



SOCIETY FOR
TECHNICAL
COMMUNICATION

Volume 20, Number 2

February 2002

Newsbrief

Monthly Publication of the Mid-South Chapter

The Challenges of Archiving and Accessing Scientific and Technical Information

by Scott Thompson

More and more, new information retrieval schemes are becoming a part of our collective information management vocabulary. At the end of the last century, for example, single-source content management (a.k.a. single sourcing) was merely a concept: the notion of systematically delivering a single source of information to multiple types of media — Web, print, CD-ROM, eBooks, and wireless devices, such as personal digital assistants (PDAs) and cell phones. Well, it's two years later, and, although some single-sourcing technology has started to emerge, it still remains largely a buzzword. Why have few organizations, admittedly, fully embraced this technology? And, why have even fewer made an attempt?

Well, without over evaluating the situation (the technology, in terms of development, is still embryonic, after all), the answer seems to lie in the information itself. Single sourcing presupposes that an organization has already taken the time to not only electronically archive all of its information "assets" (e.g., product catalogs, data sheets, operating manuals, training materials, service guides or reference publications), but also encode the information in a manner that renders it retrievable through a common user interface, such as a Web browser, database software package, or custom application. To build an effective information database, to make the information useful, to retrieve it effectively, and to keep it updated requires a huge up-front investment. And, seemingly, few organizations have committed, or are currently willing to commit, the level of effort and other resources that it takes.



"The Web has changed the rules. For the first time, companies believe that providing information (aka content) improves their competitive position and gives them an edge, particularly in the e-commerce arena," muses Paula Berger in her article, "Zeroing In on the Bottom Line." And, consequently, as technical communicators, she adds, "We've been forced to manage (and, in some cases, maintain) huge libraries of legacy documentation." Unfortunately, by placing so much emphasis on the process, it seems that organizations have lost sight of the product.

Join the Mid-South chapter as we welcome Dr. David Armbruster from the University of Tennessee Health Science Center, on Monday, February 4th, at the Pig-N-Whistle Barbecue Restaurant on Winchester Road. During our meeting, Dr. Armbruster will discuss how the digital medium has significantly changed some of the ways in which we now archive and access scientific and technical information.

David Armbruster, Ph.D., has headed Scientific Publications at the University of Tennessee Health Science Center for 18 years. For the past three years, he has served as adjunct faculty in the Professional Writing Program at the University of Memphis. Dr. Armbruster has also worked as a scientific/technical editor in Oak Ridge, TN, and Atlanta, GA. He is a Fellow and Past President of the Society for Technical Communication.

The meeting will begin at 6:00 p.m. A barbecue buffet dinner will be offered at a cost of \$10.00/person, which includes tax and gratuity.

Reference

Berger, Paula R. "Zeroing In on the Bottom Line," *Intercom*, January 2002.

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Meeting Notes

by Alison Joyner Masilak

Show-and-tell programs have historically been our chapter's most popular meeting format, and the January installment was no exception, with 28 attendees on hand to see what our colleagues have been up to professionally. Chapter members from Federal Express, EnSafe, Physicians Postgraduate Press, and Towery Publishing showed off their wares to the packed room.

Becky Derych and Elizabeth Boone of Physicians Postgraduate Press (PPP) presented resources their company offers to physicians. Along with a pair of peer-reviewed journals, PPP produces educational materials that allow doctors to earn CME credit (similar to continuing education credit). Content for some of these materials comes from doctors' roundtable discussions for which Becky and Elizabeth serve as ghostwriters. They explained how PPP keeps diverse learning styles in mind by producing their materials in multiple formats, including audio.

Jackie Walters of Federal Express showed off a test plan that her team has been developing for 14 years! The test plan is for the "PowerPad," a device that will eventually replace the existing handheld device that couriers use to scan packages. The test plan is still being tweaked.

Becky Marsh told us about an interesting side project she's been working on. She keeps her ears open, listening for phrases that may sound perfectly normal in context, but perfectly hilarious out of context. For example, while working at Towery Publishing, one of her colleagues uttered "I gave it to you when you were gone." Becky is documenting these phrases in hopes of turning the project into a larger linguistic study.

Margaret Carbaugh of EnSafe, Inc., presented a program that she developed to help content experts at EnSafe cut down on common word errors. Margaret began by logging misused words and word pairs, and from this log identified 50 frequently abused words. From that list, Margaret developed a feature for EnSafe's Intranet site, "Words to the Wise," which explained the proper usage of the misused word, giving examples from the content experts' work, when possible.

Margaret found that, since "Words to the Wise" began running as a weekly feature on the Intranet, word usage among the content experts measurably improved — and that word usage questions had also increased. Although the original 50 words have been exhausted, Margaret is continuing the program and may delve into style guide issues

The Society for Technical Communication (STC) is an individual membership organization dedicated to advancing the arts and sciences of technical communication. It is the largest organization of its type in the world. The Society's 25,000 members include technical writers, editors, graphic designers, videographers, multimedia artists, Web and Intranet page information designers, translators, and others whose work involves making technical information available to those who need it.

Membership in STC offers opportunities to learn new job skills, network with other technical communicators, and broaden your professional horizons. To learn more about what the STC has to offer, visit:

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



SOCIETY FOR
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Designing the future of technical communication

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A sharing community creating opportunity

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next. During her presentation, Margaret referenced several Web sites that she found useful while developing her program:

Merriam Webster Online —
<http://www.m-w.com>
Chicago Manual of Style FAQ —

<http://www.press.uchicago.edu/Misc/Chicago/cmosfaq.html>
Bare Bones Guide to HTML —
<http://werbach.com/barebones/>

Next up, Lyn Joyner of Federal Express demonstrated materials that she and a graphic designer produced for the company's Environmental Management and Facilities Management Departments to promote recycling. Print materials, including a brochure and posters encouraging employees to recycle, kicked off the three-phase promotional campaign. Lyn also produced a comprehensive Intranet site that lists how to recycle everything from absorbent materials to wood pallets. Lyn said that increases in employee recycling and resultant cost savings over the campaign's two-year roll-out were significant.

Finishing off the show-and-tell was Joe Lakey of Federal Express who showed us one of his group's manuals in FrameMaker and WebWorks. Unfortunately, time constraints prevented Joe from demonstrating how WebWorks generates Web pages from FrameMaker documents. Maybe he'll pick up where he left off during our next show-and-tell program?

Volunteers Needed!

by Amy Hollister

For most STC chapters, the biggest problem is attracting and keeping volunteers. The Mid-South chapter is no exception. We are in desperate need of volunteers. The questions (and reasons for them) that I have for each of you are:

Where do you work and what do you do? You might have a specific skill that



the program committee could use for an upcoming meeting.

What is your interest in STC? Some people join an organization to see how they can help and others to be helped.

Do you like to meet with or talk to other people? If you do, would you be willing to greet the attendees at the next meeting and, as such, be a part of the Hospitality Committee?

Would you help on a small task for a committee? For example, the chapter Membership Committee needs a manager to oversee, assist, and ensure tasks and projects are started and done on time.

There are still smaller volunteer tasks:

- Organize a membership drive.
- Create a display for the membership drive.
- Maintain a database for new members and a complimentary mailing list.
- Write membership articles for the chapter newsletter, "Newsbrief."
- Produce the chapter directory.
- Mail the directory to new members.

You might be asking yourself, "Why should I volunteer?" Well, here are a few reasons:

- Opportunity to learn new skills.
- Become part of a team.
- Prove or improve skills; management, planning, etc.
- Make a difference.
- Add to professional image.

Please help the Mid-South chapter build its strong volunteer base. We need you! If you are interested in being a volunteer, please contact me at (662) 349-8967 (local call) or at abhollister@bellsouth.net.

Society Office to Mail Preliminary Program

STC's 49th Annual Conference will take place May 5-8, 2002, in Nashville, Tennessee. All STC members will soon

Newsbrief

Newsbrief is the monthly publication of the Mid-South chapter of the Society for Technical Communication, a nonprofit organization. Nine issues of *Newsbrief* are published each year (September through May). 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 and professionals within local industry.
- 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) or Microsoft Word (DOC) file, or as text incorporated within the body of an e-mail;
- Photos as Joint Photographer's Interest Group (JPG) files; and
- Line art as Graphics Interchange Format (GIF) or Windows Meta-File (WMF) files.

Of course, we are more than willing to accept images (photos and line art alike) as Tagged Image File Format (TIFF) files, since these files are ideal for print. If you choose to submit a TIFF, however, please set the file resolution to 150 dots per inch (dpi) or higher.

To ensure that we publish articles within a timely fashion, we ask that you submit your articles by the tenth of each month for the coming month's issue. Send all submissions to the editor of *Newsbrief*.

Copyright

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Reprints

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receive a copy of the Preliminary Program, which includes registration forms, information on technical sessions, conference transportation contacts, and other information designed to help you plan your conference trip.

The Preliminary Program will be mailed with the February issue of Intercom, which STC members will receive in January, and will also be posted on the Society Web site (www.stc.org).

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Chapter Secretary

by Alison Joyner Masilak

[Editor's note: This article is the third in a series of articles explaining the various positions that make up the Mid-South chapter's administrative council. These articles are intended to aid our membership in understanding the role that the council plays in the organization, the community, and the STC at large.]



Largely a behind-the-scenes role, the secretary serves as the eyes and ears of the chapter. In addition to attending the monthly chapter meetings and administrative council meetings, STC secretaries are officially responsible for:

- Minutes at administrative council and other chapter meetings (or arrange for a substitute).
- Distribution of copies of Meeting Minutes to officers within 10 days.
- Correspondence related to chapter business, at the direction of the chapter president.

Nell hasn't asked me to prepare any correspondence yet, so I'll focus on the duties that I actually do.

Taking minutes at the administrative council meeting consists of 1) attending the meeting, and 2) taking notes about what transpired during the meeting. Attending may sound easy, but it requires good map-reading skills, as most of our administrative council meetings are at homes of council members who tend to live in areas not familiar to a Midtown gal. In fact, compared to getting to the meetings, taking minutes is a piece of cake!

Having taken the minutes, it's then my responsibility to prepare and distribute copies to all administrative council members. E-mail makes this task pretty easy. I can't imagine having to actually print and mail or fax minutes to each person individually — what a hassle.

Probably the toughest of the secretary's tasks is writing the chapter meeting "minutes," which are handled differently from administrative council minutes. Usually, the minutes include a recap of the guest speaker's presentation and appear as "Meeting

Notes" in the next month's newsletter. This duty involves interpreting (or attempting to interpret) the speaker's message and delivering it in a bite-sized package. Trust me, some presentations are a lot more conducive to "Meeting Notes" than others.

As a relative newcomer to the Mid-South chapter, serving as secretary has been a great opportunity to get to know colleagues in other companies and to make some contributions to the inner workings of this professional organization.

Candidate for Society Secretary: Andrew Malcolm

First, I'd like to ask you to vote for me for Secretary of the Society for Technical Communication (STC). There's an old tale of a candidate who thanked his friend for voting for him, but his friend said, "I didn't vote for you." When asked why, he told the candidate, "You never asked me, and your opponent did, and I said 'yes.'" Consider yourself asked.



Secondly, I'd like to encourage you to read the word-limited text that each STC member will receive with this year's ballots, which I'll try not to repeat here.

The responsibilities of Secretary of STC are delineated in the STC Bylaws (§IV.2.D) as found in the annual directory issue of *Technical Communication*: 1) The duties are as — you suspect — to prepare, distribute and maintain the minutes of Society, Board, and Executive Council meetings; 2) The Secretary also conducts official correspondence; 3) The Secretary is a member of both the Board and the Executive Council and in those roles is responsible to vote upon the issues brought before the Board or Council (§IV.2 and §IV.8); and 4) There are also the traditional roles of (a) Manager of the Bylaws Committee as appointed by the President (§VI.1 and §VI.4.B) and (b) recorder of the discussion at the annual STC Forum.

The Secretary must have the skill to record proceedings and to distill content into minutes. Thus, the Secretary needs both keyboarding and technical writing skills. My very first employment was with an office dictation equipment distributor and I acquired touch-typing skills long ago from a public school. Distilling content into understandable prose is what technical communicators do and I've won awards for technical communication. Distilling discussion into prose is a skill enhanced by experience. I've been a member of STC for 38 years — the material you'll receive with the ballot tells of my STC and other professional society experience.

The Secretary must from time-to-time also sign certain legal documents on behalf of the Society. Again, experience is a

guide to this essential function. My experience and education as a licensed real estate salesman, director of two corporations, and zoning board member have given me valuable insight into legal document language. I was licensed in California from 1964 to 1967, served as the director of corporations — having owned a Rochester, NY, FM radio station and a New York City theater company, and served on two zoning boards of appeals for an aggregate of more than 10 years and chaired one for 4½ years.

As a member of both the Board and Executive Council, the Secretary must vote on the plethora of issues that appear before those bodies. Votes are guided by experience; and I've attended about a dozen Board meetings and was present (but not voting) at the meeting at which the Board accepted the resignation of Curt Youngblood, Bill Stolgitis' predecessor (circa 1982). At that time, it was proposed to have STC managed by an organization that oversaw several professional societies (STC was managed by such an organization for a year before Curt Youngblood became Executive Director). Your officers wisely chose to have STC continue to "steer its own ship."

In addition to the duties specifically proscribed by the Bylaws, the secretary is often assigned by the President to oversee the work of the Bylaws Committee just as other officers are assigned other committee-oversight functions and Director-Sponsors oversee the chapters. I've had a good deal of experience with bylaw establishment and revision in other organizations, including the rather extensive bylaw creation and revision of the English Department at the Rochester Institute of Technology, where I worked for 29 years.

A minor but significant traditional function of Secretary is the recording of the discussion at the Annual Conferences' STC Forum. At the Forum, members express their concerns and opinions — often passionately. Without minutes of these meetings, important issues and articulately expressed viewpoints might be lost. I pledge to accurately distill these discussions.

After having read all of that, I think you might ask, "what are your positions on various issues?" I believe that STC should stay the course. We must be doing a lot of things right, or we would not have had the tremendous expansion in membership and annual conference attendance that we've had. When I joined STC, née STWP, our 'office' was the dining room of our executive director and the secretary was his wife. Conferences attracted a few hundred attendees, and conference program managers accepted papers to assure that presenters added to attendance! All of that changed with the policies that we have followed, so I say, "stay the course."

Currents 2002: Program of Events

The Atlanta chapter will hold its 14th annual conference, Currents, on March 15 and 16, 2002, at the Atlanta campus of Mercer University. The theme for Currents 2002, "Designing the Future," embraces the ongoing evolution of our profession and implies the need to keep abreast of changes.



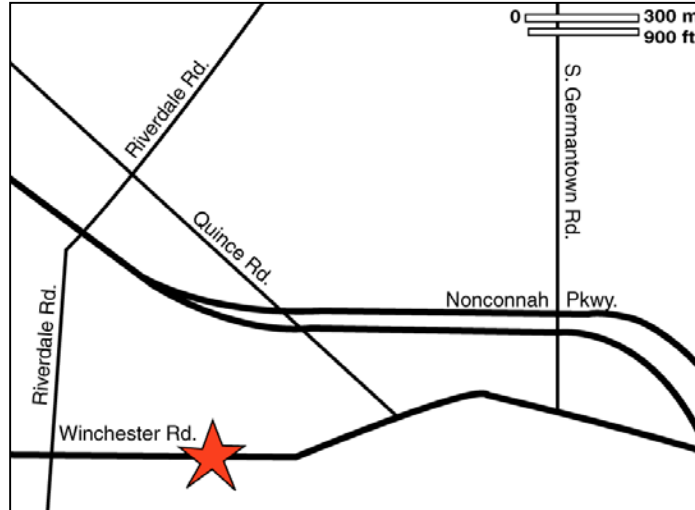
Currents begins with a full-day workshop on Friday, March 15. At the conference on Saturday, March 16, you can choose sessions from several topic stems that focus on learning new skills and tools, contracting, expanding your roles, satisfying users, education/professional development, and management. The complete program of events is as follows:

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| Pre-Conference Workshop, Friday, March 15 |
| Designing Usable Documents with Adult Learning Principles • Susan Haydock |
| Keynote Address, Saturday, March 16 |
| "It Always Starts Out Ooo, Ahh" (Jeff Goldblum, Jurassic Park) • Susan Haydock |
| Conference Sessions and Presenters, Saturday, March 16 |
| Career Development How Does the Technical Communicator Fit Into the Corporate Vision? • David Herder (panel discussion) Why Technical Writers are More Qualified to Write Marketing Materials Than They Think • Beth Ubele Marketing Communications: Yes, You Can Do It! • Thea Teich Can You Help Us Sell It? • Jack Massa |
| Management Living In Hiding: Technical Communicators and Their Hidden Value • Suzanna Laurent Masters Degrees for Technical Communicators • Marjorie Davis, Ph.D. Mentoring Technical Communicators • Denise Lee I'm Going to Work With You: Applying Team Dynamic Principles to Your work Environment • Mirhoonda Studevant |
| Tools & Technology From Desktop to Palmtop: Creating Usable Online Documents for Wireless and Handheld Devices • George Hayhoe What Every Knowledge Worker Should Know About Metadata • Gwen Thomas Flyers in an Hour • Mickey Wadia JavaScript 101: Into to JavaScript for Writers and Trainers • Scott Deloach |
| Writing & Editing Creating a Custom Style Guide • Leigh Richardson Power of Positive Editing • Pam Migneault Indexing Large Projects • Denise Kadilak Single-Source and Collaborative Authoring Using AuthorIT • Joe DeWitte |
| Usability & Instructional Design The Role of Instruction Design in Web-based Training for Learning Transfer • Latha Reddy Methods of Organizing the Instruction Document • Gerald Cohen Asking the Right Questions During a Site Visit Interview • Rob Houser |

To register or for more conference information, contact conference manager Julie Scott at julie.scott@choicepoint.net, or visit the Atlanta chapter's Web site, <http://www.stcatlanta.org>.

Meeting Reminder

- What:** February (dinner) meeting
When: Monday, February 4th, 6:00 p.m.
Program: Dr. David Armbruster, "The Challenges of Archiving and Accessing Scientific and Technical Information"
Where: Pig-N-Whistle
7144 Winchester Road
(901) 754-4400
Menu: Barbecue buffet (not just barbecue!), dessert, and drink (tea and water)
Cost: \$10.00, including tax and gratuity



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