Have an article?

Submit a new article or Chapter Meeting summary to newsletter@stc-orlando.org. If it's printed, you win a $5 chapter meeting discount voucher.

Single-Sourcing with FrameMaker and SiberSafe

BY ROB HANNA,
STC TORONTO CHAPTER
PRESIDENT

Like many of you, I've struggled over the years to find the right combination of tools and processes to reliably manage large volumes of volatile text under the duress of seemingly impossible deadlines. Inevitably, I had to learn to customize my tools and automate as much of the process as I could. This meant getting under the hood and learning numerous scripting and markup languages. I was constantly exploring new technologies and applications that could take on some of the heavy lifting.

During my last engagement as a technical communicator, I started to gain a real appreciation for an authoring tool I had only flirted with previously—Adobe FrameMaker. Over the course of several publishing cycles, I was able to cobble together a pretty reliable single-source publishing solution. With FrameMaker at the heart of my process, I found that I could reuse my content by going to a more modular style of writing and use text-insets and conditional text for single-sourcing. I found I could also repurpose my content across several different output formats. The only problem was that I couldn't automate the process with FrameMaker alone. I had to strap on many different applications to my process to manage my content.

Parts of the publication process couldn't be automated with the tools we had on hand. I used a code management tool to store and version my content. I used a spreadsheet to record and manage metadata for that content. I used scripts to bring together content I needed for publishing. There were also problems with FrameMaker that I had to find workarounds for such as embedding updateable cross-references between content in text-insets; fixing broken paths to images and files; and managing complex conditions for publishing.

Another major problem area for our process was with collaboration. Over the course of my engagement the volume of work and the accumulation of overtime forced our team to grow from a single technical communicator to a team of four. If one of us stepped out of process it would set us back while we tried to find out what went wrong. Because we were working on smaller pieces of content, we could all work together without locking up the whole document. But we also ran the risk of misplacing or mislabeling pieces of content. If the spreadsheet wasn't updated regularly, we would end up repeating tasks unnecessarily or risk creating a large bottleneck when it came time to aggregate the content at publishing time.

Getting content from our subject matter experts was no walk in the park either. They were under their own deadlines and had no appreciation for the time pressures we were in sitting at the tail-end of the product life-cycle. Every so often they would find time to get their content to us but rarely ever within the timeframe we asked for it. It would come to us in different formats that we would have to convert to FrameMaker and lay out ready for publication. We then had to convert it to RTF and send it back for approval and then go through the conversion process once again to get their corrected text back into FrameMaker. It wasn't nearly as efficient as it sounds.

We tried purchasing tools to automate the working with FrameMaker but this was no simple task. Every upgrade to either the add-on tool or to FrameMaker meant we had to rewrite our scripts or change our processes. In a couple of cases we had to back out of an add-on upgrade or abandon the new add-on all together.

Just as things were beginning to come together and the process was approaching maturity, we encountered another major twist. Greener pastures were calling me away. I ended up leaving my team holding my bag of tricks, which consisted of a lot of complex scripts and processes all held together with shoestrings and chicken wire.

Single-Sourcing
(Continued from page 1)

There is a happy ending to my story. I eventually found a solution to most of the challenges I faced—by becoming part of the solution with a company called SiberLogic. This company has been producing an XML-based content management system (CMS) since 1999, specifically targeting the technical communication market. With their tool, SiberSafe CMS, we have been able to address virtually all of the bumps on the road to automated single-source publishing with FrameMaker.

SiberSafe can replace all your FrameMaker plug-ins. It is the one end-to-end solution that takes you from the initial writing assignment straight through to multi-channel publishing of your source content, ensuring that you are more productive on an ongoing basis and more responsive to ad hoc requests.

engine in the CMS. Each writer has a list of writing tasks and knows how and when to execute them, and managers can keep track of progress and resource allocation.

Content is easily found and reused from the repository. I can define the granularity of reuse appropriate for our workflow and use it knowing that it will be updated appropriately across all instances when I publish it. Links are managed by the CMS and strictly enforced each time content is taken out of the repository. Even links to embedded images and other binary content are rebuilt by the system upon publishing. Because there are no broken links, I save a lot of QA time and the final product is higher quality.

Using the conditional inclusion features in the CMS instead of the conditional markup in Frame-Maker, I can specify complex conditions for my content to produce custom versions of my publications. The CMS uses attributes set on elements in my structured Frame-

a task from SiberSafe via email from where they launch the appropriate template in the editing console, complete their content, and submit it directly to the repository. The automated workflow ensures that the task can be escalated to a manager if the contributor fails to respond to the assigned task within the defined timeframe.

Presentation style is no longer an issue for authors and contributors with a flair for "font-fiddling." Styles are applied directly to the XML upon publishing instead of being applied inline within the FrameMaker file. In fact, we can have many different presentation styles applied to the same Frame-Maker content.

Once the team has the content in the system, they submit the content to assigned reviewers through the workflow engine. The online reviewing console allows reviewers to add annotations to the text and see other annotations in real time within their collaborative reviewing environment. When they are finished, the workflow sends it to me to dispose of the comments accordingly.

> *"The content management system stores the metadata and content is checked directly into and out of FrameMaker so that the team no longer needs to worry about stepping on someone else's work."*

I no longer need to maintain spreadsheets of metadata or a bloated code management tool stuffed with FrameMaker files. The content management system stores the metadata, and content is checked directly into and out of FrameMaker so that the team no longer needs to worry about stepping on someone else's work. File naming conventions and complex directory structures became a thing of the past. Writing assignments are sent out through email and managed by the workflow

Maker content ensuring that the DTD won't break when the conditions are applied.

With SiberSafe's online web-based editing console, subject matter experts can contribute content directly through their web browser without even knowing that they are using XML, or even FrameMaker. This can be particularly useful when contract assistance is required and FrameMaker expertise is limited. They are sent

If you translate your content, SiberSafe will manage this too. The automation in the workflow triggers translators to translate only changed fragments of content thereby reducing the amount of content that needs to be processed, saving both time and money. SiberSafe's translation memory feature allows you to aggregate translation memory files into a single federated translation memory file. SiberSafe even ships with an integrated translation memory tool that you can use if you do not already have one.

Single-Sourcing
(Continued from page 2)

Once all of the content is safely to bed, I use SiberSafe's publishing engine and staging application to produce any of my target information products. These can be PDF, HTML Help, Web Help, RTF, WEP, PDA, etc. I can even choose to send my output to SiberSafe's standalone knowledge base format. I also have the flexibility to choose any structured application for new documents. While it can be configured for any DTD or schema, SiberSafe has out-of-the-box support for such documentation standards as DocBook, sdocbook, the Darwin Information Typing Architecture (DITA), and S1000D.

But one of the most amazing aspects of this solution is that I can perform most of these tasks directly from FrameMaker. With SiberSafe's new FrameMaker integration, most of the authoring tasks can be accessed through menus and context-sensitive commands directly in FrameMaker. This effectively reduces the complexity of my process down to a single tool, so I can do much more—with less! As all of the business rules are programmed directly into SiberSafe, I'll no longer have to leave my team holding the bag when it's time to step off into my next big adventure. **—MtM**

ROB HANNA IS PRESIDENT OF STC TORONTO CHAPTER AND AN ACTIVE PARTICIPANT IN HIS LOCAL TECHNICAL WRITING COMMUNITY. HIS EXPERIENCE SPANS SEVERAL INDUSTRIES OVER A PERIOD OF 15 YEARS. IN 2002, HE WAS INSTRUMENTAL IN FORMING THE TORONTO STC SINGLE-SOURCING SIG, AND JOINED SIBERLOGIC IN 2005 AS DIRECTOR OF PROFESSIONAL SERVICES. HIS SINGLE-SOURCING EXPERTISE AND TECHNICAL COMMUNICATION EXPERIENCE BRING A STRONG USER-CENTERED FOCUS TO THE SIBERLOGIC TEAM.

Call for Jaffe Award Nominations

BY CHRISTINA HAMMOCK, JAFFE AWARD PUBLICITY CHAIR

The STC Orlando Chapter is pleased to request nominations for the 2006 Jaffe Award, to be presented in January to Central Florida's outstanding technical communicators and the organizations that benefit from their professionalism.

Judges will select an individual award winner and two runners-up based on candidates' pursuit of excellence in full-time technical communication, marketing, user satisfaction, product development, and meeting business objectives. Nominations are due by **December 15, 2005.**

Entries are encouraged whether you are an in-house employee, contractor, or free-lance professional. You may even nominate yourself or another technical communicator who is deserving of this award.

Dan Voss captured last year's award. Dan is a Senior Member of STC Orlando Chapter and Communications Manager of Tactical Missiles at Lockheed Martin Missiles and Fire Control in Orlando.

Kelli Pharo, 2004 Jaffe Award winner, offers her perspective:

Winning the Jaffe Award was such an awesome experience. It was really the first time that I had been publicly recognized for my contribution to technical communication within my company. My fellow employees sent me notes of congratulations, and my firm, PBS&J, got some great PR mileage out of the award. Overall, it was a humbling and rewarding experience. I encourage everyone to go for it!

The Jaffe Award is named for Orlando Chapter founder and retired University of Central Florida Technical Communication professor **Gloria Jaffe**. Her leadership is reflected in the enduring communication values prized by the Orlando Chapter and in the professionalism of UCF graduates who had the opportunity to study with her.

If you're an Orlando Chapter member, an application will arrive in the mail

Gloria Jaffe

shortly. If you're on the LISTSERV, you will automatically receive entry materials. If we've missed you and you'd like an application, contact Christina Hammock, Jaffe Award Publicity Chair, at (407) 342-7761 or e-mail chrishammock@gmail.com. **—MtM**

CHRISTINA HAMMOCK IS PAST VICE-PRESIDENT OF STC ORLANDO. SHE GRADUATED FROM THE TECHNICAL WRITING PROGRAM AT UCF IN 2002 AND CURRENTLY WORKS AS A TECHNICAL WRITER FOR FMC TECHNOLOGIES IN ORLANDO.

Tool Tips: Portable Document Format

BY DAVID COVERSTON, CHAPTER SECRETARY

Since their introduction in 1993, PDF files have become ubiquitous. Wikipedia.com defines the PDF (Portable Document Format) as "a file format developed by Adobe Systems for representing documents in a manner that is independent of the original application software, hardware, and operating system used to create those documents." PDF documents look and print the same on Macs, PCs, or UNIX machines; hence the "portable" in PDF.
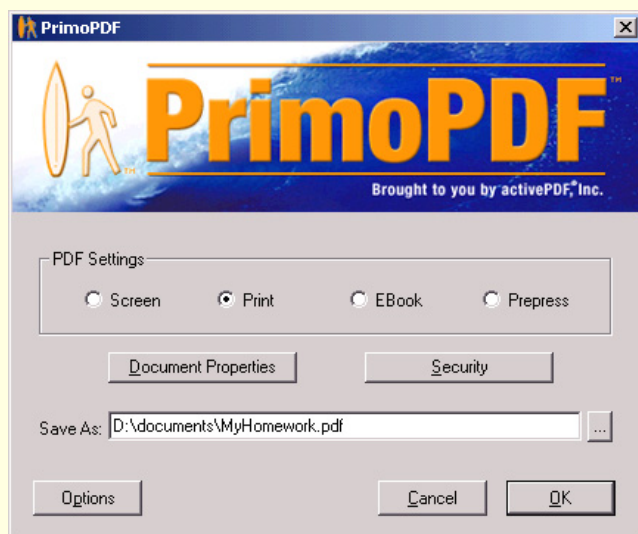

Figure 1 PrimoPDF dialog box.

The PDF format is an open standard, which means that anyone may write applications that can read or write PDFs. More simply, Adobe is not the only company that can develop programs to create PDF files. And it is not the only one that has. This month's column is about one of those tools that can create PDF files from your documents. And it is free.

There are a number of free programs that can convert your documents to PDF. The features of each vary, and annoyingly, almost all of them place some kind of notice in the header or footer or your PDF; some programs open a web page to persuade you to buy an upgraded version of their program. When you buy the upgraded version, the program doesn't place the notice in the PDF document or open the web page anymore. But not PrimoPDF. PrimoPDF is a feature-packed program that goes well beyond the abilities of many of the other PDF creation programs I investigated.

Go to www.primopdf.com and click the "Download

Now" link to download the FreePrimoSetup.exe file. Double-click the file to run the installation routine. Follow the prompts to install the program to a folder of your choice, and you are ready to begin creating PDFs.

Almost all the PDF programs work by installing their software as a virtual printer, and PrimoPDF is no exception. This is why you can create a PDF from almost any application that you can print from. To create a PDF from a Word document, choose File, Print, then select PrimoPDF as your printer. The PrimoPDF dialog box opens, and now you can choose your settings. PrimoPDF will optimize your PDF for screen, print, ebook, or prepress output.

If you open the Document Properties dialog box (by clicking the "Document Properties" button), you can set the title, author, subject, and keywords for the PDF. You can also set a number of security options on your file. Click the "Security" button on the dialog box to open the Document Security dialog box. You can set 40- or 128-bit encryption, a password, and several user restrictions on the document.
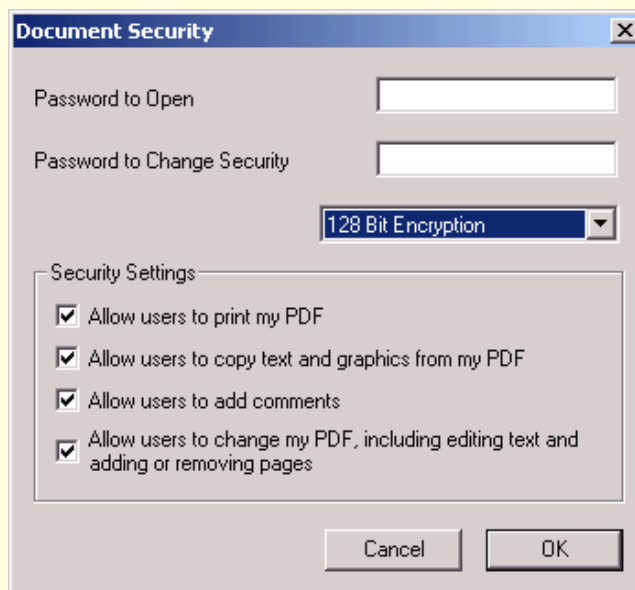

Figure 2 Document Security dialog box.

If you want to keep your settings for your next file, then the "Options" dialog box lets you keep your security and document information settings. You can also set it to open your file in your PDF reader when the file is done.

The quality of the PDF files produced by PrimoPDF is excellent. I created a PDF file of a document with

Portable Document Format
(Continued from page 4)

PrimoPDF, then I compared it to a PDF file created with Adobe Acrobat, and I could not tell the difference between the two files.

PrimoPDF does have another PDF product that they sell, one that runs on a server. Judging from the quality of their free product, I would certainly take a look at their server products if I ever need one. **—MtM**

DAVID COVERSTON IS A SENIOR MEMBER OF THE ORLANDO CHAPTER. HE RECEIVED HIS M.A. IN JOURNALISM FROM UF. DAVID HAS WORKED IN MANY AREAS OF TECHNICAL COMMUNICATION RANGING FROM WRITING DOCUMENTATION FOR MAINFRAME AND PC PLATFORMS AND SERVING AS DEPARTMENTAL IT LIAISON, TO AUTOMATING DOCUMENTATION PROCESSES THROUGH MACROS AND SCRIPTS. DAVID ENJOYS TEACHING OTHERS HOW TO BE MORE PRODUCTIVE, AND HIS *TOOL TIPS* ARTICLES HAVE BEEN REPRINTED IN SEVERAL CHAPTER NEWSLETTERS.

Education Station
TENTH ANNUAL HIGH SCHOOL WRITING COMPETITION

Contact Peggy Bivins if you are interested in speaking at a local high school about the Orlando Chapter's High-School Writing Competition: pgbivins@cfl.rr.com.

If you'd like to judge entries, e-mail Jon Kessler: jskessler@aol.com.

Online Learning Technologies: A Preview

BY DAN HEATH

Editor's Note: Join Dan Heath December 13th at the Winter Park Civic Center, where he will speak to STC Orlando Chapter on the topic of "Online Learning Technologies."

The evolution of online training tools has dramatically altered the way instructional designers and technical communicators create and present learning content. Concepts such as blended learning, rapid e-learning, distance learning, and learning content management have arisen in conjunction with modern technologies to provide powerful new training practices.

Join Dan Heath from local software company SunGard HTE Inc. for the December STC meeting "Online Learning Technologies." Dan will explore these industry concepts and demonstrate how modern training tools provide technical communicators with new options for developing training programs. **—MtM**

Employment Forum:

Need a new job? How about a new employee? Whether you're an employer, a new graduate, or an experienced communicator just looking for something new, Richard Phipps keeps you on top of what's happening in Central Florida. To post a job opening, e-mail Richard at rphipps@ciber.com. For access to job postings, just sign up for our LISTSERV by e-mailing djones@ucf.edu.

Letters to the Editor

Dear *Memo to Members,*

I am continually impressed at the improvement of the Memo to Members in the last few months. The new design is outstanding and up-to-date—it really stands head and shoulders above other organizational missives I've seen around the Central Florida area. I'm glad to see that STC is setting a high standard for its publication; too often the shoemaker's children go barefoot, if you know what I mean.

Content-wise, I'm finding each issue to be full of useful information. I'd say the *Tool Tips* column alone is worth the price of admission, except that's not quite fair given the free nature of the publication. I also enjoy the friendly and humorous tone of the organization's internal news and announcements. If there are any complaints to voice, it's that I feel an inexplicable compulsion to get an Active Member shirt after reading the October issue…but perhaps that's not such a bad thing?

Signed,
Ian Koss

Editor, *Ink 19* (www.ink19.com)

Editor's note: I really do like to hear from you, and your comments help to make the MtM better. E-mail me at newsletter@stc-orlando.org, and if you don't want me to print your message (you've got something against being famous?), just let me know.

Mentoring Program Kicks Off By Painting the Town Red, and Blue, and Green…

BY KELLI PHARO, MENTORING PROGRAM CHAIR

The first Friday night in October, twelve of the twenty participants in the STC/FTC mentoring program kicked off the year with a fabulous painting party in Winter Park at Glaze Under Fire. We all had a great time painting, chatting, eating junk food, and telling lies. What? You heard right, telling lies!

Gail and Jen working on their skateboarding lizard.

Did you know that Rachel Eichen knows Pi out to 18 digits, and Alex Garcia was a child TV star? Perhaps you didn't know that Karen Lane has sung on three continents, and Gail Lippincott has backpacked through Turkey. Oh—those aren't the lies, those are the facts! But don't let Tom Schenck fool you. He may have worked in the rock and roll industry, but he has never worked in major league baseball. Melody King tried to convince us

that her family is living in Mexico. She is loco (or at least silly). And what about Bonnie Spivey? Did she really just celebrate her 22nd birthday?

"The boys," Tom and Alex, and their racecar.

Well, we'll keep that a secret that only the kickoff attendees know. But here's a secret I'll share: Our mentors and mentees are really good at playing "two truths and a lie."

The focus of our kickoff event was three-fold. First, the "surprise" element. Some of our participants are returning pairs from last year, so they knew who their partners would be. But the majority of our pairings had to follow clues to locate the table that held their pottery piece and the identity of their M&M (mentors and mentees) partner.

Next was the "get to know you" part. Our mentors and mentees shared a pottery piece, which they painted together as they chatted and got to know each other. This is also when the two truths and a lie came in handy. We learned some fun facts about everyone. (A Las Vegas themed Bat-Mitzvah—really Rachel?)

Finally, the "make the world a better place" portion of the evening. The M&Ms will donate their pottery piece to their favorite charity. A small act of kindness can often make someone's day. We are encouraging community volunteerism, and we hope that this is the first of many kind acts our M&Ms participate in over the course of the year.

We have quite a creative group of philanthropists. Last year's program chairs, Gail Lippincott and Jen Selix, had a silly-good time painting a skateboarding lizard. Cowabunga dude! Our very own chapter treasurer, Karen Lane, and mentee Peggy Bivins were painstakingly precise in the painting of their fish. UCF instructor Mary Ellen Gomrad, and her mentee Jocelyn Nava, painted a cool gecko. Mentor Tom Schenck and mentee Alex Garcia were

Mary Ellen and Jocelyn and their masterpiece gecko.

without their M&M matches, but they teamed up for the evening and were NOT without painting talent on their "nuclear" race car. Birthday girl Bonnie Spivey was solo as well, but she found a great painting

Communicator Spotlight: Peter Petralia

BY ROSE PETRALIA

Peter is a playwright and former New Pickle Circus performer-turned-Project Manager for Avenue A-Razorfish in NYC. He provides structure and overall vision to Razorfish projects and is the deliverables manager for client project work. Peter interfaces with client marketing, technical, and product management departments to assure that solutions are understood and that they address customer business requirements. Razorfish creates captivating interactive experiences that change the behavior of clients' target audience through extensive online media experience. Find Peter on the World Wide Web at www.proto-type.org and at www.avenuea-razorfish.com.

How did you get your start in technical writing?

I think it was by accident, actually. My first exposure to technical writing was as an associate producer at a small game developer, Hyperspace Cowgirls, in the late 90's. I was hired because I had some experience in film and there was big project coming up that involved green screen shooting. Soon after being hired, it turned out that they needed documentation created (quickly) for the products we were developing. I found a number of resources on the Internet to use as reference and filled in the blanks. I am self-taught at almost everything I do, so it makes sense to me that it happened this way. After moving up from an associate producer to a senior producer, I became more familiar with a variety of other forms of documentation for software, including project plans, schematics, user-experience briefs, and technical design documents (which are written largely by programmers). Several years and many careers later, I became a functional analyst at Razorfish, which essentially means I was responsible for creating the documentation that describes how a website is supposed to function. That means gathering the requirements from the business groups involved, ensuring the technical feasibility of the requirements, and thinking through all of the possible use-cases of a product. I'm now a Project Manager, which means I oversee the entire flow of a project, including the documentation. I sometimes create the documents, but mostly I respond to them now.

So technical communication was not your original plan?

Nope. I've worked as a Development Director for non profits (which means I raised the money), a grant writer, television commercial editor, a circus clown and a theater technician.

Describe your normal day.

My normal day finds me in three or four meetings about deadlines, requirements or document reviews for the various projects I am in...or preparing for these meetings. I check in with my team several times a day and spend at least half of my time managing risk. I try to anticipate the problems that might come up in terms of client expectations, project delivery, or team satisfaction before they happen and present proactive solutions. This doesn't always work, so I sometimes have to come up with ways to handle a crisis ex post facto. I am finding that I enjoy creating project plans in Microsoft Project more and more. It's amazing to me how entire complex systems of work can be organized in a few charts and graphs. Working directly with the team is the most satisfying part of the job, of course. Seeing them succeed makes it worthwhile.

What tools do you use?

MS Project, Adobe InDesign, Photoshop, Illustrator, Firefox, IE, Outlook and several proprietary tools for expense tracking and time management.

What's the most exciting aspect of your job?

Exciting? It would be shallow to say getting paid...but that's definitely part of it! I guess the more altruistic answer is seeing a site or a feature on a site actually working. Its fascinating to watch something move from an idea to a concrete, usable product.

Do you find it important to maintain a network of tech writing peers?

One of the nice things about Razorfish is the access I have to high caliber peers in the various disciplines. I am constantly learning by reading the documentation my colleagues have created and by formal sessions where we troubleshoot as a group. **—MtM**

Mentoring Program
(Continued from page 6)

Our evening's most precise painters, Karen and Peggy.

match in solo mentee Melody King. They missed their M&M partners, but their wild, zebra-inspired purse was a way-cool painting project. And of course, I and my mentee, co-chair Rachel Eichen, painted the hippest hippo ever! Peace baby.

If it sounds like you missed a good time, you did! Just keep this is mind: We'd love to have more of you on board next time.

This year's STC-FTC Mentorship participants are: Gail Lippincott and Jen Selix, Mike Murray and Alex Garcia, Karen Lane and Peggy Bivins, Tom Schenck and Karen White, Mary Ellen Gomrad and Jocelyn Nava, Bonnie Spivey and Tracey Jacobs, Allison Anderson and Erin Allen, Sue Tate and Jennifer Lin, and Dalton Hooper and Melody King.

Thank you to all our participants this year. Mentors—you are making a difference. Thank you for your

Bonnie and Melody with their purse, before it became zebra-wild.

willingness to help. Mentees—good move. Being a part of this type of program will benefit you greatly. Thanks for participating.

Finally, I would like to thank three people who really helped pull this event and the program together this year. Dan Voss has been functioning behind the scenes as the voice of knowledge, reason, and sanity. He has been a BIG help and a quite a blessing. Thank you, Dan!

Gail Lippincott has been a great encourager and just oozes with wonderful ideas. Thanks for always being so positive and supportive, Gail.

Kelli and Rachel with the hippest hippo ever.

Rachel Eichen is a co-chair extraordinaire. She has shown remarkable responsibility and dedication in each and every task that I have requested of her. Thank you, Rachel, for your help, your heart, and your dedication.

Have fun this year, M&Ms! It's gonna be a great year! ***—MtM***

KELLI PHARO IS A TECHNICAL EDITOR FOR PBS&J, A NATION-WIDE ENGINEERING AND PLANNING CONSULTING FIRM, AND THE CHAIR OF OUR ORLANDO STC MENTORING PROGRAM. WHEN SHE ISN'T USING HER ARTISTIC TALENT TO PAINT GROOVY HIPPOS, SHE AND HER HUSBAND SPEND THEIR TIME RENOVATING THEIR HOME OR PLAYING WITH THEIR DAUGHTER AND THREE DOGS.

Active Membership Report
BY W.C. WIESE, SOCIETY TREASURER

Three months into our chapter year, the Orlando Chapter is nearly stride-for-stride with last year's record-setting attendance pace. Twenty-eight members and guests signed-in to hear Scott Abel's excellent presentation on content management, three more than attended the October 2004 meeting.

Year-to-date participation is ninety-one, which is 3 percent below last year's total attendance through October. Forty-two Orlando Chapter members have earned active member points so far this year.

A total of eleven points are required to earn one of twenty active membership shirts at our awards celebration next June. The pacesetter is Bonnie Spivey, who already has thirteen! This month's top 20 active member points leaders are:

Bonnie Spivey	W.C. Wiese
Karen Lane	Mark Wray
Gail Lippincott	Erika Higgins
Mark Hanigan	Robert Shydo
Rachel Eichen	Daniel Voss
Alex Garcia	Jon Kessler
Lexi Graham	Richard Phipps
Mike Murray	David Coverston
Kelli Pharo	Allison Anderson
Jennifer Selix	Peggy Bivins

We hope to see your name here next month! ***—MtM***

A Resource-Full Chapter

GAIL LIPPINCOTT, PRESIDENT STC ORLANDO CHAPTER

If you've attended any of the three chapter meetings this year, you'll agree that you got way more value than the $5, $8, or $15 meeting fee you paid. What value can you put on the networking, knowledge transfer, entertainment, and food you enjoyed those evenings? Priceless!

What's even more priceless is our membership. Each chapter meeting represents many hours of behind-the-scenes work, and our chapter positively overflows with talented, enthusiastic members who contribute in so many ways. These members are the true resources of STC and particularly the Orlando Chapter. But we don't work alone (a Mike Murray legacy), and I am thrilled to have dinner the second Tuesday of every month with a dozen or more of my closest friends—the Administrative Council (or AdCo, as we now call it).

This spread, including Darth Vosser's steamed pumpkin, is typical of the "light snacks" included with your Chapter Meeting admission.

Erika Higgins, our dollar-savvy vice president, hunts down bargains relentlessly. She discovered a fantastic way to make these monthly dinners help the chapter. As we eat, drink, and make merry, we partner with Pizzeria Uno, who donates 20% of our total check to the chapter. How cool is that? Check out the coupon on page 15—you can eat well *and* support the chapter anytime on 12/06.

AdCo members enjoy food and fun while supporting the Orlando Chapter!

This month we welcome another resource to Tuesdays with AdCo. Peggy Bivins, one of last year's Pellegrin scholarship winners, unhesitatingly accepted the offer to manage the Education Committee. She's already plunged into the task of rounding up members to talk with high schoolers about our profession as they promote the **Tenth** Annual High School Technical Writing Competition.

If you have a kid in high school, talk with Peggy. You can help us promote the competition with a teacher or two, who may invite us to visit an English or science class. If you want a sweet resume addition, why not offer to talk to a class yourself? We've got plenty of materials to share with you, including a tutorial prepared just for high schoolers, and lots of experienced mentors to coach you or even go with you.

After all, YOU are what makes our chapter so resource-full! *—MtM*

ASSOCIATE FELLOW GAIL LIPPINCOTT IS STC ORLANDO CHAPTER PRESIDENT AND 53RD CONFERENCE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT STEM MANAGER. GAIL TEACHES TECHNICAL WRITING AT THE UNIVERSITY OF CENTRAL FLORIDA.

Society News

PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED HERE AND THERE

From the Board Report:
www.stc.org/boardReport05.asp

A motion was made to approve Karen Lane as program manager of the 55th annual conference (Philadelphia 2008). Karen's résumé was submitted with the report of the Assistant to the President for Conferences.

Background: Conference Advisory Committee has reviewed Karen Lane's qualifications and recommends that the board vote to approve.

Rationale: Karen Lane has worked on many STC annual conferences and has the experience and keen interest to be successful. She comes highly recommended.

Editor's note: Karen is STC Orlando Chapter Treasurer and was featured last month in the MtM Corner of Distinction. Go Karen!

STC Adopts Localized Fee Structure:
www.stc.org/tieline/tie0511/local_dues.htm

In an effort to strengthen STC's appeal to technical communicators around the world, the Society board of directors has approved a localized dues structure that lowers dues for members who live in countries with emerging and developing markets for technical communication. The new structure, which goes into effect for 2006, institutes three tiers of dues for developing, emerging, and mature markets.

Renewal rates are posted on the online renewal page of the STC Web site. *—MtM*

If You Missed Our Last Meeting...

BY KEN NUCKOLS

Scott Abel gave a humorous, interactive, and informative presentation on Content Management to the STC Orlando Chapter on Tuesday, October 25. He started by defining content management in the context of

Scott Abel gives a thumbs-up presentation.

technical communications at its most basic level: the words, graphs, diagrams, sentences, rule lines, and multimedia pieces that make up the content we develop for our documents, web portals, and online help applications.

Abel also discussed how effective content management can make a Technical Communicator's life easier. One way content management helps us is by reducing the amount of time we spend hunting for information we know must exist somewhere on some network server buried in some out-of-the-way corner of "Betsy's Folder" but that we can't ever find so we rewrite, repackage and regurgitate it in multiple forms multiple ways for multiple end products. Effective content management can enable an efficient technical communications group to treat their content the way programmers treat objects in applications. For example, we can

Jon Kessler takes notes.

write one product description that can be used in a Marketing or Sales brochure, an engineering abstract, a training workbook, a procedural guide, an assembly pamphlet, and an installation manual. It helps us as writers track what content we create, where it goes, when it's updated, and who has the ability to manipulate it.

Scott Abel also talked about how effective content management can help a business be more profitable. He used examples from the silly to the serious to illustrate how poorly managed content can lead to confusing, misleading, and dangerous contradictions in content from different sources within the same company about the same product—some of which could open a company to serious legal or regulatory liabilities. But even aside from the more dramatic scenarios, effective content management could help a company save valuable time, respond faster to changing market conditions, and do what all companies hope to do—make more money! He said four main reasons that companies eventually realize the need for better content management are...

1. Risk—liability issues related to poor or conflicting instructions

2. Compliance—an industry or government regulation that sets specific requirements

3. Service—self-service customer service is more efficient and is better provided when content is properly managed and easily accessible

4. Profit—effective content management reduces wasted time, reduces liability and compliance issues, and helps companies respond more quickly to the evolving market, thus enabling the company to make more profit

Scott emphasized that content management is not so much about tools as it is about people, process, and change. There are tools that can help with tracking and storing and manipulating content, but effective use of these tools requires people to adopt new processes and changing from the status quo. The closest he would come to endorsing a particular content management solution was a discussion of the SiberSafe solution by SiberLogic (www.siberlogic.com/). While it is not as well known as Documentum, Abel said it is considerably less expensive and thus becomes a practical alternative to a far greater number of companies and organizations.

Scott's audience, in rapt attention.

In terms of technologies, Scott Abel advocated more familiarity with XML authoring tools and RSS solutions, which enable webmasters to update the web sites of subscribers through automatically updating subscribed sites each time content is updated.

I found his presentation both informative and useful—I can already see ways of putting some of his suggestions into practice at work within our Technical Communications group. I thank the organizers for inviting him to speak to us—attending tonight's meeting was definitely time well spent! **—MtM**

Conference News!

As you know, STC's 53rd Conference and Exhibition is quickly approaching. Next year's conference will take place May 7-10, 2006 at the Paris and Bally's Las Vegas hotels in Las Vegas, Nevada. We expect next year's conference to be extremely successful, with almost 200 technical sessions, an additional day of post-conference sessions, and lots of networking opportunities.

Conference registration costs are now posted online at www.stc.org/53rdConf/53confRegInfo01.asp. The printed Preliminary Program will be mailed in January with the February issue of Intercom. The online Program will be posted in February.

This year, STC is excited to announce that we have a new Exhibition Management Company. If your company is interested in exhibiting at STC's annual conference, or if you know of any companies that may benefit from exhibiting, please have them contact:

AHI Meeting Management
PO Box 519
Selbyville, DE 19975
Phone: 800-788-7077
Fax: 302-436-1911
E-mail: Convene@aol.com

Exhibition space is on a first-come, first-served basis. Space is limited, so sign up early!

If you have any questions about STC's annual conference, please refer to the conference Web site at www.stc.org/53rdConf/ or contact Buffy M. Bennett, Special Projects Director, at: buffy@stc.org.

We hope to see you in Las Vegas in May! **—MtM**

Have You Hugged Your Peachpit User Group Today?

NEWS FROM PEACHPIT

As an official User Group, STC Orlando Chapter members are eligible for a 30% discount off the list price of any Peachpit books. At checkout, right before entering your credit card number, just enter the user group coupon code UE-23AA-PEUF (case-sensitive). This coupon code is an exclusive offer that may not be used with other coupon codes.

BOOKS FOR REVIEW

A great benefit of membership is free review copies. To request a free book for review, send an e-mail to usergroups@peachpit.com.

Your email should list the following information IN THE FORMAT THAT FOLLOWS:

STC Orlando Chapter (this is our group name)/YOUR NAME
ADDRESS
PHONE
QUANTITY
ISBN AND TITLE NAME

Members have 90 days to complete a review for the *Memo to Members*; once it's published here, it gets sent to Peachpit. So, not only do you get to keep a great book, you get a $5-off meeting coupon for submitting an article. Sweet!

Peachpit also likes reviewers to try to post their reviews to Web sites such as Amazon, Barnes & Noble, and Borders. **—MtM**

New Releases from Peachpit:
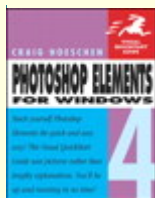
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My Journey into Technical Communication

BY MEL HAUGHTON, LONE STAR CHAPTER FIRST VP

Reprinted from the October issue of Technically Write, the newsletter of the STC Lone Star Chapter.

Twelve years ago, I was a high school student in São Paulo, Brazil. I did the same stuff all high school students did: I partied, I played sports, and I hung out with friends and family. One day, I told my mom that I wanted something different. "What is that?" she asked me. And I told her I wanted to be an exchange student in the U.S. and learn English. I expected her to say that I was crazy and that there was no way she would let me go. But she surprised me and said that we should start researching exchange student programs and figure out where I wanted to go. My mom always wanted to be an exchange student herself, and I think she lived vicariously through me! And both my parents lived in Switzerland for a year after they got married, so they knew how important it was to be exposed to the rest of the world.

My family has always saved every penny to travel. We lived very modestly in Brazil, and growing up we never had the latest toy. But my mom and dad gave us something far better: they gave us the world. My mom, dad, brother, and I traveled through Europe for three weeks on a very small budget when I was 13. For my 15th birthday, I asked to come to the U.S. to visit Disney World. And I think that is when I fell in love with this country. After we got back from Orlando, I started studying English more seriously, and I took several tests to see if I was cut out for the exchange student program. On January 8, 1995, I was on my way to Dallas, TX, to live with an American family for six months.

Dealing with Culture Shock

Was it easy? Heck no! I thought my English was great, and that I would have no trouble talking to people. Boy, was I wrong. I didn't know Texans spoke with three potatoes and five tomatoes in their mouths. And the food! Wow! I ate so much junk food. Pancakes with maple syrup? That was really disgusting. I still can't eat maple syrup. I finally started eating pancakes with chocolate syrup—that was MUCH better!

What about this Mexican food frenzy? I thought I was going to eat a whole bunch of good Texas meat when I got here, but my American family LOVED Mexican food. I almost had a heart attack when I saw how you people eat avocado. Who in their right mind eats avocado SALTY? This guacamole thingy was just the most disgusting thing I had ever tasted. In Brazil, we eat avocado as a dessert. You can have avocado cream with orange juice, or you can just slice the avocado, remove the seed, and put some sugar and orange juice in it. Talk about culture shock!

This is going to sound pathetic, but when I found out I was coming to Texas, I was so excited. I thought I was going to ride a horse to school every day. I thought my American family was going to have a huge farm and that I was going to milk cows all morning. I had to trade my wonderful horse ride for a ride in those horrible yellow school busses.

What a trade!

And I really missed my family! I was so lonely here at first. I didn't have any friends, I didn't speak the language, and Americans were not nearly as affectionate and touchy feely as Brazilians were. Back then my mom and dad didn't have a computer, so we didn't have the beauty of e-mail. I could only call them every so often because the phone calls were so expensive. But they "hugged" me over the phone, and they told me that everything was going to be OK. I couldn't have had better parents.

> *"When I found out I was coming to Texas, I was so excited. I thought my American family was going to have a huge farm and that I was going to milk cows all morning."*

With time, things became easier. But high school students made fun of me and the other exchange students, and I decided that if I didn't lose my accent, I would have to put up with them making fun of me all my life (OK, so that may sound a bit dramatic, but I am a perfectionist). So I started studying English more and more, and my American mom really helped me with pronunciation classes. It was great. I still have a bit of an accent, but it's not so bad that people will immediately ask me where I am from. Now, so many years later, I like having a bit of an accent. It differentiates me, and it's definitely a conversation starter.

Dealing with Culture Shock All Over Again

Dominating the language was step number one to get me closer to technical communication. When my exchange student program was over, I

My Journey
(Continued from page 12)

reluctantly went back to Brazil. All of a sudden, I really liked it here in the U.S. I had a pretty hard time getting used to walking to school again (we don't have those yellow school busses in Brazil), and I missed speaking English. I was really glad to be close to my family again and to have such wonderful food! Oh how I missed my mom's rice and beans!

And I loved having my freedom back. In Brazil we all went out at night (I was 17 then). My mom and dad used to drop me off at dance clubs at 11 p.m., and they picked us up at 5 a.m. The idea of having teenagers out dancing until the wee hours of the morning is outrageous to many Americans. My parents never stopped us from going out as long as they were the ones who took us and picked us up. (Now I know that was a really nice way to make sure we didn't get stuck driving home with our drunken friends or to have had too much to drink ourselves!)

Back in Brazilian high school, I had a really good time in my English classes. Were they easy? Oh yeah. And they made me really miss my life in the U.S. So I told my mom that I wanted to go back, this time for college. Again, my mom and dad supported me 100%. I had enough money saved up for my first year of college. And it all worked out. I enrolled at the University of North Texas to study Journalism, and after the first semester I received merit-based scholarships. And I've been in the U.S. since then.

Getting Closer to Technical Communication

Back then, I had no idea what technical communication was. I knew I liked to write, but I also knew I wanted to get a good job. Journalism was fun, but I didn't love it. Everyone told me I should use my language skills and become a translator. Some people think I am wasting my Portuguese, Spanish, and German. But I didn't want to translate. I've done some of it from English to Spanish, but I like writing, speaking, and "living" in English a lot better.

> *"I realized that I had helped plenty of students through their tech writing classes, and that it was my turn now. "*

During my first semester in college, I got a job offer in the UNT Technical Writing lab. Hello Tech Comm! I helped undergraduate and graduate technical writing students with their computer issues and helped them figure out MS Word. Two years later, I realized that I had helped plenty of students through their tech writing classes, and that it was my turn now. If I can help them, I can do it, too! I got a minor in Tech Writing from UNT, and decided then that I would go straight to grad school and get a Master's degree in technical writing. The rest is history.

Getting Involved with STC

Now how did I get into the Lone Star Community of STC? Well, Dr. Gail Lippincott told me that I had to apply for an LSC scholarship, and I was one of the scholarship recipients in 2002. Soon I was asked to join the administrative council, and in 2004 Louellen Coker asked me to be her Second VP. This year, I am organizing the programs you attend each month.

I believe that we make decisions and do things every day that affect our lives tomorrow. Ten years ago, I would have never thought that I would be here today. But hard work, perseverance, and a lot of support from my family and friends got me here. I've been in the U.S. long enough that I call this country my home now, but I do miss my friends and family in Brazil. I only get to see my parents and brother once a year, and I haven't been back to Brazil in three years (the beauty of working in corporate America and only having two weeks of vacation a year).

I wanted to share my journey with you because it may inspire you to do something different. It may inspire you to listen to your heart and follow your dreams. It's never too late to take a risk, so start or continue your journey until you too can find happiness! —*MtM*

MELISSA (MEL) HAUGHTON IS A MANAGER OF PROPOSAL KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT AT THE SBC PROPOSAL CENTER IN DALLAS, TX. SHE HOLDS AN MA IN TECHNICAL WRITING FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTH TEXAS (UNT), AND SHE IS THE FIRST VP OF THE LONE STAR COMMUNITY OF STC. *MEMO TO MEMBERS* WISHES TO THANK MEL FOR HER EXCELLENT, ENCOURAGING ARTICLE. IT IS REPRINTED HERE WITH PERMISSION.

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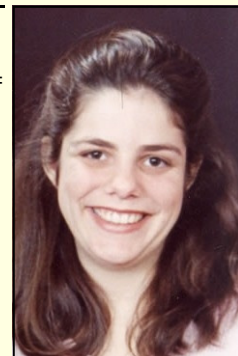
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Upcoming Seminar

Mastering Metadata: Making the Most of Your Content Management System

Wednesday, December 7, 2005
1-2:30 PM
Speaker: Jack Danaher

For many organizations, moving into a content management environment can be a step into the Great Unknown. Whether you call it content management, single-sourcing, structured knowledge, or structured information, deciding on the tools, styles, and document structure is the easy part. Now, you've got to figure out how to put it all together to work most efficiently and cost-effectively.

Knowing how to develop and use a robust metadata model can help. Metadata, or "hidden" data about content, helps an organization manage its knowledge efficiently by classifying and organizing data, facilitating the reuse of content in multiple outputs, and enabling dynamic content delivery.

As director of database development for Vasont Systems, Jack Danaher is responsible for the ongoing product development and support of Vasont®, the company's flagship content management system. He has more than thirty-three years' experience in the IT database field and is a seasoned conference presenter.

Visit stc.webex.com for more information and to register. *—MtM*

Judges Needed!

The Seminole County Regional Science, Math, & Engineering Fair takes place Saturday, February 18, 2005.

Last year, 30 Seminole students went on to compete and many took prizes in the State competition. Four individual students and two teams from Seminole County High Schools went to International and several came home with prizes!

Professionals in the science, math, and engineering fields are needed to judge the event from 9 AM until 3PM. In addition, sponsorships and awards from professional societies, companies, and individuals are needed, and volunteers are needed to assist in logistics for the event.

There are also year-round opportunities to mentor students who are preparing projects.

Don't miss the public display of projects during mall hours on February 18 at the Seminole Towne Center Mall in Sanford.

For more information, contact the Fair Director, Dr. Suzy Behel, at (407) 320-3603. *—MtM*

STC

Memo to Members

November 2005 · Volume 4, Issue 7

From the Editor's Desk...

This month we welcome Associate Editor Drew Hoffmann to the *Memo to Members*—he did a swell job and hopefully he'll return next month. Did somebody say trial by fire? Not me!

November's issue is packed full of goodness—events, information, tips, and plenty of opportunities to make an impact on our community. Want to show a deserving someone they're appreciated? Easy! Nominate them for a Jaffe Award. Want to encourage young folks to pursue an interesting career in technical communication?

Tell local kids about our chapter's High School Technical Writing Competition or judge Seminole County's Science, Math, and Engineering Fair entries. Don't have much time? Earn cash for STC Orlando Chapter while you take care of holiday shopping *virtually stress-free* at **amazon**.com. There's something for everyone inside...

Hope you enjoy this month's offering, and as ever, here's hoping this issue finds you happy, healthy, and thankful.

—Rose

Mark Your Calendars:

11/15 **Chapter meeting.** Usability Testing with Dr. Karla Kitalong. Winter Park Civic Center at 6:30 p.m.

11/24 *Thanksgiving*

12/04 December *MtM* article deadline

12/06 **AdCo meeting/Fundraiser.** 6:30 p.m. at Pizzeria Uno at Bennett and 50—don't forget the coupon on page 15!

12/07 Mastering Metadata Seminar with Jack Danaher. See page 15 for information and registration instructions.

12/13 **Chapter Meeting.** Online Learning Technologies with Dan Heath. Winter Park Civic Center at 6:30 p.m.

12/15 Deadline for Jaffe Award nominations. See page 3 for details.

12/25 *Christmas*

12/31 *New Year's Eve*

Corner of Distinction

Congrats to chapter members Mark Hanigan and Karla Kitalong for their book reviews, published in the latest issue of *Technical Communication*.

They earn points toward a Chapter Achievement Award for STC Orlando Chapter!