Exploding Myths About Consulting

By William Oliver

I've heard lots of crazy things said about technical writing, consulting and contracting work over the years. Some of the more colorful descriptions include phrases like "combat pay, IRS back-audits, without a net, burned-out, cutthroat existence, hired guns, beached," and more. To some, I guess consulting work appears almost dangerous. For the well-prepared, it's not really that way.

In my opinion, consulting work is the highest role to which a day-to-day working technical writer can aspire. Working as a consultant in our field for an extended period of time says that you are indeed a master of the trade. The best make it look deceptively easy. Let me separate some of the fiction from the facts about consulting work.

Consultants make the big bucks... Okay, a certain amount of that is true. But, wouldn't it be sad if the best and most experienced among us didn't do well financially? With equipment, marketing, legal, insurance, and other expenses, consultants don't make quite as much as you might think. Nobody I know who writes documentation every day is getting rich. Busy consultants just make bigger bucks than most; as well they should.

Avoid short term contracts... The truth is the shorter contracts are often more interesting and lucrative than the long ones. Managers of long-term projects know they can pay far less because of the perceived security in the "long-term." With a short-term deal, the negotiating tables are turned somewhat. By the way, most consulting contracts are extended at least once so the average short-term contract is longer now than it used to be (thanks, Yogi).

Long term contracts are secure... There's no such thing as a guaranteed contract in our business. Most agreements aren't much more than we-promise-to-pay-if-you-perform-deals with non-compete clauses. There are escape opportunities for everyone. No matter how long the contract, if something big breaks down (budget, technology, management, etc.), it's probably going to be "over early." On some projects, over early is a good thing.

1099 means IRS troubles... Not all contracts can or should provide you with "W-2 income." Type of work, length of project, location, tools, etc. all play a role in determining employee/contractor status. Recent reforms passed by Congress made it even easier to figure out where you stand. If approached properly, independent contractors

For the Latest Employment and Meeting Information, Call the Orlando Chapter Hotline at 407-262-2064

A Note from the President . . .
The End of Another Chapter Year

by Dick Hughes

How did it get to be June already? Another chapter year is almost over. It seems like a perfect opportunity to take a few moments to look back and plan ahead.

Outgoing Region 3 Director-Sponsor Mark Hanigan, the featured speaker for our May meeting, also brought other good news from STC's 1997 Annual Conference in Toronto. With Mark's support at the highest STC levels, the Orlando Chapter was awarded this year's Chapter Achievement Award for chapters within our membership range. This is certainly an honor that all chapter members can be proud of. The progressive and worthwhile activities you've contributed your time to have been duly noted and recognized by the STC Board of Directors. Hopefully, we'll have our award plaque in time for our June dinner meeting.

At May's general meeting, I had the pleasure of presenting our Distinguished Chapter Service Award to Lori Corbett for all her painstaking planning and efforts associated with starting and managing the production of our new chapter newsletter, *Tech Trends*. Because of her commitment and initiative, the Orlando Chapter received a Chapter Achievement Award in this year's STC Newsletter Competition. Lori truly deserves this recognition.

This is also the time of year we typically say goodbye to some of our elected chapter officers and hello to some new ones. Many, many thanks go to outgoing Vice President Charlotte Salveson and outgoing Secretary Paul "Punmeister" Lockwood. Charlotte has done an outstanding job over the past year coordinating and organizing our monthly Chapter meetings; I'm sure you'll agree we've had some very informative and entertaining gatherings. And Paul has done yeoman's work keeping the Administrative Council's meeting minutes clear and accurate, procuring and presenting (with quite a flair) our monthly meeting door prizes and keeping all of us chuckling with his sharp wit. We'll miss you both on the Council, but we look forward to seeing you at future chapter events. Looking ahead, we welcome incoming Vice President Gwen Thomas from PaySys International and incoming Secretary Laurie Benson from ImageSoft Technologies. Gwen and Laurie offer a variety of technical communication experiences and perspectives, and I'm sure they will provide some stimulating leadership to the chapter in the coming year. I look forward to working with them and all of you as we plan our programs for the 1997–98 chapter year and host our first two-day regional conference, Trends '97, this October. ✠

> **With Mark's support at the highest STC levels, the Orlando Chapter was awarded this year's Chapter Achievement Award for chapters within our membership range. This is certainly an honor that all chapter members can be proud of.**

CONSULTING, *cont'd from page 1*

invite no more scrutiny from the IRS than other small business people. Now, if you could only figure how to wiggle-in a deduction for that ski vacation?

Contracting firms market individuals... Rarely do contracting firms invest a lot of time in marketing a specific individual. The economics of the business dictate they market their own (and much broader services) first. Obviously, you can benefit a great deal if and when your capabilities match the needs of one of their clients. The best way to work with any recruiter or consulting firm is to cultivate a relationship over time and keep them up-to-date about your skills, interests and availability via a well-written resume. Whining and pleading followed by daily "reminder calls" won't help, I promise.

Consulting is a cutthroat existence... This one is way off the mark. While contract technical communication is a business, there's very little backbiting or "trashing" of the competition. The reason? Corporate clients have very little patience for it. The general atmosphere in consulting is business-like, respectful and professional. And the relations between most working writers can only be described as supportive and collegial. There's a great deal of referring work to others, helping with technical problems, coaching, job-sharing, collaboration, etc. Does that sound cutthroat to you?

Contracting firms are the enemy... Occasionally, I talk with someone who believes contractors take advantage of writers. They see the contractor putting "a big markup" on their hourly rate. Unfortunately, their narrow perspective misleads them. The cost of capital, heavy up-front marketing expenses, a lengthy sales cycle, and lots of competitive pressures constantly gnaw away at contractor

margins. Profits on individual contracts are actually quite small and it's very easy today to lose money on a contract. If contracting firms didn't provide valuable services to both companies and writers, they'd disappear. Sorry, your contractor is not your enemy; he's your partner.

You'll spend a lot of time "on the beach"... This is a time-honored euphemism for looking full-time for that next contract. Your "beach time" really depends on your skills and marketing talent. If your portfolio is bursting with lots of first-rate work and your contact list is a "Who's Who" of the business, you'll probably never have time to get a great tan. On the other hand, if you're on the beach fresh off 20 years with nuclear missile docs, I'd buy a family-size bottle of sunscreen.

There's one final bit of fiction about being a consultant and that's anyone can be one. While most technical writers bump into a consulting opportunity now and then, not everyone is cut out for it. It takes talent, years of experience, confidence and a positive attitude to succeed. A fine portfolio and well-developed interpersonal skills are also big advantages. Finally, you have to really enjoy the work. If you come up short anywhere on that list, go slowly. However, if you've got all those things and long for independence, don't let any tired old myths get in your way! ✠

Editors Note: Originally published by Metro Voice, the newsletter of the New York Metro Chapter. William Oliver is President of Techwrights, inc., a Randolph, NJ-based technical communication consulting firm. You can contact Bill with questions or comments at (800) 205-6842.

Dan Voss and Lori Corbett after accepting the Orlando Chapter's achievement award at the STC Annual Meeting in Toronto

Administrative Council Notes

By Paul Lockwood

According to President Dick Hughes, the Call for Presenters for Trends '97 has been sent to about 2000 addresses. Prospective presenters have until June 16 to send in their proposals. Dick reported to the Council that he and Conference Chairperson Alice Sennott are working to staff several conference committees.

The Education Committee has also been busy. High school technical writing competition materials were sent to 98 schools in Brevard, Orange, Osceola, Seminole, and Volusia counties, with entries due back the third week in May. Dick said the award presentations will be held during the June Chapter meeting. ✠

Employment Opportunities

Here are the additions to our employment hotline. Remember to check the hotline (262-2064) for the latest employment opportunity information.

Position:	Technical Writer (Three months + Contract)
Location:	Orlando
Contact:	Connie Culler, Orange Lake Resort, 239-0000 x1911, fax 407-239-1086
Description:	Develop user manuals for software application. Possible online help.

Position:	Technical Writer
Location	Orlando
Contact:	Carol Tuttle, Tuttle Associates, P. O. Box 915786, Longwood, FL 32791-5786, or e-mail ctuttle@iag.net
Description:	Bachelor's Degree in English or Technical Writing. One to three years technical writing experience preferred; software/hardware documentation helpful. Experience with FrameMaker or other DTP software. Familiar with online authoring software. Ability to work easily with technical and nontechnical people, handle multiple projects, and frequent deadlines with minimum supervision. $30–34K range. Send resume and salary history.

Position:	Technical Writer
Location	Naples, FL
Contact:	Phil Wilkerson, 1-800-932-5536 x 2247. Allen Systems Group, Inc., 750 Eleventh St. South, Naples, FL 34101, Attention: Human Resources. Fax 941-263-1952
Description:	Three to five years experience specializing in software documentation. Entry-level candidates also considered. Knowledge of FrameMaker for Windows 95 including the ability to develop GUI-intensive books with conditional sections, use paragraph tags and templates, perform conversions from WordPerfect 5.2 for Windows, and develop hypertext documents as Acrobat Portable Document Files. Bachelor's Degree in English composition, Journalism, or Technical Communications.

Did You Know?
Everything You'll Ever Need to Know About Computers

By Lori Corbett

Check out ZD Net University (ZDU) at http://www.zdu.com. I found this site during a recent surfing trip. Developed by Ziff Davis (the computer magazine publisher), ZDU is online computing classes and seminars taught on private, moderated message boards for $4.95 a month. An introduction to Java is just getting ready to start on June 30. Other classes include subjects such as How to Code with HTML and C++ for Beginners.

How Does It Work?

Once a week, a qualified ZDU instructor posts an assignment on the class message board. All discussion resulting from the assignment is managed by the instructor, teaching assistants, moderators and other students.

❑ The ZDU classroom accommodates each student's schedule.
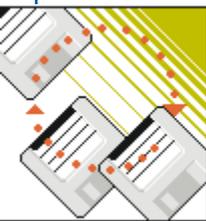
❑ Students log onto ZDU at least once a week to read assignments and post questions.

❑ Most classes last 4 to 8 weeks. Instructors offer biweekly live chat "office hours" for real-time interaction.

❑ No flames or ads, only focused learning.

If you'd like to see how a sample class works, just drop in at ZDU, click on How ZDU Works, and then click on View a Sample Class. ✄

Wow, What a Year!

By Charlotte Salveson

June marks my final program of this Chapter year as your Vice President and looking back — it's been a very good year indeed. Since bringing quality programs to the membership is the primary duty for the office of Chapter Vice President, my objectives for the Chapter this year were to get as much participation as possible from the Chapter members and to keep meeting attendance high.

Since our Chapter theme is technical trends, I enlisted the membership to participate in identifying topics for our programs. At our first meeting in July, I conducted a brainstorming session with the attendees to identify topics of interest for each meeting. That done, I then asked for volunteers to take responsibility for coordinating one meeting each. The response was overwhelmingly positive. By the end of that first meeting, we had established the entire year's program plan. It was teamwork at its finest!

I want to formally recognize and thank all those who have made this year's programs interesting, educational, enriching, and fun. In August, Dan Voss of Lockheed-Martin, kicked off the planned programs with an energetic and informative recap of tidbits from past STC conferences. In September, Joanne Ohlsson of ForeFront, Inc. in Boulder, Colorado, presented an online demonstration of her company's ForeHelp 2.95 Help Authoring Tool. In October, W.C. Wiese and Bill Paskert, enlisted Tess Moore and Rebecca Walish of Lockheed-Martin to share their pioneering venture in establishing photo archives on their computer network. Our November/December holiday dinner meeting, coordinated by Bruce Cone of PaySys International, Inc., was an evening of good food and fun mixers.

In January, we were back to our focus on technical trends with Tool Wars. This panel discussion, lead by Diane Heald and veterans of various online help tools, provided valuable insight to help authoring systems. In February, Steve Werly of PaySys shared that company's experiences in implementing the delivery of documentation on CD-ROM. In March, Chapter President, Dick Hughes, coordinated the arrangements with UCF for us to tour its impressive Tech Writing Lab and hear a presentation on online documentation by visiting professor Henrietta Shirk. In April, W.C. Wiese engaged guest speaker Dave King of ParkAve.net, who shared an informative look at Web page design and business opportunities for technical communicators. In May, Mark Hannigan, immediate past Region 3 Director-Sponsor and current STC International Secretary, brought us a delightful and informative look at our profession's past, present, and future.

Re-instituting the practice of presenting door prizes at each meeting, Paul Lockwood, our Chapter Secretary, volunteered to award door prizes.

It has been encouraging to note that attendance has been very good this year. I believe the high attendance can be attributed to many factors, but two major contributors are the quality of our programs and getting the word out to everyone in our new, award-winning *Tech Trends* newsletter. Thanks, again, to everyone for making this a rewarding tenure. ⌘

Let's Celebrate

By Charlotte Salveson

The answer to the first question is: A desktop publishing application that could also describe a job at an art supply store. The answer to the second is: Bonanza. (For the actual questions, keep reading.) These are the types of brain testers you will have the opportunity to answer at the June STC meeting. This will be a dinner meeting followed by a game of Techardy (technical/general jeopardy), complete with special game hosts. Everyone will compete for prizes. Don't miss this chance to test your knowledge.

To finish out the year's programs, this meeting will contain all the elements consistent with our program goals—educational, interesting, participatory, and fun. Following the dinner, our game masters plan to form teams consisting of you and all the members of your dinner table competing against members of the other dinner tables.

The winning team will be awarded a prize for each member. Also, that winning team will select their MVP (most valuable player) who will win a brand new car! Game masters, Paul Lockwood of EDS and Ted Salveson of TLT Marketing Group, are trivia buffs, have experience working in film and radio broadcasting, love a challenge of knowledge, and really love to have fun. So, read up on technical communications and general knowledge facts because these two plan to put you to the test!

Back to the business side of things, we also will be presenting this year's Technical Writing Awards and installing our new officers.

Oh, yes, I did promise the questions to the opening answers of this article. The first question is: What is FrameMaker? The second question is: What was the first weekly TV series to be broadcast in color?

(How did you do?) ⌘

Introducing Our New Region 3 Director-Sponsor

By Michelle Ratcliffe

Hello! I am very excited and very proud to be your new Director-Sponsor. Thank you for your support. I am really looking forward to working with you.

As we get started, I'd like first to say THANK YOU to Mark Hanigan, the outgoing Director-Sponsor for our region and incoming Secretary for the Society. Mark has been the true treasure of this region for the past three years. His enthusiasm, unbridled passion, and wisdom have inspired many to help grow STC, our

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Look for announcements about the availability of the Region 3 Web site.

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chapters, and even many of our careers to unparalleled levels of success. His commitment and vision resulted in many, many tremendous accomplishments. I hope you will join me in thanking him for his contributions. You can reach Mark at onwritetrk@aol.com.

And Now for the News...

CONGRATULATIONS!!

The STC annual conference (just held in Toronto, Canada) is a great event on many levels. But one of its most important activities is to recognize the achievements of chapters and individual STC members. Region 3 (to no one's surprise) demonstrated once again how to do it!

Congratulations to the Orlando chapter for winning the 1997 Chapter Achievement Award for chapters with 75–150 members. Also, congratulations to the East Tennessee chapter for winning the 1997 Pacesetter Award.

Congratulations to new Fellows Carol Barnum, the Assistant to the President for Publications and member of the Atlanta chapter, and George Hayhoe, Technical Communication Editor and member of the South Carolina chapter, and Associate Fellow, Beth Tanner of the Middle Tennessee chapter.

Congratulations to these winning newsletters in Region 3:

❑ *Transcript,* East Tennessee, Brad Connatser, Distinguished Technical Communication
❑ *CommLink,* Atlanta, Mary Menz, Excellence
❑ *Verbatim,* South Carolina, Else Tennessen, Excellence
❑ *Tech Trends*, Orlando, Lori Corbett, Achievement
❑ *Write-Up,* Suncoast, Karin Fraser, Most Improved
❑ *Tech Commentary,* Tennessee Tech Student Chapter, Alfred Cooper and Joe Scardina, Most Improved.

And final congratulations to the East Tennessee chapter for winning an Excellence award in the STC Public Relations competition.

New Challenges

A number of individuals in Region 3 contribute to the Society in leadership roles. These individuals are moving into new roles at the Society level:

Martha Collins, Suncoast chapter, Society Treasurer Jamie Clark, Suncoast chapter, manager for the Society's

International Online Communications Competition (IOCC)

Scott DeLoach, Atlanta chapter, manager for the Society's Online Information Special Interest Group

Hary Bottka, First Coast chapter, manager for the Society's International Competition Winners Traveling Exhibit

Jeanne Dole, East Tennessee chapter, member of the Nominating Committee.

If you are moving into a new role, and I did not include you, please let me know so we can share the news.

A Look to the Future

In the next few months, look for announcements about the availability of the Region 3 Web site. The Web site will be a way for all of us to communicate news and happenings around the region. Also, Stephanie Bergeron of the Suncoast chapter is helping me investigate the possibility of creating and facilitating an online discussion list similar to TECHWR-L and WINHELP-L. The online discussion list originally will be a method for the leaders of Region 3 to communicate and share ideas about chapter development and happenings, and it can expand depending on how its use evolves. If you have any ideas or comments about either of these projects, please let me know.

You can reach me at 8942 Bayaud Drive, Tampa FL, 813/920-3539 (home), 813/962-2554, extension 730 (work), MRatcliffe@msn.com.

Have a great month! ✠

on Language

By Mary Kendig

Are We in Agreement?

Have you ever had difficulty remembering which pronouns are singular, which are plural, and which can vary depending on meaning? This month's column includes three lists you can refer to if you're ever in doubt:

The following pronouns are always singular. Any pronouns that refer to these pronouns must also be singular. Verbs used with these pronouns must be singular as well.

anybody   everybody   one
anyone   everyone   somebody
another   nobody   someone
each   no one
either   neither

For example:

❑ Neither of the men has *his* tools. (not *their*)

❑ Someone left *his* or *her* coat at the restaurant. (not *their*)

❑ If anyone wants a copy, *he* or *she* can request one. (not *they*)

Note: His or her is preferred over his/her, and he or she is preferred over he/she.

The following pronouns are always plural. Any pronouns that refer to these pronouns must also be plural. Verbs used with these pronouns must be plural as well.

many   both   few   several   others

For example:

❑ Several found *their* test results surprising.

❑ Only a few would sacrifice *their* weekends.

❑ Many brought *their* lunches with them.

The following pronouns can be singular or plural, depending on the meaning of the sentence:

all   any   some   none

When these pronouns refer to an individual number, they generally are regarded as plural. When they refer to quantity or mass, they generally are regarded as singular.

For example:

❑ Some found *their* performance reviews timely. (Some is plural here.)

❑ Some of the candy has lost *its* flavor. (Some is singular here.)

❑ *Is* any of the fruit left? (Any is singular here.)

❑ *Are* any of the people here? (Any is plural here.)

Hope you find this reference tool handy! ⌗

***Tech Trends** editor Lori Corbett was presented with the Distinguished Chapter Service Award at May's Chapter Meeting*

Chapter Notes

By Paul Lockwood

May Meeting

"We drank a lot of beers together, chased a lot of women together." That's NOT a synopsis of the May 28 Chapter meeting, just one of the many intriguing remarks and quotes from a fun and thought-provoking evening … and I won't tell you which long-time Chapter member said that! What I *will* share with you are the highlights:

Tech Trends editor Lori Corbett was presented with the Distinguished Chapter Service Award.

STC Immediate Past Region 3 Director-Sponsor Mark Hanigan announced that the Orlando Chapter is the recipient of the Chapter Achieve-ment Award for chapters with 76–150 members. Mark also presented the wide-ranging, fast-paced presentation on "The Plug-and-Play Technical Communicator," which included predictions from the past (such as, "I think there is a world market for maybe five computers," stated in 1943 by the chairman of IBM) and Mark's own forecast of our profession's future— "The need for quality technical communicators is growing astronomically."

In addition to her service award, Lori Corbett also walked away from the meeting with a door prize. Other door prize winners included Nadia Bojilova, Chris Chiaro, Jon Kessler, and Steve Werly. ⌗

Coming Up . . .

DATE	TOPIC	LOCATION
JUNE 16	Deadline for Trends '97 Call for Presenters.	
JUNE 25	**Chapter Meeting:** Year-End Banquet - Italian Buffet 6:30 p.m.—Members: $12.00 / Nonmembers: $15.00. R.S.V.P. by June 23 to Charlotte Salveson at csalveson@paysys.com or 407-660-0343.	Winter Park Civic Center 1050 W. Morse Blvd. Winter Park, FL
JULY 9	**New Technologies SIG Meeting** 6:30 p.m. Call Laurie Benson at 667-3725 for more information.	Pizze Hut Corner of Fairbanks & 17-92
JULY 11	Notification of accepted speakers for Trends '97.	
JULY 30	**Chapter Meeting:** Annual Planning Session 6:30 p.m.—There is no charge for this meeting; just bring your thinking caps and plan on having a good time! R.S.V.P. to Gwen Thomas at gthomas@paysys.com or 407-660-0343.	Winter Park Civic Center 1050 W. Morse Blvd. Winter Park, FL
AUG. 1	Deadline for submitting articles for the August issue of *Tech Trends.*	