TECH TRENDS

User Revelations

by Matt Danda

I recently interviewed several full-time clerks (users) who are most affected by the new computer system and the new documentation. Here are some of the more interesting question/answers between myself and the users.

Me: Where are your copies of the manuals?
User: I don't know. I think Tech Services has them.

Me: How did you learn to use the software?
User: Because our training is purely hands-on, we have no real need for training manuals.

Me: What kind of manual would you like to read?
User: Give me step-by-step instructions; I can handle that. Don't tell me how it works; just tell me how to do it.

Me: When you first started working here, how difficult was it to learn to use the software?
User: The computer system was the easiest part. It's the office procedures that were difficult and complex.

Me: How often do you use the manuals?
User: I only refer to the manual after I know the system and want to learn some more advanced stuff.

Me: From your perspective as a user in the real world, what is the most important part of the manual?
User: The index. A manual must have a good index. Without one, I won't look at it. Also, a good trouble-shooting guide can be very useful. I like something that tells me, "If this happens, do this...."

Me: When you have a question about the computer, what do you do?
User: First I ask the most experienced person in the area. If he or she doesn't know the answer, I call technical services (in the organization). If they can't answer my question, they call the software company.

Matt Danda recently joined the STC Orlando Chapter. He is currently a technical writer for Walt Disney Co.

Editor's note: If you have any interesting user interviews you'd like to share with us, please e-mail them to nbojilova@paysys.com.

Inside this issue:

A Note from the President . . .

Hot Summer News

by Dick Hughes

Greetings everyone, and welcome to Central Florida's smoky summer of 1998. Would all technical communicators out there please research and post on your web site the correct procedures to follow when conducting a rain dance – obviously, I must be missing an important step in the process. Thanks.

Anyway, for those of you who missed our last two monthly meetings, we enjoyed an interesting wrap-up of STC's certification feasibility study at our May meeting, and a really fun Dilbert-game-based ethics mini-workshop at our recent June meeting. Sorry some of you couldn't make it. Speaking of monthly meetings, I'd like to thank those of you who returned our meeting surveys in April. Incoming Vice President and Programs Manager, Lori Corbett, is putting your comments to good use in planning for our 1998–99 chapter programs. Lori is also planning an informal meeting in July to get more of your input for future programs; be sure to check the Calendar on page 8 for meeting information.

Many, many thanks go to Gwen Thomas, our outgoing (in more ways than one) Vice President and Program Manager for the past year. Gwen has done a wonderful job coordinating and scheduling the monthly meetings over the last year, and has always been there with a smile and a warm greeting. We'll miss Gwen, but now she can just come to the meetings and relax as a participant.

Additional kudos go to Linda Emerine, member of our chapter's Education Committee and coordinator of this year's Central Florida High School Technical Writing Competition. The Orlando Chapter was proud to present four Excellence Awards and two Merit Awards to area high school students this year. As we conclude our third year of the high school competition, we are excited about the continued participation in this event.

As we enter our traditional summer planning period, some of the chapter activities that you can look forward to include the continuation of our monthly program meetings, our Trends '98 conference in October, the Florida Technical Communications/Publications Competitions in November, and maybe some cooler weather in December! As always, if you're interested in helping out on any of our chapter committees, please contact me at either 660-2552 or hughesrl@cdm.com. We can always use some new ideas.

Have You Noticed?

The Orlando STC Chapter was mentioned in the Community Notes section of the *Orlando Sentinel* on July 9, 1998 as the organizer of the Central Florida High School Technical Writing Competition. Picked up from the Education Committee's press release on the competition, the daily newspaper mentioned the names of the winners, their respective schools, and the titles of the winning entries. For more information and pictures from the award ceremony, please see Chapter Notes on page 5.

V.P. Peeps

Get Ready, Get Set…
by Lori Corbett

And we're off. With your help, I'm really looking forward to the coming chapter year serving as vice president. Now, you're probably asking yourself, "Why is she so excited? What could be so different about this year?" I hope the following news answers those questions.

1998 STC Orlando Chapter Meeting Survey Results

As part of the legacy from last year's administrative council, I received the results of the 1998 Meeting Survey. The response rate was extremely impressive. We distributed approximately 100 surveys to our membership and received 34 completed responses. Thank you all!

Although most of the responses were somewhat predictable, some of them were a bit surprising. For example, the responses to the question about whether food and beverages were available for meetings indicated that the majority of our membership thinks they are *somewhat* important, but (surprisingly to me) eight respondents think they are *not* important. For the coming year, we will continue to offer light refreshments during the networking portion of each meeting.

Most respondents find the Winter Park Civic Center an adequate meeting location, with exceptions for company or facility tours and celebrations at restaurants or banquet rooms. I would like to take a moment here to elaborate on my personal feelings about the Winter Park Civic Center. It's probably the best choice for us at this time because:

· The price is reasonable. We've tried hotels, the library, and restaurants. All locations within downtown Orlando require parking costs, and most places require food guarantees.

· The location is central to most of our membership. I travel from Leesburg; others come from as far as Melbourne, Lakeland, and Deltona. We are the Orlando chapter, and we need to meet within a few miles of downtown Orlando.

· The room is professional. Okay, I can hear some of you remember those aerobics classes next door. But believe me, that noise really was minimal compared to a public restaurant.

· The staff is very helpful and flexible. We rent the room for two hours, but they let us come in early to set up and leave a little later so we can clean up. Most of the time, we are the last group in the building.

If you still would like to find a new location, please let me know where you think we would be better off.

Not surprisingly, program content is the primary purpose for attending meetings, with networking and social aspects tying for second. In a related subject, respondents selected presentations and topics in the following order of preference:

1. Software demonstrations
2. Speakers and Panels
3. Tours

And last, but certainly not least, many of you expressed the desire to vary our meeting days. I am certainly going to try to do this. Although our first meeting is Wednesday, July 22, the August meeting will be on Tuesday, August 25. I hope rotating meeting days enables more of you to attend more meetings this year.

July Meeting – Annual Program Planning Session

We're having a brainstorming session. Come and share your ideas. Even if you don't think you could possibly add to the conversation, someone just might have an idea to which you could add some pertinent and helpful information. I promise that no one will have to volunteer for anything unless, of course, you want to volunteer. All help is gratefully accepted!

Just come and share some pizza while we examine the areas and topics you would like to hear more about during the coming year. And last, but not least, there is no charge for this meeting. Just bring your thinking caps and plan on having a good time!

August Meeting – 45th Annual STC Conference Review

The first Orlando chapter meeting I attended was the 41st Annual STC Conference review in August 1994. So I guess you could say it is something of a tradition. This meeting is always a lot of fun. Approximately twelve members of our chapter attended this year's conference in Anaheim, California. Everyone is invited to come learn a little bit and laugh a little bit at this "informal" panel presentation.

If you attended this year's meeting and would like to sit on the panel, please contact me for more information.

Check the "Calendar" for the meeting location, date, and time.

1998 FTCC Deadline Approaches
by Kathlena Witkowski

The eighth annual Florida Technical Communication Competition is underway! All professional and student technical communicators are encouraged to submit technical publications, art, and online entries. Entry forms and instructions will be mailed in August to those planning to compete. The deadline for all 1998 FTCC submissions is September 25.

Call for Entries

Individuals or teams may enter, and entries may be submitted in more than one category. The categories are publications, art, and online. Each submitter who is an STC member receives a $10.00 discount on entry fees, and student members may enter at a reduced rate.

All entries are evaluated on their own merit by trained judges recruited for their experience and expertise.

Appraised on the effectiveness of the writing, editing and graphics, each entry is reviewed first by individual judges and again by teams of three who convene on judging day to reach a consensus. Consensus judging is on November 14. Both individual judges' comments and the consensus comments for each entry are sent to submitters in December along with notification of any awards earned.

Of the three awards possible, Distinguished, Excellence, or Merit, all entries earning the Distinguished honor are automatically entered in STC's International Competition!

Additionally, one prestigious Best of Show is named in each category.

All awards are announced and presented at the FTCC Banquet on January 30, 1999.

Competition Committee

The competition is being coordinated again this year by the Suncoast chapter and sponsored by all the STC chapters in Florida. Co-chairs Khairunnisa Hoosainali and Nancy Reach head the planning committee of 20 volunteers to coordinate competition activities.

Contact Information

For entering the competition or participating on the committee-- Khairunnisa Hoosainali at 813-532-2692 or khairu_h1@verifone.com; Nancy Reach at 813-734-5473 x2620 or reach@worldnet.att.com. To update address information in the competition mailing list, contact Stephanie Bergeron at 813-532-2647 or tephanie_b1@verifone.com (with a #1, not an 'L').

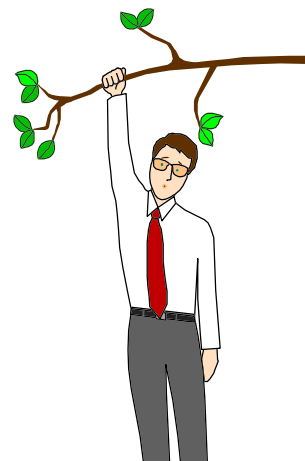Tell associates and employers about this opportunity and enter this year!

All I Want To Do
by Bob Lanni

All I want to do is add a picture to my text.
A simple little graphic, yet it makes me so perplexed.
Finding one is easy, all I have to do is look.
But doing it's another thing; I have to read a book.

All I want to do is clarify what I have said.
But all these different formats overload my tired head.
Bitmap, *gif*, and *jpeg*, Word and *tif* and *e p s*.
And when you finally print it out, the thing looks like a mess!

All I want to do is "size it" right and make it stay.
If I don't drop an anchor though, the damn thing floats away.
And while I'm at it, why do graphics take up so much space,
requiring custom "filters" and a special interface?
　　And options up the ying-yang and messages galore.
　　If I don't get some help soon, I can't *take* it anymore!

All I want to do is put a picture on a page.
I start out calm and cheerful, and end up in a rage.
Wild and unpredictable, refusing to be tamed.
You can't just *hang* the picture, you need to get it framed.

So if you can explain to me which formats I should use,
provide a handy handout I can leisurely peruse,
I'd be forever grateful not to be so stressed and vexed.
'Cause all I want to do is add a picture to my text.

Chapter Notes

by Laurie Benson

May Certification Program

The May Program brought relief for those of you who were concerned about the STC certification issue. The survey results were not very supportive of certification. Although the votes were almost evenly divided on most questions, some responses showed that employers will not support the initiative enough to share in the costs of certifying technical communicators. Although we have not heard a definitive response from the National STC office yet, the results, as presented by Professional Testing Inc., do not indicate that there is enough support by members to continue the certificate pursuit at this time.

June Ethics Program and Banquet

Our June meeting was a time for games and good food. Those of us who attended the June Banquet got a chance to play a Dilbert board game led by Dan Voss of Lockheed Martin. This game focused on ethical questions that can arise in corporate life. Some situations touched upon the issues of sexual harassment, use of company assets, and accepting gifts from a vendor and illustrated well how most ethics issues are not black and white but contain a significant amount of gray.

In the game, we discussed each ethical dilemma by teams and crafted how our own team would handle the ethical dilemma. The ethical validity of our choice determined how many spaces our character could move on the Dilbert board. We learned that there was more than one way to look at many of these ethical issues. The game was fun but time was short and we wished that we could have solved more dilemmas.

Dilbert doorprizes of the evening went to Pete Jameson, Alicia Baskins, Karen Lane, and W.C. Weise.

The winners of the High School Technical Writing Competition and their teachers (above)

Players in the Dilbert ethics game

Admin Council

by Laurie Benson

Since June is the end of the STC's fiscal year, it is a time to close the books and welcome in a new year. Gwen Thomas passed the Vice Presidential reins over to Lori Corbett who already has some good ideas for programs for the next year. Please join us at the July 22 planning meeting at the Winter Park Civic Center to help us pick the most promising ideas for the new year's monthly programs.

Regional News

Remembering the 45th Annual Conference

by Michelle Ratcliffe

It hardly seems possible that the 1998 annual conference is over but it is. What a fantastic week. Thank you to the several individuals who attended the STC Leadership Day and the Region 3 reception. Region 3 had quite a showing! I really enjoyed meeting so many new people and catching up with so many friends!

One of the biggest happenings were the recognition and celebration of the new Associate Fellows and Fellows and announcement of the two Chapter Achievement Awards and Pacesetter Award in our region. These were made at Tuesday evening's Honor's Banquet. Congratulations on these fantastic accomplishments:

First Coast Chapter
Chapter Achievement Award

Atlanta Chapter
Chapter Achievement Award

East Tennessee Chapter
Pacesetter Award for PCHICC

WAY TO GO!!

Here is a summary of Board actions at the 1998 Spring Board Meeting.

Approved the formation of new chapters:
- Northern Plains
- Utah State University Student Chapter
- Southern Arizona Chapter

Dissolved chapters:
- Pittsburgh State Student Chapter
- Moorhead State Student Chapter

Adopted new policies:
- Sexual Harassment Policy - Volunteers
- Sexual Harassment Policy - STC Office
- STC Diversity Policy
- STC Financial Reserve Policy

You can contact the Society office for copies of these new policies.

Approved grants and funding for:
- $2,000.00 to support a faculty internship for the summer of 1998.
- $10,000 to David Dayton, Texas Tech University, for a study of "Online Editing by Technical Editors: Attitudes, Practices, Impacts."
- $10,000 to Jean A. Pratt, Utah State University, for a study of "Instruction in Microbursts: The Study of Minimalist Principles Applied to Online Help."
- $9,250 to Jessica Schultz and Beverly Zimmerman, Brigham Young University, and Charles Cox, University of South Florida, for a study of "Examining the Effectiveness of Document Design Principles in Creating Computer-Generated Health Questionnaires."
- $8,253 to Emily A. Thrush, University of Memphis, for a study of "Clarity and Reading Comprehensibility for International Audiences," which is subject to the submittal of a revised proposal following the Grant Committee guidelines.

Michelle Ratcliffe
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813/920-3539
404/631-2303 (voice mail)
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Have You Heard?

The *Proceedings* from the STC's 45th Annual Conference are now for sale on CD-ROM. This is the first time that STC has offered a complete set of its annual conference *Proceedings* in this format.

The *Proceedings* gathers all the papers presented at the 1998 conference--more than 200 on subjects ranging from online help systems and Web page design to new technical communication theories and research.

The CD-ROM sells for $10 to STC members, $15 to non-members. The print version sells for $60 to STC members, $90 for non-members. For ordering information, please contact Merrick Bechini at 703/522-4114, x. 202 or merrick@stc-va.org.

eye on Language

You Say Potato. . .

by Mary Kendig

Although I've been an editor for 17 years and am a nitpicker by nature, I've always considered myself an easygoing person overall. I even managed to be a good sport when a friend once gave me a T-shirt that said, "Does anal retentive have a hyphen?" It was all in fun, of course. Ha, ha, ha. (By the way, yes it does.) To make a long story short, I'm not bothered by too many things. Except for one small item.

Before I reveal the cause of my repeated head twitching and teeth grinding, let me say this: Although the problem is relatively minute, I've been exposed to it for years now, and the abuse is spreading. Need I tell you? It involves the mispronunciation of a word. Yes, it's an "English thing," as my husband eloquently puts it.

I've come to refer to it as "Sylvester the Cat Syndrome," because of Sylvester's proclivity for using the letters *th* repeatedly when just one letter (such as *s* or *t*) would do. Of course, recognizing Sylvester's speech impediment, I don't fault him for saying things like "Thufferin' thuccotasth!" The poor dear can't help it. But the people who abuse the aforementioned "English thing" can help it. They know better but boldly choose to ignore simple common sense.

I've kept you wondering long enough. The cause of my annoyance is the way some otherwise intelligent people insist on adding an *h* to the end of the word *height* when they pronounce it. *Heighth* It drives me up a wall. Maybe it's because I live with someone who finds ways to work the word into almost every conversation he has with me.

I can see I've got to clarify something. My husband and I have managed to live in relative peace for 16 years now, and we agree on a lot of things, except for that gosh-darn word. Visit our house almost any evening, for example, and chances are you'll hear me repeating the *t* sound so often you might think you were hearing laughter (*tee-tee-tee*) if it weren't for the desperate, crazed look on my face.

I'll admit that my husband does put up a good argument. Why do most similar measurement-oriented words—*length, width, breadth, depth*—use the *th*, when *height* doesn't? Why is *height* an exception? Apparently, many people agree with him. Go to any home improvement store, and you'll hear *heighth* so many times your head will spin. Trust me. Just stay away if you know what's good for you.

Look, I don't make the rules, I just enforce 'em. English is an often confounding language, and that's the way the word has evolved. It has worked perfectly well for hundreds of years, and it won't change now, no matter how hard my husband and his cohorts in crime try. Can't we all just get along? I believe we can if we try (if we can at least **spell** the word correctly, that is). We can do that much, can't we? CAN'T WE?

Ahh. Thank you for listening. I almost feel at peace now. In fact, I can sincerely say that my sense of peace has risen to new . . . height(h)s.

Employment Opportunities

by Loretta Lott

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

Position:	Technical Writer
Location:	Orlando
Contact:	Din Bissoondial, ACSYS Resources, Inc. 426-2040, fax 426.2050
Description:	Experience writing, HTML, and interactive tutorials. Writing for a non-technical audience. Knowledge of help authoring tools and financial applications. Salary $35-40,000.

Coming Up...

July 22	**Chapter Meeting:** Annual Program Planning Session Come enjoy some pizza and brainstorm about topics for this year's monthly meet ings. **No charge for this meeting!** 6:30 p.m. – Time for networking 7:00 p.m. – Business meeting and working session. R.S.V.P. to Lori Corbett at 407/828-5315 or Lori_Corbett@wda.disney.com	Winter Park Civic Center 1050 W. Morse Blvd. Winter Park, Florida
August 25	**Chapter Meeting: 45th Annual STC Conference Review.** Come hear about some of the best sessions your fellow Orlando Chapter mem bers attended at the conference. Members: $5.00 / Nonmembers: $7.00 6:30 p.m. – Time for net working 7:00 p.m. – Business meeting and panel discussion. R.S.V.P. to Lori Corbett at 407/828-5315 or Lori_Corbett@wda.disney.com	Winter Park Civic Center 1050 W. Morse Blvd. Winter Park, Florida
Sept. 1	**Submission Deadline for the September/October issue of Tech Tech Trends.** Contact Nadejda Bojilova at 407/ 660-0343 x.321 or at nbojilova@paysys.com for more details on how to submit articles for the Orlando STC chapter newsletter.	
Sept. 25	**Submission Deadline for the 8th Annual Florida Technical Communication Competition.** See article on page 4 for details or contact Khairunnisa Hoosainali at 813/532-2692 or khairu_h1@verifone.com; or Nancy Reach at 813/734-5473 x2620 or reach@worldnet.att.net	

TECH TRENDS

Orlando Chapter
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—PLEASE FORWARD—

STC

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