

# Newsbrief

The newsletter of the Mid-South Chapter of  
the Society for Technical Communication

July 2009  
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## President's Column

by Kelly Schrank

**H**ello Mid-South Chapter members and friends! I am so glad to be writing a column for our revamped newsletter! It's been over a year since this chapter has had a newsletter and I think it is such a valuable resource for our community. Thank you, Ken Armstrong, for taking this on.

I would also like to thank Manny Karkowsky for becoming our Treasurer this year.

The chapter must have a Treasurer and President in order to continue, so his willingness to take on this responsibility has been the difference between us having a chapter this year and NOT having a chapter this year! I would also like to acknowledge Anna Acerra as our new Secretary; she is a great asset to the chapter and always takes great meeting notes. Now all we are missing on our board is a Vice President; if you are looking for a way to get out in the world and want to plan our meetings this year, let me know. I could certainly use the help.

I am also thankful for our returning administrative council members: the ever-loyal Glenn Sanders as our webmaster, Loel Kim as our academic liaison, and Susan Popham as our scholarship manager. Our newest addition to the administrative council is Julie Grady as Employment Manager; look for some changes to the website employment page soon.



Kelly Schrank, Chapter President

In my month or so as President, I have tried to make some small but positive changes to the chapter. Some things you may have noticed:

(1) We are asking for different information on our sign-in sheets. Please fill in all the boxes on the sign-in sheet at meetings, so we can learn a little more about you and better meet your needs. (2) We are having meetings published in the *Commercial Appeal's* business section again, so hopefully that will bring more people to meetings. (3) We have a LinkedIn

group for the chapter. If you're on LinkedIn, please sign up for our group and get involved in our discussions.

**I am really looking forward to working with our members and friends over the next year to create better programs and provide more services to our community.**

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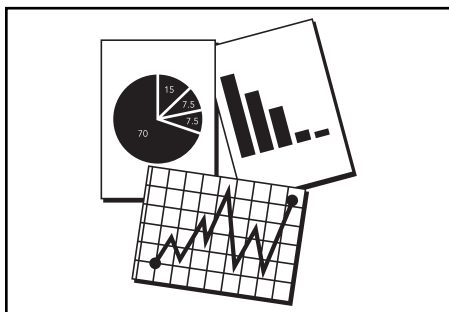
*STC advances the theory and practice of technical communication across all user abilities and media so that both businesses and customers benefit from safe, appropriate, and effective use of products, information, and services.*

see President's Column, page 4

## The Top Ten Mistakes Writers Make Looking for Work

From a presentation by Jack Molisani, a recruiter and the owner of ProSpring Technical Staffing, at the 2009 STC Summit

- #1 Not following submission guidelines
- #2 Not using network /not building professional relationships
- #3 Bad manners
- #4 Applying when you are not remotely qualified
- #5 Not summarizing skills vs requirements
- #6 Mis-naming your resume
- #7 Having a poor resume
- #8 Mis-evaluation of importance
- #9 Not anticipating questions
- #10 Not keeping current



## The Power of Charts & Graphs

by Ken Armstrong

We are bombarded with statistical information every day. Given as raw numbers, this information can seem too abstract to fully understand or appreciate. But, when presented visually as charts,

graphs, or diagrams, statistical information can be very powerful. A graphic designer can use charts and graphs to illustrate statistics, make interpretations, and marry the illustration with the subject.

A “chartmaker,” as author Nigel Holmes refers to them in *Designer’s Guide to Creating Charts & Diagrams*, can literally make the meaning of figures visible. This unlocks their mystery. For example, when we are told that the percentage of government funds spent on healthcare is 36.3 in Liberia, 21.8 in the United States, and 18.7 in Switzerland, that gives the information but does not make it as clear and accessible as a bar chart that illustrates that information.

Interpretations can also be made about statistics when they are presented visually. Holmes makes the point that when the numbers are shown only as a rising and falling line or a set of bars, they have no relation to the subject and may fail to engage the reader. However, creative representation of the visual information can engage the reader’s imagination and add to the reader’s understanding of the article.

One way to make a chart, graph, or diagram more illuminating is to incorporate the subject in the design. For example, Holmes shows a fever graph of the rising gap between Japanese imports and exports between 1974 and see **Charts & Graphs**, page 6

*Newsbrief* is the quarterly newsletter of the Mid-South Chapter of the Society for Technical Communication, a nonprofit organization. Our chapter serves the Memphis, TN and surrounding areas. We create the newsletter to do the following:

- Involve members and visitors more fully in professional 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 to *Newsbrief*, please contact the newsletter editor with your ideas.

### Copyright

Writers are invited to submit articles for publication consideration. 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. Please let the newsletter editor know if your article has run elsewhere or been submitted to another publication.

### 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 if a copy of the reprint is sent to the newsletter editor.

### Subscription

To receive email notification when *Newsbrief* has been posted online, send your email address to the newsletter editor.

### Advertising

Advertisements relevant to technical communicators are accepted. Base prices are listed below, and discounts will be given for ads that run in at least two consecutive issues. For more information, contact the newsletter editor.

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

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## Mid-South Chapter

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## Officers

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### President

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### Vice President

Open

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## My Experience at the 2009 STC Summit

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by Kelly Schrank

I always enjoy the STC conference. From a social standpoint, it is great to spend time with my peers, discussing our projects or jobs or co-workers. I always meet new people that I can't wait to see at the next conference, and I often get to meet people I have previously only "talked" to on email. From an educational standpoint, there are always sessions that teach me A LOT, and others that I wish had taught me more. I always come away having at least a cursory knowledge of the latest tools, trends, and technologies, even if I am not able to implement them at work. And this year, I was looking for information to help me be a better chapter president.

For the sake of brevity, I am only going to discuss a couple of sessions that were really eye-opening to me.

Louellen Coker of Content Solutions presented "Professional Portfolios" as part of the Consulting and Independent Contracting Special Interest Group's Progression. I have admittedly NOT spent enough time on my portfolio, so I found it interesting and her handout is good.

Her handout suggests that you have four portfolios: (1) an archive of every project you will ever use in interviews,

see **2009 Summit**, page 5

## Seven Habits of Highly Successful Technical Communicators

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From a panel presentation by Bernard Aschwanden of Publishing Smarter, Rob Frankland of Sock Monkey Consulting LLC, and Lisa Swallow of Mentor Graphics at the 2009 STC Summit

- #1 Confident
- #2 Passionate
- #3 Driven to Explore
- #4 Creative Problem-Solving
- #5 Continuous Learning
- #6 Technical Aptitude
- #7 Comfort with Chaos

## Upcoming Events

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### July STC Networking Luncheon (Midtown)

- July 14, 2009
- 11 A.M. – noon
- Bosco's Squared,  
2120 Madison Ave.

### July STC Networking Luncheon (East)

- July 16, 2009
- 11 A.M. – noon
- Half Shell,  
7825 Winchester Rd.

### July PRSA Memphis Meeting

- July 8, 2009
- 11:45 A.M. – 1:00 P.M.
- Holiday Inn – University of Memphis
- [www.prsamemphis.org/en/cev/129](http://www.prsamemphis.org/en/cev/129)

## President's Column

*continued from page 1*

The administrative council has other things in the works: (1) We are gathering ideas for the next year's meetings. Our election calendar runs from May to May, so I am just beginning to get things together for the rest of the year. Please let me know if you know of any great speakers, have any ideas for programs, know some sponsors who could feed us or bring paid speakers, or like/dislike the luncheons or programs at the library. We are open to feedback. (2) We voted in some changes to the chapter by-laws allowing students to get more involved in chapter activities, and the national Society has made a new by-laws template available based on some changes they needed to make, so melding those two documents is a project that I am hoping someone will volunteer to accomplish. (3) We would like to implement meeting evaluation forms to get feedback from attendees on speakers and programs. If you would like to take this action item or have a good template for us to use, please let me know.

I am really looking forward to working with our members and friends over the next year to create better programs and provide more services to our community. If you would like to be involved, come on out to meetings and volunteer! ✍️



Attendees at the June 24 Administrative Council meeting at Old Venice Pizza Company were (left–right) Julie Grady, Kelly Schrank, Anna Acerra, Glenn Sanders, Manny Karkowsky, and Ken Armstrong (not pictured).

## June Meeting

The June Monthly Meeting was held at the Central Library. There were about eight people in attendance.

Chapter president Kelly Schrank discussed some of her favorite presentations from the 2009 Technical Communication Summit as the lone representative from the chapter to go to the Summit this year. She also took the opportunity to ask attendees at the meeting what they thought about some of the things she learned at Leadership Day. For instance, the Society believes that non-members should have to pay to attend chapter functions. She also learned that many other chapters have dinner meetings with presenters (with a significant cost for dinner). Attendees at the meeting thought that par-

ticipation may rise when meetings require a payment because the cost raises their perceived value of the meetings. Others believed that speakers should be valuable and exciting to entice more meeting attendees. Kelly also reiterated her belief that SIGs are a valuable benefit to STC membership, especially if you get involved with them. She also announced the creation of a Mid-South chapter group on LinkedIn, encouraging those on LinkedIn to get involved in discussions. ✍️



## 2009 Summit

*continued from page 3*

(2) a presentation portfolio (nice leather one) with all your best work for the job at hand, (3) a sample that you are willing to leave behind, and (4) an electronic portfolio of your best projects on CD/DVD/website. She emphasized that you should REALLY know everything in your portfolio and that non-profit and personal work is fine.

Other good advice: make PDFs of all electronic docs and have backups. This is especially important if you don't have any software at home, like Framemaker or Acrobat. Other good advice is to enter your work in the stc publications competition, so you can say a piece in your portfolio is "award-winning."

She also discussed your "elevator portfolio" which is a business card on a magnet. Hers had her skill set, website, and company name. She actually had three business cards: a double-sided card with her name, company name, and contact information on one side, then the skill set on the back; a double-sided card with the skill set on one side and a coupon on the other side, and the "elevator portfolio" magnet.

Overall, I felt that was good information for such a short presentation.

Jack Molisani is a recruiter and the owner of ProSpring Technical Staffing. He had many sessions for job seekers, but "Portfolio and Interview

Strategies: How to Ace a Job Interview" blew me away. If you can pull this off, I don't see how you could NOT get a job. He believes that a portfolio is a tool for walking potential clients/ employers down a path of understanding that:

- you are an expert,
- you have done what's in your resume,
- you can do the same for them.

His biggest bit of advice, which he repeated: "You need to control the conversation." He advises that you use the portfolio to guide the interview, creating a conversation about you. Like Louellen Coker, he suggested using a nice leather portfolio with plastic page protectors. Someone asked "What if they want you to leave it with them?" and he answered that you would never leave the portfolio with them...he does not even want you to let them touch it! He repeated this many times: "DO NOT LET THE PORTFOLIO OUT OF YOUR HANDS."

The first sample in his portfolio is a doc plan/project plan, with the overview of the project (objective, terms and abbreviations, change history, changes anticipated), then the project description (title, purpose, audience, scope, prerequisites, cross-references, estimated length, media), and finally the result, a few pages of the longer document. He advises that you walk them through every step of the doc plan/project plan to let them

know you have thought of everything. You should not assume that they understand the level of detail needed to get a manual together.

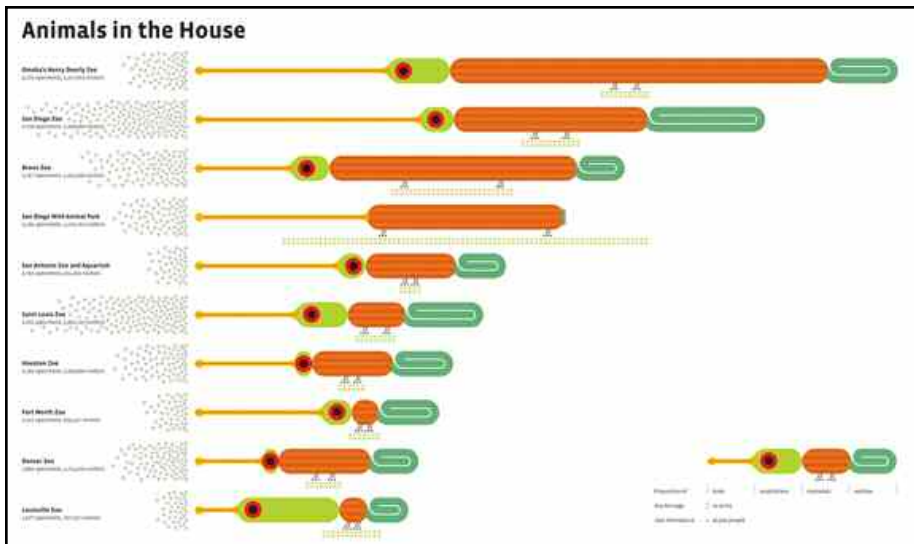
Other samples would be actual awards received for documentation (not the docs that won the award, but a copy of the actual award), citations about you in publications, ads for the products documented (to show how complicated they are or the big name companies involved). Though he is a tech writer, most of the samples were NOT writing samples; it was essentially a brag book.

The whole point was to walk them through each piece of the portfolio, telling them what you wanted them to know, and controlling the conversation. If you let them take it or hold it and ask questions, then you have lost control of the conversation and you won't be able to tell them what you want them to hear about you. He seemed to be a pretty confident guy, so I can see where he could get away with it. There is a lot you could do with his advice, and I found it helpful.

Neither of these sessions had their handouts on the web,

*see 2009 Summit, page 6*





A graph showing various American zoos' numbers of species, vistors, and acreage from *GOOD* magazine.

## Charts & Graphs

*continued from page 2*

1978 over a silhouette of a mounted samurai with his sword raised in the air. The exports line is in red and extends to the top of his sword while the imports line is in white and only extends to the horse's head. This references Japanese woodblock prints and makes the graph much more eye-catching than if it were a simple fever graph with no other illustration. This technique does have to be used with caution, however, so that it does not trivialize the subject or interfere with the information being presented.

Imaginative illustration, interpretive elements, and transformation of figures into visual information can all be goals of a "chartmaker." It is a way to take the mystery out of statistics and make them more accessible than when they are presented solely in prose. 📌



## 2009 Summit

*continued from page 5*

but you have the opportunity to see the presentations and hear the sessions via the SUMMIT@aClick program. STC is currently packaging the audio and graphics of the sessions to sell the presentations to those who did not attend. 📌



## Live Webinars

STC offers many webinars from well-known speakers on topics of concern to technical communicators. Members access the calls online; the cost is \$79 per person.

### July

Wednesday, 8 July, 2009

12:00 – 1:30 P.M.

*Content Management in a Down Economy*

Presented by Ann Rockley

Wednesday, 15 July, 2009

12:00 – 1:30 P.M.

*Designing and Implementing Embedded Help*

Presented by Nicky Bleiel

Wednesday, 22 July, 2009

12:00 – 1:30 P.M.

*Today's Agile Documentation*

Presented by Megan Leney

Wednesday, 29 July, 2009

12:00 – 1:30 P.M.

*Converting Readers from Casual Subscribers to Devoted Followers: Best Practices for Blogging*

Presented by Tom Johnson

### August

Wednesday, 5 August, 2009

12:00 – 1:30 P.M.

*Creating Visual Training with Adobe Captivate 4*

Presented by Neil Perlin

Wednesday, 26 August, 2009

12:00 – 1:30 P.M.

*Functional Forms Design: Putting Pragmatism Before Aestheticism*

Presented by Eric Spears 📌