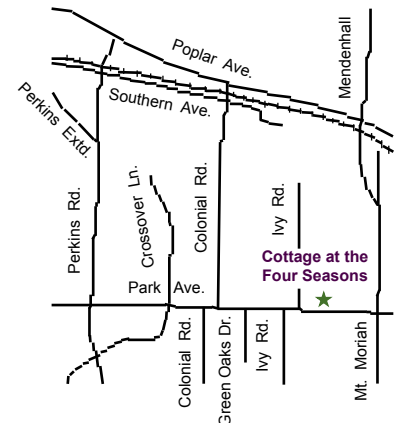
Unless otherwise noted, meetings cost \$10 (\$5 for students with a valid ID), and cash is requested.

Monday, September 13, 5:30–8:00

Topic: Emerging technologies in the Mid South

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

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.



Monday, October 11, 5:30–7:30

Topic: Presentation and Q&A on STC's transformation initiative

Speakers: Beth Tanner, STC Region 3 director-sponsor, and Thea Teich, the Society's immediate past president

Location: The Central Library, 3030 Poplar Ave.

Cost: FREE, as part of membership appreciation night

Monday, November 1, 5:30–8:00

Topic: Panel presentation on contract working

Speakers: To be determined

Location: To be determined

If you would like additional details or have ideas for future meeting topics and speakers, contact Alison Masilak (ajoyner@memphis.edu or 901.274.0215). ◆

Upcoming STC Web-Telephone Seminars

General information: STC's seminar series features high-quality training at an affordable price. During the quick and simple online registration process, participants receive an 800 number, a secure URL, and passwords to access the audio and online elements of the seminar. On the day of the seminar, participants listen to the presenter(s) over the phone while viewing presentation materials over the web. Then everyone can participate in a lively Q&A discussion. Note that each site can have only one phone connection and one computer connection and registration closes 24 hours before the seminar begins.

Cost per site: STC members, \$99; non-STC members, \$149

Time: 12:00–1:30 p.m. CST

Schedule:

Wednesday, September 15

Cascading Style Sheets: Learning the Basics (Part I)

Char James-Tanny

Beginner-Intermediate

Wednesday, September 29

Cascading Style Sheets: Creating Layouts without Tables (Part II)

Char James-Tanny

Beginner-Intermediate

Wednesday, October 6

Communicating with Older Audiences

Dana Chisnell and Amy Lee

Advanced

Wednesday, October 20

A Brief, Comprehensive Indexing Primer

Seth Maislin

All Skill Levels

More information and registration: <http://stc.webex.com/>