

Newsbrief

The Publication of the Mid-South Chapter, STC

Volume 18, Number 9

September 2000

7th Annual Technical Publications Competition

by Steve Gillespie



It's August again, and that means it's time for an exciting annual event—the Candlelight Vigil will be held in the Memory Gardens, oops—I mean, it's the 7th Annual Technical Publications Competition, sponsored by the Mid-South Chapter, STC. The 2000-01 Call for Entries should be in the mail to you soon, so start making plans now to get involved. We had a record 21 entries last year, including one top level award winner from FedEx—*The Diversity Appeal*—in the newsletter category, which was sponsored by the chapter in the STC International Technical Publications Competition (ITPC).

Why a competition?

The Technical Publications Competition is one of the biggest annual events for the MidSouth Chapter. The competition provides a much-needed opportunity for technical communicators across the Mid-South to get the well-deserved recognition for their work, and at the same time, a chance to see the best of what fellow technical communicators are doing.



What can I enter?

If you are a technical communicator or a student of technical communication, you are eligible to submit entries in any or all of the almost 20 categories, for publications produced within the past two years and accepted for publication by a client, employer, or publisher. For example, the competition is open to:

- Promotional Materials
- Informational Materials
- Quick Reference Guides
- Software Guides
- Hardware/Software Combination Guides
- Computer Hardware Guides
- Non-computer Equipment Guides
- Organizational Manuals
- Training Materials
- Annual Reports
- Magazines
- Newsletters
- Technical Reports
- Trade/News Articles
- Scholarly/Professional Articles
- Scholarly/Professional Journals
- Books



How do I enter?

You will be sent a Call for Entries brochure this month, that includes the entry form and complete submission information (If you DON'T get an entry notice, contact me, or any local chapter officer). The entry fee is \$30 for

STC members and \$45 for nonmembers. The deadline for submitting entries is **Friday, October 6, 2000.**

Where do I send entries?

Mail your entries to:



Steve Gillespie
6201 Garden Cove
Memphis, TN 38134-7605

How else can I get involved?

If you don't have anything to enter this year, you can also support the competition by volunteering to serve as a judge. I've been a judge for our competition since its inception seven years ago, and I can tell you that it's a great experience to critically review other professionals, other genres, and materials for diverse audiences. The process has simply made me a better writer/editor.

For more information

If you would like more information about the competition, or you would like to serve as a judge, please contact Steve Gillespie by phone: (901) 395-3237

or by e-mail:
sgillespie@fedex.com



CONTENTS

Ten Good Deeds in Web Design	2
What's New in Your World?	3
STC to Launch Financial Industry Special Interest Group	3
Writer's Block	3

Ten Good Deeds in Web Design

by Jakob Nielsen

Jakob Nielsen's Alertbox

October 3, 1999

www.useit.com and www.NNgroup.com

When analyzing Web design, it is easy to identify a large number of mistakes that reduce usability. It is much harder to say what good things to do since I have never seen a website that was truly stellar with respect to usability. The best major site was probably amazon.com as of late 1998, but during 1999 Amazon declined in usability due to the strategy of blurring the site's focus.

Here's a list of ten design elements that will increase the usability of virtually all sites:

1. Place your name and logo on every page and make the logo a link to the home page (except on the home page itself, where the logo should not be a link: never have a link that points right back to the current page).
2. Provide search if the site has more than 100 pages.
3. Write straightforward and simple headlines and page titles that clearly explain what the page is about and that will make sense when read out-of-context in a search engine results listing.
4. Structure the page to facilitate scanning and help users ignore large chunks of the page in a single glance: for example, use grouping and subheadings to break a long list into several smaller units.
5. Instead of cramming everything about a product or topic into a single, infinite page, use hypertext to structure the content space into a

starting page that provides an overview and several secondary pages that each focus on a specific topic. The goal is to allow users to avoid wasting time on those subtopics that don't concern them.

6. Use product photos, but avoid cluttered and bloated product family pages with lots of photos. Instead have a small photo on each of the individual product pages and link the photo to one or more bigger ones that show as much detail as users need. This varies depending on type of product. Some products may even need zoomable or rotatable photos, but reserve all such advanced features for the secondary pages. The primary product page must be fast and should be limited to a thumbnail shot.
 7. Use relevance-enhanced image reduction when preparing small photos and images: instead of simply resizing the original image to a tiny and unreadable thumbnail, zoom in on the most relevant detail and use a combination of cropping and resizing.
 8. Use link titles to provide users with a preview of where each link will take them, before they have clicked on it.
 9. Ensure that all important pages are accessible for users with disabilities, especially blind users.
 10. Do the same as everybody else: if most big websites do something in a certain way, then follow along since users will expect things to work the same on your site. Remember Jakob's Law of the Web User Experience: users spend most of their time on other sites, so that's where they form their expectations for how the Web works.
- Finally, always test your design with real users as a reality check. People do things in odd and unexpected ways, so even the most carefully

planned project will learn from usability testing. 🐣

Editor's note:

Jakob Nielsen, Ph.D., is a User Advocate and Principal of the Nielsen Norman Group which he co-founded with Donald A. Norman (former VP of research at Apple Computer). He is also the author of "Designing Web Usability: The Practice of Simplicity". Until 1998 he was a Sun Microsystems Distinguished Engineer.



What's New in Your World?

submitted by chapter members

The Mid-South Chapter of the Society for Technical Communication hosts two members who received the coveted FedEx Sirius Award and Induction into the DGO Planning & Support Hall of Fame, Friday, July 28, at the Memphis Botanical Gardens. This annual award is presented to the top 10 percent of Memphis-based DGO Planning & Support employees reporting to Ted Merida for accomplishments within the past fiscal year.



Rebecca Mabry and Ted Merida

The Sirius Award program was designed to reward and recognize Ground Operations Planning & Support personnel for exceptional performance, contributions, and accomplishments.



Rick Richardson and Ted Merida

STC past President, **Rebecca Mabry** along with STC Member, **Rick Richardson** were recognized at the 2000 Sirius Award Luncheon. Congratulations on the accomplishments our STC members are doing within the community.

Our editor, **Amy Hollister**, also received an award recently. Amy's co-workers nominated her for a Quality Award. The FedEx Quality Award is meant to single out employees who demonstrate initiative, create new or improved work methods, assume added responsibility, and regularly go 'above and beyond'.

Michael Albers and **Loel Kim** will be part of the IPCC SIGDOC Conference's preliminary program. They will be presenting the topic of "Implications of the Wireless Web for Technical Communicators: User Web Browsing Characteristics Using Palm Handhelds for Information Retrieval".

PCS advocates and promotes technical development and encourages close cooperation among its members, with other IEEE

members, and with members of the engineering and science professions in general.

The Conference will be hosted September 24-27, 2000 in Cambridge, MA. September in Cambridge is exceptional. For more information, visit: <http://www.goston-online.com>.

Online registration is available on the IPCC SIGDOC website at: <http://www.ieeeeps.org/2000>.

Questions about IPCC SIGDOC 2000 may be directed via e-mail to: ipcc-sigdoc2K-reg@mit.edu or by phone: (518) 587.5107. ☎

STC to Launch Financial Industry Special Interest Group

by *Maurice Martin*,
Communication Director, STC National

Would you like to become a member of a special interest group (SIG) devoted to the issues unique to technical writers and instructional designers connected to the financial industry? STC is currently in the process of forming such a SIG, and is seeking members to get it started.

Technical communicators should consider joining the SIG if they work for the following types of organizations:

- Accountancy Firm
- Business or Economic Analysis Company
- Commercial Bank
- Credit Union
- Investment Firm
- Loan Broker
- Loan Servicer

- Mortgage Broker/Banker
- Private Mortgage Lender
- Real Estate-related Company
- REIT
- Stock Brokerage Firm
- Thrift
- Any company related to the financial industry

If you're interested, and an active STC member, please e-mail your expressed interest and/or questions to Steven Marshall at: steven_marshall@indymac.com along with your name and e-mail address.

The Society for Technical Communication is a professional organization for technical writers, editors, illustrators, managers, and educators. It is the largest professional organization in this field, with more than 23,000 members in 147 chapters worldwide. Information about STC and its programs can be found on the STC office Web site at:

<http://www.stc-va.org> ☎

Writer's Block

from *Edmond H. Weiss*,
Writing Remedies:
Practical Exercises
for Technical Writing
(Oyrx Press, 1990)



The alien Coneheads (from *Saturday Night Live*) have a distinct way of talking. Not only do they refer to ordinary objects by pseudoscientific names (*eggs* become *chicken embryos*), they describe all ordinary processes as though they were items in an instruction manual (*eating* becomes *ingesting consumable nutrients*). Strangely, many people in the computer field write a little like Coneheads.



society for technical communication

Conehead English	Earthling English
alphabetic characters	letters
application development team	committee
audio monitoring device	speaker
multipurpose financial center	bank
clerical workstation	desk
client base	customers
non manufacturing employment unit	office building
personal lifestyle environment	house, home
systems information developer	writer
information dump mindmap	thoughts
instructional facilitator	teacher
negative input	complaint
public mailing facility	post office
print output site	printer
retail shopping facility	store
retail fuel outlet	gas station
surface transport equipment	trucks
voice data communications unit	telephone

Don't be a Conehead—use Earthling English! Make sure you communicate to your audience in a language they understand. 🐣



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Newsbrief

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The mission of the Society for Technical Communication is to improve the quality and effectiveness of technical communication for audiences worldwide. 🐣