



Newsbrief

Monthly Publication of the Mid-South Chapter

SOCIETY FOR
TECHNICAL
COMMUNICATION

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Show and Tell

by Scott Thompson

During the Mid-South chapter's January meeting, we will hold our now infamous show and tell program. In the past, this program has been a huge success, and has drawn some of our largest crowds. During the meeting, several of our members will present noteworthy technical communication projects and research that they've completed over the last year. Lyn Joyner, for instance, will tell us about the Web projects that she and several other Mid-South chapter members from Federal Express recently received some international awards for (See related story on page 4).



So don't miss out! Come join in on the Mid-South chapter's show and tell program, Monday, January 7th, at the Pig-N-Whistle Barbecue Restaurant on Winchester Road.

The program 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.

Meeting Notes

by Alison Joyner Masilak

As technical communicators in a multimedia world, many of us produce content, often regenerating the same content, in a variety of forms and media — print, CD-ROMs, Web sites, and so forth. The task of maintaining consistent content across the board is tedious, error-prone, and time-consuming. And the process of making universal changes to a variety of communications can bring on a monster headache.

As the 18 people that attended our December meeting learned, formatting and updating can be automated and greatly

simplified. Jim Green of Arbortext discussed the benefits of single-source publishing to both the technical communicator and business in general.

For technical communicators, single-source publishing is a time-saver. Instead of being tied up in endless details of font formatting, spacing, resizing pictures, translating, and so on, communicators are liberated to develop new content and work on new projects.

In single sourcing, content is stored at the component level (e.g., word, paragraph, or image) rather than the document level. A component can be changed in one central location then applied to every instance in every media, properly formatted — instantly. Single sourcing is made possible through the use of XML (eXtensible Mark-up Language). Because XML is vendor neutral, a single change can be applied to documents regardless of the software. XML is also platform neutral, media independent, extensible, and scalable.

For business, the benefits of single sourcing include:

- reduced costs
- increased productivity
- increased customer satisfaction
- faster time to market

While corporations spend millions on building e-business infrastructure and making e-business investments, they could benefit from focusing on improving their information delivery. Unstructured information like manuals, specifications, and training materials grow old and inconsistent, leading ultimately to frustrated internal users and external customers. Customers expect multiple media delivery of accurate, fresh, and usable information. Arbortext offers a viable solution.

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References for more information on XML and single sourcing:

- O'Reilly and Associates, <http://www.xml.com/>, includes useful XML information for everyone (from beginners to experts).
- World Wide Web Consortium (W3C), <http://www.w3.org/XML/1999/XML-in-10-points>, is for XML novices.
- Arbortext, <http://www.arbortext.com>, our guest speaker's company, has information about the services that they provide as well as broadly applicable information about single sourcing.

Effective Listening Pays Big Dividends!

by J. Suzanna Laurent, Region 5 Director-Sponsor

A really good listener is a rare and priceless commodity! That's because effective listening skills do not come naturally. Few of us have ever been taught the value or the process of active listening, and those who have are the ones getting the results they want. They make it to the top of their professions, enjoy rich and fulfilling personal relationships, and suffer less from stress and worry.

The good news is that anyone can become a good listener. All it takes is the desire to learn the techniques that work. Listening is one thing that most people wish they could improve. Yet many people overlook the simple and obvious ways they can instantly improve their listening skills. Here are five guidelines that should help you improve your listening skills.

Use Your Mind

Being a good listener requires a conscious effort. You must listen with your mind completely engaged. Try listening for accuracy and inaccuracy — it helps keep your mind alert. Listen as if you are hearing the information for the first time.

Listen for the Whole Message

Many people tune in only to the words of a speaker, not the body language or tone of voice, so they do not listen to the whole message. In understanding a message, both the verbal and nonverbal part of the message is important. The purpose of good listening is to get the best understanding. You cannot do that if you only listen to part of the message.

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
TECHNICAL
COMMUNICATION

Designing the future of technical communication

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A sharing community creating opportunity

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Control Your Environment

Distractions can destroy listening ability. We are surrounded by noise in the office and at home. We can be distracted by physical barriers, such as the placement of a desk or a seating arrangement in a group meeting, or internal distractions. You can be a much more effective listener if you can control both your external and internal environments. If you can't control the environment, reschedule or move to another environment.

Take the Initiative

In order to make better listening a way of life, you have to learn new skills and rid yourself of "bad" listening habits. This takes time and practice. You can become a better listener just by learning and practicing one new listening skill every week.

Use Active and Reflective Listening

Both active and reflective listening use the same principles, but their purposes are different. In active listening, the listener responds to the speaker based on the listener's understanding of the message that was communicated. This person is part of an ongoing conversation, a give and take of ideas. Active listening is used in group problem-solving situations.

In reflective listening, the listener is primarily a sounding board for the speaker. The listener helps the speaker come to grips with the problem being communicated. Reflective listening is used primarily in one-on-one conversations when the speaker needs a listener, not advice.

These five guidelines for improving your listening can give you quick and immediate results. There are dozens of good books about becoming a better listener. By putting these guidelines to use and learning more about how to become an effective listener, you will be able to "listen up" and hear what's really being said.

Responsibility – What Does It Mean?

by Amy Hollister



Responsibility. A quick glance at my Webster's dictionary, and I learn the word is defined as "a moral, legal, or mental accountability." I cannot help but think of my newly acquired responsibility to my little daughter. The sound of her peaceful breathing by way of the baby monitor is comforting to me as I write this article. It is definitely a moral, legal, and mental accountability, with the stress being on "mental" at this stage in the game. Sleep deprivation is surely a mental thing. My responsibilities to her are to feed her, bathe her, sing to her, clothe her, diaper her, and love her. The latter is the easiest one of all and makes all the rest possible. But, I digress. I was asked to write an article about my responsibilities to the Mid-South chapter as your vice president. What are these responsibilities? Allow me to outline them briefly for you.

It is my responsibility to be aware of chapter operations and to meet with Nell (the chapter president) often, not only to help her, but also to gain knowledge about the leadership of the chapter, should I be elected president in the next election.

Along with the other administrative council members, I help to establish the chapter's long-term and short-term goals. This may mean voting on whether or not to have the annual yard sale at Mary Sue's house to raise money for the scholarship fund, or voting on whether or not the chapter should purchase a projector for our monthly meetings. You get the idea.

As your vice president, I also take an interest in the treasurer's report. I need to know just how much money we have, so that I can wisely vote on the purchase of that projector that I mentioned above.

I try to find insightful and intriguing speakers and events for the monthly meetings (to keep you guys coming

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

Articles published by *Newsbrief* may be reprinted in other STC publications if (1) credit is given to the author as well as the Mid-South chapter, and (2) a copy of the reprint is sent to the *Newsbrief* editor.

Editor

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back!). The good thing is that I always have the support and guidance of the other council members. The vice president never has to do this alone, as good ideas abound within this group of fine folks. I think that we have come up with some pretty interesting programs for the coming year. How have we done so far?

Not only am I responsible for finding and securing speakers, but also it is up to me (and the rest of the council) to find a suitable meeting place for our monthly meetings. This means that we have to agree on a place, a menu for every taste, a time, and a fair price for the meal. The meeting dates have to be reserved so that we can be assured of obtaining the restaurant each month. The restaurant has to be called the week prior to the meeting as a reminder, so that I can be assured that our room will be ready when we are. At these monthly meetings, I am responsible for the sign-in sheet (to record your names, addresses, e-mail addresses, etc.), the nametags, and the door prize slips. I keep a file of all the sign-in sheets and advise the newsletter editor on how many people attended each monthly meeting. I am supposed to give the newsletter editor the details of the speaker and the monthly meeting so that he or she can place this in the newsletter to advertise the upcoming meeting. I have fallen short on this duty, and would like to thank Scott for picking up the slack. He does a great job!

If for any reason Nell cannot attend the council meetings or the monthly meetings (like when she's in Europe!), I am responsible for holding the meeting and making sure that everything goes smoothly. I would like to take this opportunity to thank Alison for performing this function so graciously and professionally when I could not take Nell's place this year.

Lastly, I am to perform other duties as defined by the president. I guess this means that if Nell tells me to do something, I had better do it, right Nell? Just do not ask me to hike any mountains or camp out in the woods, okay?

Being a part of the Mid-South chapter and serving as your vice president is an honor and a joy to me. I enjoy working with the other council members to make this a chapter that you are proud to join and support. So, who wants to run for vice president at the next election? Any takers?

Chapter Members from Federal Express Receive International Awards

by Lyn Joyner

HR Web Design & Development (HRWDD) at Federal Express announced five winning entries in the Mercury 2001 Public Relations and Corporate Communications competition, sponsored by the International Academy of Communications Arts and Sciences/MerComm, Inc. Last year, HRWDD's "FedEx Online Library" won a silver award. This year, the team produced two gold winners, which



will compete with all gold entries for the Best In Show to be announced January 24.

Mid-South chapter members Melanie Michael, Debbie Todhunter, and Lyn Joyner had major roles in four of the winning projects:

- Gold - "Benchmarking for Best Practices and Breakthroughs" Web site
Lyn Joyner - writer, developer
- Bronze - "Putting Your Publication Together" Web site
Debbie Todhunter - developer, Lyn Joyner - writer
- Honors - Diversity Appeal - Executive Interview of Ann Mullis
Melanie Michael - writer
- Honors - "Recycling Project" Web site
Lyn Joyner - editor

HRWDD systems analysts Beth Tanner and Erica Carpenter received a gold award for the Federal Express resource Web site, "HR Online," as well as designing or assisting significantly in all the award-winning sites.

Suzanna Laurent Shares Her Vision for STC

Last November, while attending the STC Region 4 Conference in Michigan, I visited the Henry Ford Museum. During that visit, I learned a lot about Ford and the automobile he made so successful. Many people have the mistaken idea that Henry Ford was an inventor, but Ford did not invent the automobile. He didn't even "invent" the assembly line.



So what did Henry Ford do? He learned from other people's experiences as well as his own. He took risks. He saw failure as a lesson, and he applied everything he learned to perfect the product, the process, and the policies that shaped the American automobile industry. In short, he was a great *innovator*. And because he was so willing to share the lessons he learned, he became an inspiration to many others.

I am running for the office of second vice president of STC because, in my own way, I want to do as Henry Ford did. I want to use the lessons that I have learned in my 25 years in management and leadership to create innovations that will make STC vital to the careers of all technical communicators in the many fields within our profession.

One of the more innovative things that I've done in my three-year term as director-sponsor for region 5 is to attend conferences in every region to meet our members and listen to

their ideas. This “listening tour” has given me a greater understanding of the challenges facing the Society, its chapters, and our members.

STC members work in more diversified environments than ever before, with experience, skills, and talents that vary widely. Nonetheless, we share the desire to be recognized for our contributions to our workplace. I believe that STC can help members achieve this goal. By proactively promoting the profession of technical communication, we can make a difference in the lives and careers of our members.

My strategies for accomplishing this goal include:

- Teaching members how to define the value they add to the products and services we provide, how to measure that value, and to add more value.
- Continuing the innovative, proactive, and forward-thinking implementation of the branding and governance initiatives.
- Ensuring that the STC board of directors becomes a policy-driven board.
- Communicating more effectively with organizations outside our profession and with STC members and chapter leaders internally.
- Providing better training for Society and chapter leaders.
- Creating opportunities for members to learn so that they can become more successful in their careers.

With these strategies, and with experienced leadership and guidance, STC can become the catalyst that enables technical communicators to achieve the professional status they have earned. And when that is accomplished, we will have fulfilled my vision for STC to become an organization whose members feel that the Society is absolutely essential to their profession!

I believe that I am the candidate who is most qualified to provide the leadership necessary to achieve this vision for STC. This article does not provide the space for me to properly describe the experience and personal traits that qualify me, but you may find out more about my qualifications by visiting my Web site at <http://pages.prodigy.net/slaurent> or by sending me an e-mail at slaurent@prodigy.net.

Currents 2002: Designing the Future

The Atlanta chapter is proud to announce 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 topic



stems include: online tools and technology; writing and editing; usability; consultants and independent contractors; and management.

Online Tools and Technology

Web site design, HTML-based online help, Java Scripting, Web-based training, online documentation, knowledge management, and tool comparisons.

Writing and Editing

Writing; editing; indexing; illustration and graphic design; instructional design; genres: user manuals, marketing collateral, and training materials; industries: telecommunication, financial, manufacturing, scientific, and medical.

Usability

User-task analysis, usability testing, focus groups, Web-based surveys, and contextual inquiries.

Consultants and Independent Contractors

Starting your own business, managing your finances/taxes/record keeping, marketing yourself, working through agencies, and finding work abroad.

Management

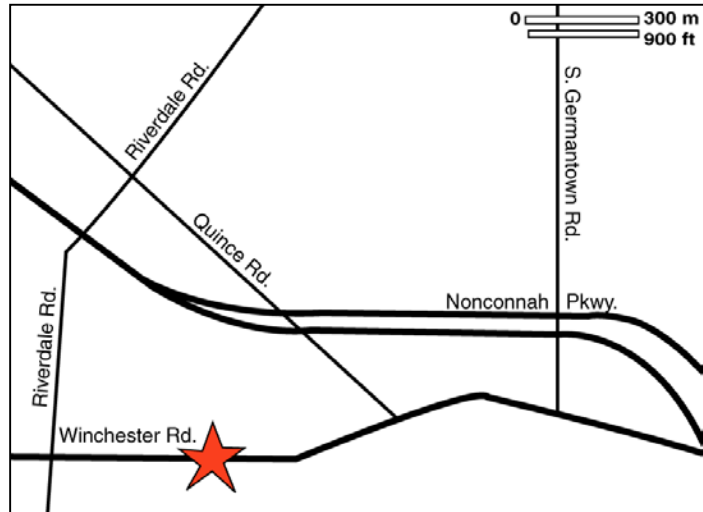
Project management; teamwork; hiring, interviewing, and evaluating staff; career paths for technical communicators; and managing writers, trainers, and artists.

Currents 2002 is the premier way for technical communicators to interact with colleagues and learn the theories, technologies, and tools of the profession. Technical communicators from all over the southeast attend the annual Currents Conference. Students attend Currents for the chance to rub elbows with working professionals and gain valuable career advice and skills. Our attendees are full-time, salaried workers, contractors, consultants, students, retired technical communicators, and others who are interested in the technical communication field.

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

Meeting Reminder

What: January (dinner) meeting
When: Monday, January 7th, 6:00 p.m.
Program: Show and tell
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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