



# Newsbrief

Monthly Publication of the Mid-South Chapter

SOCIETY FOR  
TECHNICAL  
COMMUNICATION

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## Communicating the Conservation Vision

by Scott Thompson

Communicating the complexities of wetland ecology to a non-technical audience presents a challenge. According to the United States Geological Survey (USGS), wetlands in North America alone provide critical habitat for more than a hundred different types of animals and plants. Persuading a non-technical audience to conserve these delicate natural resources at the same time, therefore, only makes the effort that much more challenging.



Biologists at Ducks Unlimited, a not-for-profit organization based here in Memphis, estimate annual wetland losses in the United States at more than 109,000 acres. That's more than 275 acres a day, not to mention the historic losses of more than half of North America's original wetlands. Ducks Unlimited's mission is "to fulfill the annual life cycle needs of North American waterfowl by protecting, enhancing, restoring and managing important wetlands and associated uplands." Because of the tremendous importance of wetlands in the life cycle of waterfowl, Ducks Unlimited is committed to conserving this vital resource. To date, they have conserved more than 1.5 million acres of wetlands in the United States alone.

Join the Mid-South chapter as we welcome Eric Keszler, the Director of Communications at Ducks Unlimited, on Monday, October 1<sup>st</sup> at the Pig-N-Whistle Barbecue Restaurant on Winchester Road. Eric will discuss the importance of effectively communicating scientific concepts, such as wetland ecology and waterfowl biology, to a lay audience, particularly prospective volunteers. Ducks Unlimited currently has over 50,000 volunteers. For more information about Ducks Unlimited or to find out how you can volunteer, visit their Web site at [www.ducks.org](http://www.ducks.org).

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.

## Meeting Notes

by Alison Joyner Masilak

In September, the Mid-South chapter reconvened after a summer break to hear the chapter's own Scott Thompson of AutoZone present "Providing the Do-It-Yourself Market with What It Takes to Do the Job Right." The 22 attendees listened attentively as Scott discussed some of AutoZone's current Web initiatives.

Most of Scott's presentation focused on how AutoZone proposes to tap the female market through its online offerings at AutoZone.com - one example of the company's overall strategy for targeting new markets on the Web.

Scott pointed out how, according to market research conducted by the American Aftermarket Industry Association, women have increasingly taken on the responsibility for maintaining and repairing their automobiles. And, how the automotive industry, traditionally considered a "male" category, is still marketed toward a male audience. AutoZone plans to attract the female market by including a number of features designed with women's needs in mind.

According to Scott, AutoZone has developed several marketing strategies to target the female market, including:

- Creating opportunities for them to connect – bringing women together in a brand-identified environment and setting the stage for them to join the brand.
- Simplifying their lives – helping women handle their multiple lives and make their lives easier.
- Anticipating their needs – addressing needs that women may not even know they have.

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## Zen and the Art of Backpacking

by Nell Johnson

As your new chapter president, I'd like you to know that I'm frequently gone on weekends. That's capital G-O-N-E. No phone, no pool, no pets. Only a backpack and a long trail in the woods. Maybe a good friend or two.

Is this irresponsible behavior for the president of a professional organization? Should I dutifully devote weekends to e-mails, reports, and grant proposals? Nah.

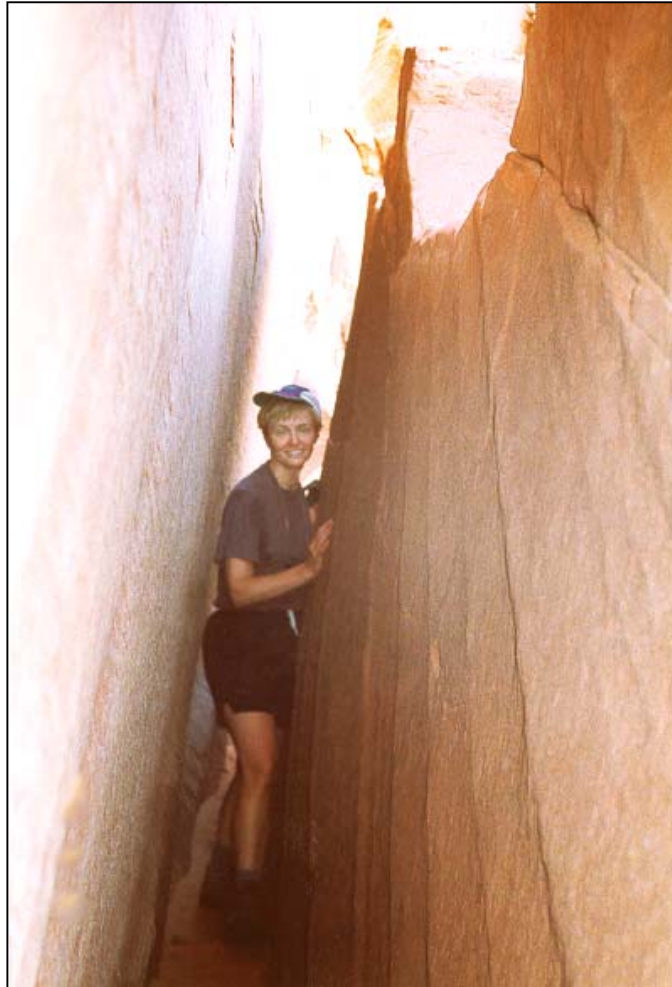
Backpacking, euphemistically known as a "leisure activity," although there is nothing leisurely about hiking 12 miles on a hot day carrying 35 pounds, has helped me to develop my own philosophy about backpacking, technical writing, and life in general. I'd like to share some of the "Rules to Live By" that have occurred to me as I've trudged and scampered through the wilderness. This list keeps growing, thankfully, each time I set out. Some of these rules may work for you.

### **Plan carefully, but always keep an eye out for the unexpected.**

Be open to what chance may provide. The willingness to consider a different path, à la Robert Frost, has allowed me to see both the largest poplar tree in Alabama as well as the inner workings of a mainframe software development manufacture.

**Choose companions carefully.** This is critical when you are sharing the same tent, food, filtered water, and project files.

Whiners generally throw a wet blanket over the whole experience, and drill sergeants belong in the Marine Corps, not on the trail or in the workplace. Cooperation, understanding, and tolerance make it possible for everyone to come out of the experience alive.



**Know when to be silly.** I believe in silliness. Play keeps me lighthearted and able to avoid the dreaded taking-myself-too-seriously syndrome. It also opens the door to creativity when all the serious brainstorming in the world can't tease out an answer.

**In rough times, just concentrate on putting one foot in front of the other.** The end will appear. When I know I

have 3 more miles of up and down before I can set up my tent, and just enough time to hike it before dark, I just look down at my two big brown boots and watch each step ahead of the other. Taking a big project and dividing it into workable sections, where daily progress can be seen, makes it not only satisfying, but doable.

### **Treat yourself well.**

Celebrate success. Reflect on and re-enjoy the most meaningful experiences. On the trail, set up the tent, build a fire, inflate the comfy camp chair and have happy hour. "I'd like to thank my feet, legs, and back for making this moment possible..." Likewise, at the end of a project, have a little party. Give public recognition. Be generous.

### **Less is more.** Know the meaning of "enough."

Enough gear, software, edits, meetings, e-mails. Use the right tool and nothing more, or nothing less. When possible, have multiple-use items to save space, weight, and money, but only if the item will really serve all the purposes adequately. For example, I have a Swiss army knife in my backpack, which I mostly use for slicing food —

cheese, apples, and the occasional prickly pear. But I also use it for cutting rope, tightening screws, cutting fingernails, and fighting bears (just kidding!). It works very well for all these applications, so it's worth its weight. Likewise, minimalism in documentation has encouraged conditional assembly and re-use of text and graphics, both in print and online information alike.

**Try to leave things better than they were before you got there.** On the trail, it is considered proper ecological ethics to pick up the trash that others have left behind — the errant gum wrapper, coke can, or pop top. In a documentation group, one of the best ways to do this is to develop a style guide. Standards help guarantee quality goals over time and changes in personnel.

**Share.** Give stuff away. Let go of the unnecessary. I believe that everything I own has weight. That's not a bad thing, as long as the item has a benefit, whether practical, aesthetic, sentimental or hopefully all (i.e., the "less is more" principle). At some point we have to deal with each object — dust it, store it, move it — that we own. This wisdom becomes excruciatingly apparent when, while on the trail, you realize that you have developed blisters under your backpack shoulder straps because of the extra weight of the family pack of Oreos that you thought you might need. Become the cookie fairy and give them all away. In a technical writing group, we can share recognition, software, knowledge, and our most precious commodity, time.

**Pay attention.** Survival depends upon paying attention. Once I foolishly set up camp in a large cave to get out of the rain. There was a beautiful waterfall that descended over part of the cave opening. Perfect, I thought. Until later that night when the rain increased the water flow in the "beautiful waterfall," which proceeded to run into the cave and thence underground! It threatened to swamp my tent, gear, and, worst of all, me! As a technical writer, detail is very important, not only in writing detailed descriptions or procedures, but also in being sensitive to the nuances of a project, the attitude of the lead engineer, the changing corporate priorities.

**Work so hard and so well that you sleep like a baby.** When people ask me why I'm not afraid to sleep in the woods alone, I tell them that I'm usually so tired that fear is not an issue. I remember once, when I was particularly tired, I felt an animal walking beside my tent in the middle of the night, pushing against my shoulder. Too tired to get completely awake or alarmed, I just pushed back — gently — and the critter left. In technical writing, I believe that good work, productive days, positive interactions with coworkers, and the occasional "push-back" allow for the comfortable tiredness that one feels on completing a worthwhile, yet difficult, task.

I look forward to being your president, and to seeing you on the trail!

## Meeting Notes

*(Continued from page 1)*



Scott detailed AutoZone's rationale for each of the strategies, and gave some examples of the features that the company proposes to add to AutoZone.com in order to implement each:

- Provide referrals to reputable and qualified mechanics and other professional installers.
- Form alliances with Web sites already popular with women (e.g., iVillage.com, awroadandtravel.com).
- Provide easy-to-follow and complete maintenance and repair instructions.
- Offer time-saving tips and product reviews that promote products' time-saving features.



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*A sharing community creating opportunity*

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- Provide automotive-related articles that heighten the customer's awareness without disparaging their intelligence or ability.
- Offer troubleshooting checklists that incorporate preventive maintenance instructions.
- Indicate the degree of difficulty for each how-to instruction.
- E-mail service reminders to let customers know that it's time to change their oil, rotate their tires, replace their oil filter or spark plugs.

Scott closed by stressing the importance of AutoZone.com crafting its new Web content in a way that encourages non-traditional automotive customers to maintain or repair their own automobiles by building their confidence and by creating a sense of accomplishment in learning what it takes to do the job right.

*Editor's note: I want to thank everyone who endured my presentation. You must have found it ironic for me to address simplifying your audience's lives as part of a presentation that, in terms of length, ran over twenty-plus minutes. Obviously, I was not too considerate of my own audience. In retrospect, I realize that I got too caught up in trying to substantiate what, in fact, was a pretty simple message: that, for all intent and purpose, marketing research and audience analysis are synonymous. That nowadays, regardless of the business that you're in, you cannot succeed without knowing how to market to (i.e., communicate with) your customers. And that, as the research which I cited during my presentation indicates, although men and women are vastly different, you cannot succeed unless you market to women. As Faith Popcorn and Lys Marigold state in their book, EVEolution: Understanding Women — Eight Essential Truths that Work in Your Business and Your Life, "Researchers are beginning to take seriously that women are the pioneers in the world of consumerism." Thanks again.*

## Communication Professionals to Hold Conference in Knoxville

The East Tennessee chapter announces its program for the 24th Annual Practical Conference on Communication (PCOC). This year's conference will be held on November 2<sup>nd</sup> in Knoxville, Tennessee, at Pellissippi State Technical Community College.

Streamlined for the new millennium, PCOC 24 will present one full day of hot topics of interest to communication professionals. Content management, single sourcing, multimedia design, imaging and illustration, science writing, and project management top this year's offerings. Notable speakers include:

- JoAnn T. Hackos, Comtech Services, Inc.
- Frederick M. O'Hara, Jr., Consultant in Technical Communication
- Janice C. Redish, Redish & Associates, Inc.
- Julia S. Kelley, Oak Ridge National Laboratory
- Donald C. Samson, Jr., Radford University

The Practical Conference on Communication is the longest running regional conference in the STC, which has more than 25,000 members worldwide. The conference gathers professionals from throughout the United States who share their communications experience and practical knowledge.

PCOC supplies information about the most current professional methods and technological advances in technical communication.

The conference consists of a full day of sessions on November 2<sup>nd</sup>. Registration includes a printed copy of speaker handouts, lunch, and refreshments. Fees are \$100 for professional registration and \$25 for students.

For more information or to register for the conference, visit the PCOC 24 Web page under "Events" at <http://www.stc-etc.org>. Or, e-mail Ann Wilson Buttram ([buttram@ornl.gov](mailto:buttram@ornl.gov)), Jeanne Dole ([dolejm@ornl.gov](mailto:dolejm@ornl.gov)) or Karen Downing ([kdowning@utk.edu](mailto:kdowning@utk.edu)).

## 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 amongst 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 (JPEG) 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*.

### 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.

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### Contributors this Month

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 Mary Sue MacNealy  
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 Scott Thompson

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## Design Workshop Update

### Communications by Design: Shaping the Communication Experience

by Karen Schriver

Information designers bring together words and images in ways that enable people to understand, make decisions, or take action. A good information design helps people to use the content in ways that suit their unique interests.



*"...information designers communicate not by default, but by design."*

Creating effective communications is tricky business, whether the information design is a paper artifact or an embedded help system. Part of the difficulty is that technology-based organizations tend to focus mainly on issues of technical accuracy; that is, on making sure customers understand the important features of their products and services. But making clear and accurate information designs will not necessarily guarantee success with the customer.

In addition to worrying about issues of clarity and accuracy, information designers must meet stakeholders' expectations for visual and verbal content. "Easy-to-use" and "easy-to-access" can be merely slogans if the content is inadequate. As information designers, we need to be concerned

with people's cognitive and emotional responses to our subject. We need to move beyond "documenting products or services" to "shaping the communication experience" through documentation and other communications artifacts.

This workshop will focus on the issue of shaping the communication experience, suggesting that information designers communicate not by default, but by design. We will first talk about what it means to shape the communication experience. We will then look at examples of information designs, both those that work and those that do not.

You are encouraged to bring a one-page example of something you have worked on. Choose any type of document/artifact from any type of media that can be reproduced for our viewing on paper.\* Select something that has been effective, not just because you got the procedures or content "right," but because the content has been carefully crafted *both visually and verbally*. Prepare a five-minute presentation about your example. During the last session of the workshop, participants will be encouraged to share their examples, to talk about the problems they faced, and to say why they think their solution works.

\* *Please bring 40 copies of your example. The idea in selecting your example is to choose something that illustrates a principle of information design. If needed, delete the names of products, companies, or brand names so that proprietary information is held confidential. Our purpose is simple: to share good ideas.*

<b>Who:</b>	Karen Schriver
<b>What:</b>	Document Design Workshop to Benefit the Mid-South Chapter Scholarship Fund
<b>When:</b>	October 6, 2001, 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.
<b>Where:</b>	University of Memphis, University Center, Faulkner Lounge (Parking is available in the Zach Curlin Garage for \$7.00 or for free in the lot across Zach H. Curlin Street)
<b>Cost:</b>	\$90.00 for STC members, \$50.00 for students
<b>Schedule:</b>	9:00-12:00 p.m. <b>Session 1</b> – What it Means to Shape the Customer Experience 12:00-1:00 p.m. Lunch (provided as part of the workshop) 1:00-3:00 p.m. <b>Session 2</b> – Presentation of Information Designs by Workshop Participants

To register for the workshop, contact Mary Sue MacNealy at (901) 678-4431.

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## Treasurer's Report

by Mary Sue MacNealy



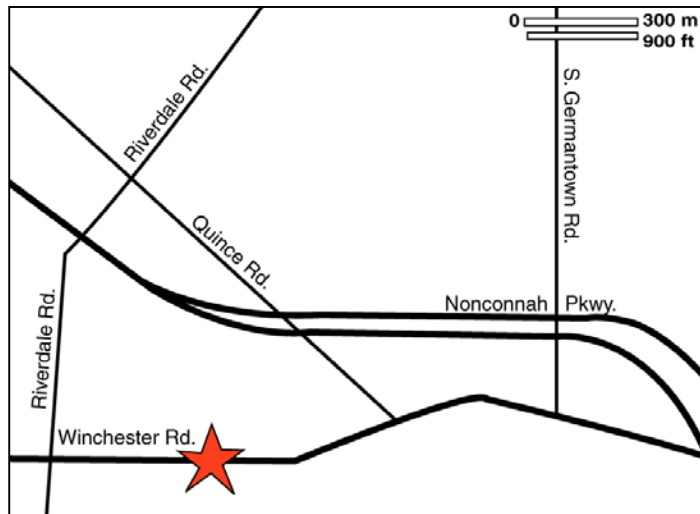
This financial report reflects the balance for our treasury as of September 24, 2001.

<b>Previous Cash Balance (As of July 31, 2001)</b> .....	\$3,862.93
<b>Income</b>	
Interest on account.....	\$0,004.92
Proceeds from Countrywood Yard Sale.....	\$0,226.50
Total income.....	\$0,231.42
<b>Expenses</b>	
Yard sale fee.....	\$0,020.00
Deposit for workshop luncheon.....	\$0,510.50
LCD projector.....	\$1,520.00
Mouse for laptop computer.....	\$0,054.99
Total Expenses.....	\$2,105.49
(Total income less total expenses).....	\$1,874.07 (-)
<b>Current Cash Balance</b> .....	<u>\$1,988.86</u>

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## Meeting Reminder

- What:** October (Dinner) Meeting  
**When:** Monday, October 1<sup>st</sup>, 6:00 p.m.  
**Speaker:** Eric Keszler, Director of Communications for Ducks Unlimited, "Communicating the Conservation Vision"  
**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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