



SOCIETY FOR
TECHNICAL
COMMUNICATION

Newsbrief

Monthly Publication of the Mid-South Chapter

Volume 20, Number 6

June 2002

Conference Overview

by Nell Johnson

STC's annual conference is the world's largest gathering of technical communicators. Planned events during the conference included educational sessions, workshops,



Conference attendees enjoyed the Opryland Hotel's sumptuous feast of tropical and native plants, winding trails, and waterfalls—all indoors.

vendor booths, and displays of the winning entries of the Society's competitions. Technical communication professionals benefited from networking opportunities and employment resources available at the conference.

Mid-South members who were able to attend the conference this year had something to be thankful for—to be able to actually DRIVE to an international conference! However, finding our way around Opryland seemed to require several maps and a compass. With a preliminary counting of 1400 attendees according to conference manager Charles Fisher, the conference was still very successful despite general economic conditions and travel cutbacks.

Over a period of four days, we sat together in sessions and workshops, traded ideas and theories, swapped war stories, discussed hometowns, and re-energized ourselves.

During the Mid-South chapter's May program meeting, we shared some of our newly gained knowledge with the group during our roundtable discussion. (See Meeting Notes on page 2 and article on page 3.)

Some of the members of the Mid-South chapter who attended the conference are: Michael Albers (presenter and Mid-South scholarship manager), Jennifer Alessi, David Armbruster (presenter, Mid-South historian and STC Fellow), Elizabeth Boone (Mid-South secretary), Apryl Cox, Kelly Cox, Sue Easley (Mid-South hospitality manager), Beverley Henderson (new member and co-editor of this newsletter), Joe Lakey (Mid-South webmaster), Nell Johnson (Mid-South past president and co-editor of this newsletter), Leanne Logan (new transfer and new Associate Fellow), Mary Sue MacNealy (our past treasurer who received the Jay Gould award), Nina Pinsley (presenter), and Steve Gillespie.

STC's 50th Conference will be in Dallas, TX on May 18-21. It should be an extra special event because we will be marking the 50th anniversary of the Society for Technical Communication.

Engineers don't have to write, or do they?

Cross-disciplinary technical communication initiatives at the U of M - June 3 program



Anna Phillips, Director of Technical Communications for the Herff College of Engineering at the University of Memphis, will discuss a joint venture between the English Department and the College of Engineering at the university to bring "just-in-time" learning and a greater awareness of technical communication requirements at the professional level to engineering students.

For more details on the meeting, see page 4.

Inside

Meeting Notes	2
Region 3 Director-Sponsor Update	3
Meeting Reminder	4

Meeting Notes

by Elizabeth Boone

STC's 49th Annual Conference in Nashville served as a springboard for the discussion of several topics pertinent to the field of technical communication today. The roundtable discussion format allowed the 21 attendees of May's chapter meeting to exchange their knowledge, opinions, and experiences about these topics. Highlights from the discussion are outlined below.

XML, or extensible markup language, emerged as the first major area of discussion. An alternative web language, XML is unique in that it allows writers to define their own format tags. The frequency with which technical writers are using XML may mean that XML is something that technical communication students should be exposed to. Unfortunately, XML is still a new technology, so little software is available to support it. A benefit of XML is that it facilitates consistency in terminology; however, not all terms fit all audiences.

The future of the technical writer was the next issue. Termed "squishy" in a conference session, jobs that require technical writers to perform many different roles in the course of one job can be both a boon and a burden. Today, technical writers are expected to have web and graphic design skills and software knowledge in addition to their writing skills, which may mean that all their skills suffer as a result.

On the other hand, skill variety makes the job of technical writers more interesting and steepens the learning curve. Because technical communication is squishy, the profession is difficult to define.

The previous discussion progressed into a dialogue about the tools that make technical communicators competitive in the job market. Are knowledge of the rhetorical situation and the key tools of communication, such as print, graphics, and audio, enough for technical communicators

XML
"squishy"
TOOLS
corporate intranets

just going out on the market, or do they also need to know the basics of web design and the current software? Academic programs can only offer and require so many

courses, especially at the master's degree level. A knowledge, but not necessarily a mastery, of design and software appears to be helpful for getting a job and working on a project team, but a core understanding of the principals of technical communication is still required.

The final topic dealt with how to make an intranet pay off. A company may spend a lot of money developing and maintaining an intranet, but the payoff is the time saved by the employees who use it. Unfortunately, in large companies, individual divisions or departments may have their own intranet, which often leads to inconsistent formats and terms and makes it difficult for users. When companies attempt to set uniform requirements for the intranets, they may meet with resistance from the divisions or departments with their own intranets.

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

Society President.....Edward J. See
Region 3 Director-SponsorRob Houser

Mid-South Chapter

A sharing community creating opportunity

Officers

President..... Amy Hollister
662.349.8967
abhollister@bellsouth.net
Vice President..... Open
Secretary..... Elizabeth Boone
901.274.5801
eboone@psychiatrist.com
Treasurer..... Alison Joyner Masilak
901.274.0215
ajoyner@memphis.edu
Past President Nell Johnson
901.434.8426
nwjohanson@fedex.com

Managers

Academic Liaison..... Loel Kim
901.678.3646
loelkim@memphis.edu
Employment Open
Fund Raising..... Margaret Carbaugh
901.372.7962
mcarbaugh@ensafe.com
Historian David Armbruster
901.448.5051
darmbruster@utm.edu
Hospitality Sue Easley
901.323.5965
dseasley@bellsouth.net
Newsletter Co-editor.... Nell Johnson
901.434.8426
nwjohanson@fedex.com
Newsletter Co-editor.... Beverley Henderson
901.795.5535
bhenderson@fedex.com
Publicity Teresa Johnson
901.821.9443
trj@midssouth.rr.com
Scholarship Mike Albers
901.678.4776
malbers@memphis.edu
Webmaster..... Joe Lakey
901.434-8427
jhlakey@fedex.com

Information Modeling

An overview of Ann Rockley's conference presentation

by Beverley Henderson

Ann Rockley is a familiar face at STC conferences. She returned this year with a full roster of presentations, including "Information Modeling," a term I have often heard but did not completely understand. Now I know, at least a little bit.



Ann Rockley,
The Rockley Group

Information modeling is the in-depth analysis and design that allows content management specialists to understand the basic structure of the information they use. "During the information modeling phase, you determine the elements required for each information product (or output), and how each information product will be designed for optimum usability and reuse." (Proceedings, "Information Modeling," pg. 254)

Designing an effective information model requires solid audience analysis and thorough information analysis. This foundation is essential to understand who uses the information and in what context.

Analysts examine representative information resources for several key elements concerning the structure, use, and format of documentation, such as:

- repetitious information
- similar information
- potential missing information
- multiple outputs (in how many different formats does the information currently appear?)

Product and element models need to be created. Products are built of elements. Different products (such as an intranet page, a brochure, and a

journal article) may contain some of the same elements of information (e.g., author, title, introductory paragraph, summary of topics, credentials) in different arrangements. "Product models identify how the information will be compiled to create the product...Element models identify how each element in the information product model is structured." (pg. 255)

Granularity and Metadata

The principles of granularity and metadata affect the information model and must be considered to develop an effective design.

Granularity refers to the size of the information being modeled.

"Granularity means looking at the smallest possible piece of information that is still a useful piece of content." Metadata is "information about information" and refers to the "labeling, cataloging, and descriptive information that allows the content elements to be properly processed and searched by a computer." (pg. 256)

Outcomes

So how does all this analysis and design build a usable information product? Even this must be formalized into a model using semantic elements and writing guidelines.

Semantic elements name the content the element supplies according to its meaning. For example, the semantic structure of a "Warning" might be:

- alert word/ icon
- title
- hazard avoidance
- hazard identifications
- consequences

Writing guidelines provide instructions for how each element should be written. For example, all titles must use the gerund form of the verb.

Detailed discussion of this presentation can be found in Rockley's paper "Information Modeling" in the conference proceedings.

Newsbrief

Newsbrief is the monthly publication of the Mid-South chapter of the Society for Technical Communication, a nonprofit organization. Twelve issues of *Newsbrief* are published each year. 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

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 (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.

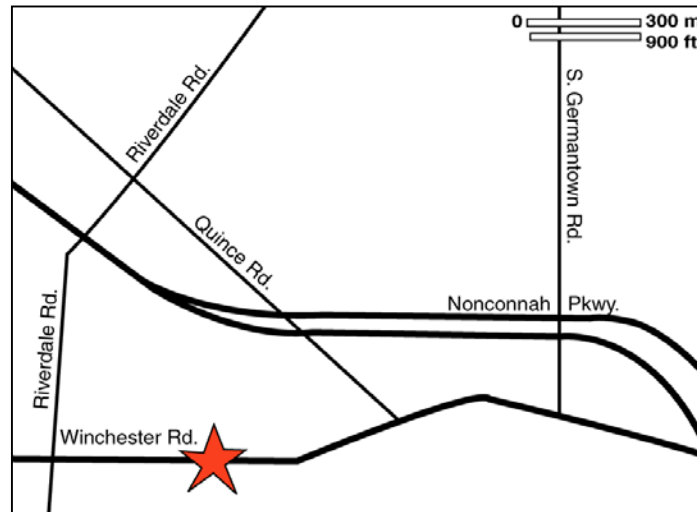
Editors

Nell Johnson
901.434.8426

Beverley Henderson
901.797.5535

Meeting Reminder

- What:** June program meeting
When: Monday, June 3, 6:00 p.m.
Program: Anna Phillips, "Teaching English to Engineering Students"
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



Newsbrief

Nell Johnson
668 North Idlewild Street
Memphis, TN 38107