blue pencil

September 2001 STC Board of Directors Meeting

By Chris Benz, Region 2 Director-Sponsor

Following the terrorist acts of 11 September, the September 2001 STC Board of Directors meeting was held by teleconference—instead of face-to-face in Atlanta, Georgia, as originally planned—on September 21 2001.

As a little background, like all board meetings, this one consisted of three *passes*:

1. An *action* pass, during which motions are brought forth to the board. For each motion, the board either approves it (with or without modifications), rejects it, or requests that the motion be restated and brought forth at a later date. Also during this pass, actions taken by the Executive Council since the last board meeting are announced.

2. A *discussion* pass, during which various topics are brought forth for board consideration and discussion. Many discussion items result in action items for board and/or committee members, generally with the expectation that a motion or further information will be brought forth at an upcoming board meeting.

3. An *information* pass, during which board members provide information not otherwise covered in the reports they provided to the rest of the board prior to the meeting. This is also the time for board members to ask for clarification on information presented in other members' reports.

This article reports on the results of the *action* pass. During that pass, the board approved:

a. The final budget for Fiscal Year 2002.

b. The dues structure effective January 1 2002.

c. The following new mission statement for the Society-level Technical Editing Special Interest Group (SIG): "The Technical Editing SIG provides opportunities for members to expand their editing and proofreading expertise by serving as a forum for information exchange, professional support, and interaction among the SIG, STC, and the editing community at large."

d. The dissolution of the following chapters:

Letter From the Editor

Flexible Work Arrangements

By Chris Downs

What comes to mind when we say "flexible work arrangements"? And what does that mean for technical communicators? When I think "flexible," I think of a mutually beneficial and respectful relationship between a company and an employee. Flexibility goes both ways.

Companies can be flexible by providing the following benefits and opportunities:
- Flex time.
- Comp time.

- Part-time employment.
- Contracting opportunities.
- Telecommuting.
- Casual dress.
- Casual work environment.
- Upbeat, employee-oriented culture.
- Various management structures.
- The freedom to do our jobs well.
- Plenty of vacation and sick time (as well as creative alternatives).
- Opportunities for professional interaction (such as reimbursing for conferences and meetings).

Contents

President's Column

By Mary Ecsedy

Back in the early 90's, in the early days of the Internet, I used to spend a lot of time hanging out in a Usenet newsgroup that was loosely devoted to discussing cyberpunk science fiction. The stories of this genre, such as "Neuromancer" and the Sprawl Trilogy by William Gibson, and "Snow Crash" by Neal Stephenson, portray a dark future where government \ has become irrelevant, military and economic power is wielded by oppressive global corporations, and things are generally very intense and scary. We used to call it "the CyberGothicDystopicFuture (TM)".

Many of the strutting, leather-clad cyberpunk wanna-bees who hung out on that newsgroup really admired the "rugged individuals" in these stories. They dreamed of being like those anti-heroes who survived through superior technical skills and general outstanding coolness. My argument with them at that time was, and still is, that they had misread the stories. There are no "rugged individuals", but people relying on the strength of their personal and professional contacts to survive. I wrote that rugged individualism is a lousy survival strategy. A much better one, I argued, is to integrate yourself into the fabric of the community around you: your family, friends, neighbors, associates.

So what does all this have to do with the STC? Well, at the moment the CyberGothicDystopicFuture (TM) is looking less and less like fiction with each passing day's headlines. This column is not the forum for politics, but I think we can at least all agree that the economy and the geo-political situation are rather grave. When I was trying to think of a topic for this column, the message that seemed most relevant to me is that this is the time to take our networking seriously, as a part of our basic strategy for getting through uncertain times.

Therefore, I want to encourage all of you to take advantage of the effective networking that is available to you through our organization. If you are a member but have not been able to attend meetings, I hope you can find the time to join us this season. If you are not a member of the STC, I want to encourage you to consider joining, but we also welcome non-members to our meetings. I have always found the Pittsburgh members of the STC to be a warm, generous group of people that I know I can count on in a pinch, for which I'm very grateful.

So come to the meetings, submit newsletter articles, volunteer some of your time — participate. Sure, you can stock up on water, peanut butter, and Cipro, but if you're really down on your luck, it's the people around you who can help you the most. We can't do much about the economy or geo-politics, but we can look out for one another.

Employment Issues Column

Flexibility Pays

By Pam Schmidbauer
Aquent - Associate Area Manager

Flexibility is the name of the game in today's workplace. Employers in almost all industries are offering "flex time" to retain and lure valuable employees.

Flexible work schedules are not a new concept. The idea was introduced in Germany in 1967 to alleviate commuting problems. Hewlett-Packard followed the Germans' lead and was the first company to bring "flex time" to the United States in 1972.

At first glance, it may seem that the only one who stands to gain from "flex time" is the employee. With a well thought-out flexible schedule and responsible employees, employers can also benefit. Flexible schedules have been shown to increase morale, extend loyalty, expand productivity, enhance recruiting, and decrease occurrences of unscheduled absences. It is also a critical tool for retaining experienced and valued employees, which saves an employer the time and expense of hiring and training replacements.

In our office, I have found that working with your employees on a flexible schedule can lead to happier employees. Our recruiter, Joani, went on maternity leave and wanted to return to work on a part-time, flexible basis. We were able to do that by modifying her job responsibilities. Now she is in the office two days and works at home one day each week.

Many companies are opting to be a little more flexible to have access to even more talented people who work from home. Many of our clients have loosened up a bit and are letting people work on a telecommuting basis. Files are emailed back and forth and the work gets done. We've had clients request people off-site so that the work can get done quicker since there won't be office distractions.

Employees must understand that their home office has to be a place where they can work with very few distractions. They have to establish boundaries for themselves and be extremely disciplined.

Since Aquent is an international company, work can be done while you are sleeping. Some clients have been known to go around the world to get, for example, a PowerPoint presentation done overnight instead of paying one of their employees overtime to stay after hours to do it.

As the workplace and technology continue to evolve, more and more people will be able to work from home, the beach, or anywhere else you would like to work.

Pam Schmidbauer is Associate Area Manager of Aquent and can be reached at pams@aquent.com or 412-322-4940. Aquent is the world's largest talent agency for creative professionals. Headquartered in Boston, Aquent leverages both the Internet and a network of 55 offices in 12 countries to provide independent professionals access to work, training, and the same insurance, retirement, and cash-flow management benefits enjoyed by traditional W-2 workers.

http://www.aquent.com

Letter From the Editor

Flexible Work Arrangements

(Continued from page 1)

Employees can be flexible by being willing to:
- Work overtime when needed.
- Schedule doctor's appointments and other personal appointments at appropriate times (other than emergencies, of course).
- Keep files in order in case someone else needs to access them.
- Work under alternative management structures (such as flat structure or matrix structures).
- Be considerate of other peoples' schedules and needs, both on a professional and on a personal level.

There are of course many other ways in which both companies and employees can be flexible. These are only a few obvious examples.

Flexibility involves being responsible and dedicated, respecting others, and trusting your employees and co-workers. You should expect this level or trust, respect, and responsibility from your employer, from your employees, and from your co-workers. And you should provide it in return. Flexibility, respect, empowerment: These things breed loyalty.

We all have lives outside of the companies we work for, and we will be much more loyal to these companies if we are free to spend enough time with our families and if we are free to do our jobs well while at work. Flexibility helps provide employees with a sense of empowerment. When employees feel that their employer trusts them to be responsible and to succeed in their jobs, they will be more dedicated to the company, and they will often work harder (even on a subconscious level).

Flexibility seems to be abundant in the **technical communication** field. Maybe that's because **technical** people don't always work normal "8-to-5" hours; they work when they have an idea or when something needs to be figured out; they work (night or day) when they are intrigued by something.

People News

Chapter Membership:
209

Total STC Membership:

22,784

Casual Dress And Casual Writing

B*y Janis Ramey*

Editor's note: This article first appeared in her newsletter, W O R D S ... from Janis Ramey, in October 1999. his article first appeared in her newsletter, W O R D S ... from Janis Ramey, in October 1999.

We've been moving toward more casual writing at the same time that we've been switching to more casual business attire. Is there a connection between these two trends? I don't know. I DO know that casualness in writing is something we need to manage competently.

This means we should use a personal approach, even in most reports and proposals. Use the pronouns "we" and "you" liberally. If you know the first name of the reader, insert it in appropriate places in the text.
It also means contractions are not only acceptable but also encouraged. Notice the contractions in the first paragraph of this article. Grammar checkers set for business writing have not caught up — they still suggest that contractions be spelled out. Slang is also OK (as here) if the readers understand it.

Casual does not mean careless. Words must still be correctly spelled; subjects and verbs must agree; and paragraphs must contain information relating directly to the topic. The tone must be appropriate. In most situations the tone should be friendly and professional rather than curt, arrogant, or childish as can easily happen in careless writing. The reader should feel pleased to have read your writing.

In casual writing, sentences must be short and direct. Complex sentences or sentences with verbs widely separated from the subject are fun to construct but a challenge to the short attention spans of our readers.
E-mail has encouraged us to be brief — even to the extent of using sentences fragments. Most of us have no objection to sentence fragments or to using short

lists, emoticons, and other techniques for making the messages brief. Misspellings and missing words, however, are not acceptable. And even less acceptable is the tendency to sound rushed, rude, or otherwise insensitive to the reader.

Although we may be more comfortable wearing business casual, it's considerably easier dressing in the morning if we're wearing a standard business suit. That may be because the suit offers fewer choices. The same can be said for the difference between the new business casual writing and the old standard business writing. Casual writing is less formulaic and requires more planning and consideration of the reader. And therefore more work for the writer.

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Managing the Virtual Worker/Telecommuter

By Peter C. Heikes

Editor's note: This paper originally appeared in the Proceedings for the 48th Annual STC Conference in Chicago, IL

Abstract
Virtual workers/telecommuters are employees who perform assigned duties at an alternative site (usually home) during some or all of their scheduled work hours.

With the number of full-time virtual workers expected to exceed 13.5 million in the U.S. within the next two years and 130 million worldwide by 2003, managers are more often being confronted with a new type of employee. As a result, we need to make adjustments in how we manage them, when compared to the on-site employee. We need to learn how to screen and select viable candidates, develop new guidelines (e.g., state expectations clearly, manage by results, communicate often, plan ahead for meetings, and consider special needs such as administrative support), learn what goes into a work agreement, and consider technology impacts.

Definitions
Telecommuting is a work agreement between an employee and his/her supervisor that allows an employee to perform assigned duties at an alternative site (usually home) during some or all of his/her scheduled work hours. It is a managerial/supervisory option and not an employee benefit or right and must conform to the company's policies and procedures regarding employment.

Telecommuting is the partial or total substitution of telecommunications technology for the trip to and from the primary workplace along with the associated changes in policy, organization, management, and work structure. Simply put, it's moving the work to the workers, instead of the workers to work. Computers, cellular phones, fax, and advanced communications links such as ISDN and dial-up access have removed the physical barriers that once required workers to be in their offices.

There are three different types of telecommuting:

- *Work at Home* – this is the most popular form of telecommuting. The employee designates workspace at home to conduct business functions.
- *Satellite Office* – These are remote office locations usually placed within a large concentration of employee residences, allowing employees at a single company to share common office space and reduce the time and expense of the commute to and from the main office facility.
- *Neighborhood Work Center* – This provides work space for employees of different companies in one location. Each company housing employees at these locations is usually responsible for the administrative and technical requirements of its employees.

Trends
About 8 million people telecommute full time in the U.S, with the number expected to grow to about 13.5 million within the next two years. Teleworker productivity is 22% to 45% higher than that of their in-office counterparts, which is due to fewer interruptions, less absenteeism because of weather or sick children, and no time spent commuting. (The Gallup Organization)

GartnerGroup predicts that by 2003 approximately 130 million employees worldwide will be involved in remote access as part of their jobs. In the U.S., roughly 1/3 of all jobs will be impacted by remote access.

Selecting Telecommuters
Not everyone in your organization is a good candidate for telecommuting! The success of telecommuting may be enhanced when telecommuters meet the following criteria:

- Has been an employee for a long time
- Is a full-time, permanent employee
- Indicates a desire to telecommute
- Has strong organizational skills
- Has good time-management skills
- Is a self-motivated, independent worker and can make independent decisions
- Is a good performer
- Shows appropriate responsibility towards the job and company property
- Can function as a team player
- Is dependable and completes work on time
- Has a safe/efficient alternative work site
- Where relevant, has a satisfactory plan for meeting dependent child or elder care needs.

For an online test to determine a candidate's aptitude for telecommuting, visit the two websites listed in References (1) and (2).

Manager guidelines
Managing telecommuters is not unlike managing employees on site. It requires management skills such as goal setting, assessing progress, giving regular feedback, and managing based on results. Some managers prefer dividing objectives into smaller parts and reviewing work more frequently – at least initially – to ensure the telecommuter is on track.

When trying out virtual arrangements with new employees, take is slow. Let them show they can handle the challenge by scheduling occasional work-at-home days first.

-State Expectations
Nip potential problems in the bud from the start by letting home-based workers know what you expect from them. Go over the terms of your virtual agreement – whether, for example, you want them to carry an office cell phone – and tell them if there are specific ways you want the job done and then include it in the agreement (see Agreements for more detail).

Letter From the Editor

Flexible Work Arrangements

(Continued from page 3)

Maybe it's also because **communication** itself IS flexible. Writing isn't set in stone; there are many ways to say the same thing, some clearer than others, but most clear enough to adequately convey the meaning (and isn't that the point?). Technical writers, by virtue of their experience with many forms of communication, as well as due to continued technological advances, are also able to communicate effectively from any location, any distance. We better be able to — we ARE the communication experts!

While not all of us work in the field of software documentation, many of us ARE involved in this specialty. By nature, the software industry is unpredictable and ever-changing, so those who play a part must, out of necessity, remain flexible. Small start-ups are even more unpredictable, so communicators working in these environments enjoy even more flexibility (and often more uncertainty — the two sometimes go hand-in-hand).

In my career, I've had the luxury of working for fairly flexible companies, and I have tried to be flexible in return. For example, my current team has a flat management structure, with each documentation team member reporting directly to the development department manager, while still working together on various projects. This provides a great sense of empowerment and responsibility. It can also be difficult at times, and is certainly stressful, but it generally works well, providing team members with a strong sense of ownership and mutual respect.

This same company has remote writers and offers flex time and a casual environment. Since I have a long drive, I typically work from 6:30 to 3:30, in an attempt to avoid the worst of the traffic. This flex time is very important to me and makes me more willing to go that extra mile to finish a project, to stay a little later one day, to come in even earlier during crunch times, and to take work home with me on the weekends. But I also respect the schedules of others, who may choose to work from 10:00 to 7:00 instead, and avoid scheduling meetings too early in the day.

After working at flexible companies, I doubt if I could ever successfully transition to a less flexible company, particularly one with an extremely rigid corporate culture (at least while remaining satisfied in my job). Not after seeing (and greatly appreciating) the other side.

I chose this theme for the *Blue Pencil* because I wanted to advertise flexibility. I hope both employers and employees recognize it as a good thing (for both sides). The articles in this issue drive that point home and also provide tips on how to make flexible work arrangements (such as telecommuting) a success.

I also believed that many *Blue Pencil* readers would be interested in this topic. From speaking to colleagues and co-workers, I have learned that many professionals in this industry cherish flexibility. I am one of them, and I will always be looking for ways to be even more flexible.

Time is valuable — to both employers and employees. Flexible work arrangements help make the best use of time so that writers do a quality job and remain satisfied. This benefits everyone.

*Christina Downs has been a technical writer for over six years and is currently working at Ansoft Corporation. Chris is also the Managing Editor of the **Blue Pencil**. She can be reached at:*

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Problems Solved Here

September Meeting Summary

By Nancy Carpenter

The September STC meeting was a problem solving session chaired by all of us. We discussed problems and solutions at our individual dinner tables and pooled the results. Here is a summary of the findings:

Portfolios
- To show work that is proprietary, extract the non-proprietary portions.
- Write a summary about each piece, stating the challenges and solutions, and why you brought this item to the interview.
- Use a good portfolio such as a leather-bound one.

Converting Documents to PDF
Management does not want to use online help; they want the document set converted to PDF. The following steps could be taken to help management make the move to online help:

- With management backing, prepare a prototype help file, and get one set of users to approve and back it. This influences other management to accept this format.
- Any large document set is a navigation problem. Use html on a web page and a list of topics to provide easy navigation.
- Get a browser that does keyword search of pdfs.
- Unless your desktop publishing package generates a PDF table of contents and interactive index, you must break the document into chapters so that the browser can do keyword search.

Tools and Tips Column

Using Word's User Forms

By Bob Mohr

Ever wonder how you might go about collecting information from users, via a Word document, that can later be fed into a database? Word's User Forms, combined with an equal part of VBA (Visual Basic for Applications), makes it possible. First, let me make a distinction between forms in a "protected" document versus user forms.

Typically, you create a document, include one or more form fields, then protect the document and make it available to users. This works fine for many applications but not one in which you want to collect the user's input and save it to a character-delimited file. That's a job for a User Form and VBA. A User Form is a macro-controlled user interface that you develop for any number of applications, including the collection and manipulation of data and data files.

The appearance of the User Form is up to you, since you must design it. All of the usual data-entry controls and amenities are available:

- input (text) boxes
- list boxes
- combo boxes
- radio buttons
- check boxes
- colors
- graphics
- command buttons

The real power of the User Form lies in the VBA code behind it. Since you have programmatic control over the form, you can "capture" the data and do anything you want with it. You can also use any number of User Forms in a single document.

A sample document, available for download from my web site, demonstrates two ways in which User Forms can be used:

- Collect input data and store it in a "|"-delimited text file that can later be imported to a database.

- Collect input data and store it as a well-formed, hierarchical XML file. (Each major section of the form represents a level of hierarchy in the XML tag structure.)

This article uses the simpler of the two files to introduce you to the creation of User Forms and underlying VBA code. I encourage you to download the file and print the code components so you can gain a better understanding of how they work. You can also read through Word's extensive collection of online help regarding VBA. Once you understand how User Forms and VBA work together, you can create User Forms for your applications. Figure 1 shows the sample User Form.

Figure 1: Sample User Form

Managing the Virtual Worker/Telecommuter

(Continued from page 5)

Write it down. Record directions, project changes, and updates in writing by sending an email or fax or using Web-based services that allow for sharing calendars and tracking projects.

-Manage by Results

Focus on what's accomplished, not whether your employee is working from his/her patio or at 10 p.m. Set interim deadlines on projects and stick to them.

Measuring productivity and performance should not be different for on-site and off-site workers. If you have a good system for measuring output, it should be equally effective for an employee working at home. If you feel the current measurement criteria are not sufficient, this is a good opportunity to develop them. Be careful not to over-measure; not every task can be evaluated in quantitative terms.

Evaluate individual work as well as group work. Telecommuters may sustain or even increase individual productivity levels, but their group work may suffer because they are not staying in touch with co-workers.

-Communicate Often

Whether your telecommuters take an occasional day away or work from home full-time, make sure they're reachable during business hours. Phone calls, email, fax, and chat all work well – but they have to be able to reach you, too.

Include telecommuters in all appropriate office meetings, both official and social, to prevent telecommuters from feeling isolated from the office team.

Schedule regular meetings with the telecommuter to assess needs, give feedback, discuss problems, and just catch up. By doing this, you will not feel as if you are losing contact, and the telecommuter will be less isolated. If you hold regular meetings to set timetables and assess progress, employees will have deadlines to keep them on target. When face-to-face meetings are not possible, utilize other means such as mail and the phone to keep the lines of communication open.

Telecommuting should not put extra strain on the workers in the office. Communication is the best solution to this potential problem. Always keep co-workers informed of schedules and projects that concern them. This will mean that the telecommuter's time spent in the office will probably consist of many meetings and face-to-face interactions. In any case, telecommuters should designate a key contact person in the office who can assist them and keep them informed of important events. These key contacts could be someone they work with on a project, administrative support people, or their managers. They could also assist with favors such as getting information from a file or sending a fax. If telecommuters have to depend on key contact people for numerous favors, they are probably not planning well, or the tasks they are doing at home may be unsuitable for remote work.

-Plan Ahead for Meetings

Human contact still matters. Schedule periodic and regular meetings where all team members can discuss current projects and telecommuters can catch up on office gossip. Fly out-of-towners in at least quarterly so they can develop working friendships with your in-office staff.

-Administrative Support

If there is an administrative person supporting the telecommuter, it is important that they know the details of the arrangement, such as the days that he or she will be out and how to stay in contact. The administrator should know how to handle situations when people call or come by looking for the telecommuter. Have the administrator explain to people that the employee is working off-site today and give them the number where he/she can be reached. Whether the administrative support person is the key contact or not, the telecommuter should communicate frequently with them as a vital link between the telecommuter and the office.

Agreements

A formal written and signed Telecommuting Agreement should be used that includes:

- Work location
- Work hours (on- and off-site)
- Work assignments
- Evaluation
- Salary and benefits
- Overtime
- Worker's compensation
- Company-owned equipment
- Employee-owned equipment
- Inspection
- Records
- Termination of arrangement, with proper notice.

For sample agreements, refer to Figure 1 and References (4).

Technology

Depending on the requirements of the work the telecommuter is to perform, computing resources and applications such as those listed will need to be available:

- Workstation – consider screen size, speed, disc space, backup capability
- Application software – consider which applications are necessary and their license agreements
- Printing – consider if printing is required (level of quality and type of output required) or can be done when on-site
- Communications link – consider what access needs are and the volume of the data
- Terminal access – consider level of interactions with corporate computing resources that will be required, and how it will be accomplished

Managing the Virtual Worker/Telecommuter

(Continued from page 8)

- Combined file-transfer and terminal access – consider need for a telephone line, modem, terminal emulator, file transfer package, and associated technologies (e.g., Switched 56, ISDN, AND, Frame Relay, Broadband Services, Wireless Service)
- Technical help line – provide a point of contact for the telecommuter in case of technical problems with any listed above.

For a comprehensive list (and discussion) of technology issues to consider as managers of a telecommuter, and for contact points of various technology providers, visit the website in References (4).

References

(1) www.att.com/telework/getstart/ gs_perscr.html

"Telework for Employees, the Telework Personal Screener"

(2) www.langhoff.com/test.html "The right stuff… Test Your Aptitude for Telecommuting"

(3) www.businessweek.com/smallbiz/ content/apr2000/ ma3674054.htm "Remote Control"

(4) www.svi.org/PROJECTS/ TCOMMUTE/TCGUIDE/ HTMLVERS/ "Smart Valley Telecommuting Guide"

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Peter has telecommuted himself for over 3 years as both a trainer and training

manager, and over the past 10 years has managed editors, writers, and trainers who were telecommuting for three different companies – Unisys, Volt, and EDS.

Peter has worked in the tech comm industry for over 20 years as an editor, writer, trainer, and manager (of writers and trainers). After serving the chapter for three years as its Treasurer, he is currently the Twin Cities STC 1st Vice President and the Management SIG manager. He has also served as a publications competition judge, and has made presentations at the chapter's monthly meetings and conferences.

(A sample telecommuter agreement is shown on page 10)

Memberandums

Compiled by Chris Keefer

Alan Houser has a new XML book out on the market. It's called "XML Weekend Crash Course" and contains 30 teach-yourself lessons and a CD-ROM containing support tools and demo or trial versions of several XML tools. Alan co-authored the book with Kay Ethier of Bright Path Solutions in Research Triangle Park, NC. The book is now available through major booksellers' websites.

If you've checked the chapter's calendar of events, you may have seen that **Chuck Lanigan** will be presenting two upcoming seminars for the University of Pittsburgh's Katz Center for Executive Education. In "Effective Writing & Organizational Communication," Chuck covers specific techniques and concepts for developing a successful overall approach to communicating messages within an organization. In "Knowledge

Management & Effective Decision-Making," he offers technologies and concepts that will help executives and organizations in developing a successful overall approach to knowledge management.

Marlene Miller will be presenting a paper at the STC Region 4 conference in Ann Arbor, Michigan on November 3, 2001. It's an updated version of a paper originally co-authored by Marlene and Janis Ramey that discusses the need to edit high tech documents. Janis presented the original paper at last year's IPCC/SIGDOC joint conference at MIT in Cambridge, Massachusetts. The paper is posted on Janis Ramey's website: http://www.technical-writing.net/articles/ RameyArticles.html

You never know what might happen when you write an article for the *Blue Pencil*! For **Janis Ramey**, her "How to Build Better Surveys" article in the September 2001 issue led directly to an invitation to present a talk on the same subject to the Carnegie Science Center staff on September 26.

Memberandums are published periodically as information is made available about our chapter members' professional accomplishments. If you have some information you'd like to see in a Memberandums, please email it to Chris Keefer at keefercj@adelphia.net.

New Technical Writing Program

Penn State University, McKeesport campus, is starting a certificate program in technical writing.

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Figure 1. SAMPLE TELECOMMUTER AGREEMENT

{NOTE: Replace words in [brackets] with appropriate wording. This is meant to be only a sample; contact your Legal department before developing such an agreement to be used real-time.}

This Alternative Work Arrangement Agreement ("Agreement") between [company name] ("Company") and [employee name] ("Employee") establishes the terms and conditions of an alternative work arrangement.

This Agreement is effective from [date] through [date]. [Company] and Employee will review the arrangement on a quarterly basis. In addition, a change in the Employee's responsibilities, assignment, customer, or leadership may prompt a reevaluation of this agreement. It is understood and agreed this arrangement may be terminated at any time by either [Company] or Employee if it is determined the arrangement is unacceptable.

Under this Agreement, [Company] permits Employee to work at home on a full-time basis. Employee's work hours will be flexed between [time] to [time] each workday. Employee's workdays will be [day] to [day]. Employee's benefits will be commensurate with those of a full-time employee.

Employee understands his/her presence may be required in the office or at other designated locations for training classes, mandatory organization meetings, performance reviews, off-site team meetings, and on any other such occasion as determined by [Company] management. [Company] will provide as much advance notice as practicable if Employee is required to be in the office or at another designated location on a scheduled workday. Employee may, at [Company's]. discretion, be asked to participate either in person or by teleconference in other scheduled meetings or events as deemed necessary by [Company].

[Company] will supply to Employee a [insert equipment/materials]. Employee understands [Company] is not responsible for reimbursing Employee for Employee's purchase of any other equipment or materials for work at home; however, [Company] will reimburse Employee for miscellaneous office supplies when appropriate purchasing policy is followed. Employee understands he/she is allowed to copy non-restricted [Company] material only for legitimate business needs. Employee agrees not to reproduce in any way restricted [Company] materials for any reason. Employee further understands he/she must return any [Company] equipment in his/her possession within fifteen (15) days if the alternative work arrangement is discontinued at any time for any reason.

Employee will adhere to [Company] holiday schedule. Employee will receive a holiday if it falls on the Employee's scheduled workday. Employee agrees to make every effort to schedule all personal business for non-scheduled workdays.

Employee agrees to inform his/her direct leader whenever Employee is unable to perform his/her duties for any reason including, but not limited to, personal and/or family illness.

Employee agrees to abide by [Company] policies, procedures, practices, and guidelines at all times.

Employee acknowledges [Company's]. right to audit any [Company]-owned equipment or materials used at any time for any reason. In addition, [Company] retains the right to request the return of equipment and/or materials without notice at any time for any reason.

Managing the Virtual Worker/Telecommuter

Figure 1. SAMPLE TELECOMMUTER AGREEMENT

(Continued from page 10)

Employee agrees to furnish and maintain a designated work space in Employee's home. In addition, Employee agrees to work in a safe manner, employ appropriate security measures, and protect company assets, information, trade secrets, and information systems at all times. Employee agrees to immediately notify his/her direct leader of any safety or health hazard caused by any [Company]-owned equipment or materials and to immediately stop using such equipment or materials. Employee will also notify his/her direct leader of any other safety or health hazard encountered in the course or scope of his/her employment with [Company]. Employee further agrees to cover [Company] assets by insurance with full replacement coverage. Employee shall be responsible for any insurance deductible associated with a claim for loss or damage to [Company] assets. Loss or damage to any [Company] asset shall be reported as soon as practicable to Employee's direct leader. Similarly, any accident or injury which occurs during the course or scope of work for [Company] must be reported by Employee to Employee's direct leader as soon as practicable.

Employee agrees to devote to the business and affairs of [Company] during his/her scheduled business hours all of his/her working time, attention and ability to carry out the duties of his/her position, to the exclusion of any other employment, gainful occupation, or personal and/or family matters. Employee further agrees to notify his/her direct leader of any other employment or gainful occupation.

This Agreement is contingent on Employee's continued employment with [insert organization name]. In the event Employee transfers to an organization outside the [insert organization name] organization, Employee must make arrangements for future alternative work arrangements with the manager of the organization to which he/she is transferred.

This Agreement is further contingent upon Employee's continued satisfactory performance. In the event Employee's performance is deemed unsatisfactory in any manner, [Company] may, at its sole discretion, discontinue the alternative work arrangement.

Both parties agree that this arrangement may be terminated at any time for any reason by either Employee or [Company]. Employee further agrees that [Company] has the sole discretion to discontinue or alter the alternative work arrangement at any time for any reason.

Notwithstanding the foregoing, Employee understands that nothing in this Agreement constitutes a contract that modifies or in any way alters Employee's status as an employee-at-will, meaning Employee's employment with [Company] can be terminated by either Employee or [Company] for any reason or no reason at all at any time.

[COMPANY]   EMPLOYEE
BY:

_____

[[Company] Manager]   Date   [Employee Name]   Date

Tips for Working at Home

By *Deborah S. Ray*

Editor's note: Reprinted with permission. This article was originally published on the "Official TECHWR-L" website: http://www.raycomm.com/techwhirl/

Question: I finally got my boss to let me work at home a day or two per week, but I just can't seem to get any work done at home! I end up grazing in the fridge all day long, checking email over and over again, surfing the Web, or nervously pacing around. What can I do to work more effectively at home?

Some ideas that have helped us:

- Ensure your home office workspace is suitable for doing your job. Is your desk big enough? Is your office separate from other rooms, activities, or distractions? Is your equipment suitably situated? You might begin by examining your workspace at the office, determining why and how it's effective, and trying to create those characteristics in your home workspace.
- Ensure you have the resources needed to do your job. Do you have the software you need to complete your tasks? Do you have the resources to print out that 350-page draft? Do you have enough phone lines to, say, let you research online while on the phone with a colleague?
- Bring home work that you *want* to do, if possible, especially as you're establishing your work-at-home routine. Similarly, bring home work that could be better done in a quiet at-home work environment, such as reading, researching, or line editing.
- Schedule your work-at-home days and times consistently from week to week, if possible, so that working at home becomes part of a routine.
- Plan your work hours beforehand so that you're less tempted to procrastinate. As you're establishing a work-at-home routine, you might plan errands or activities to do after the regular work day so that you're less tempted to procrastinate during the day and catch up during a night shift.
- Prepare the day's agenda before you sit down at the computer each day. Make a list of things you want to get done, and check off tasks as you complete them. For example, we write our agendas on two white boards on the wall.
- Leave the computer if you're not being productive (but don't head to the fridge *grin*). If you're not getting office work done, do housework, laundry, filing, or whatever and start again fresh.
- Find a non-writing activity that helps you get back in a flow. For example, I go upstairs and play the piano; Eric goes to the garage and does manly things with his collection of power tools.
- Make sure you don't have to walk past the fridge to get to the coffeepot, sodas, or other drinks.
- Keep snacky foods and easy-to-munch on meals in an outside fridge or freezer, if possible.
- Take short exercise breaks throughout the day (or if you're not being productive at the computer). We toss a Nerf ball back and forth here in the office, go out for walks, use exercise equipment, and even play basketball in the driveway.
- Have background noise going at all times (if it helps!). We keep CNN on low or play CDs throughout the day.
- Take time to eat meals *away* from the computer. And, if possible, also snack away from the computer so you don't get in the habit of doing so.
- *Leave* work at the end of the day.

If you have suggestions or ideas to add to these tips, please email debray@raycomm.com.

Tools and Tips Column

Using Word's User Forms

(Continued from page 7)

The sample application consists of just two major pieces:

• A User Form with the appropriate interface controls.

• A code module that functions as the overall, controlling macro.

The first step is to create the form and interface controls:

1. Press **Alt**+**F11**.

    This puts you into the VBA editor.

2. Select **Insert** > **User Form** from the main menu bar.

    Word displays the Toolbox and gives you a blank form that you can modify. You can stretch the form using the re-sizing handles to accommodate any arrangement of controls. See Figure 2.
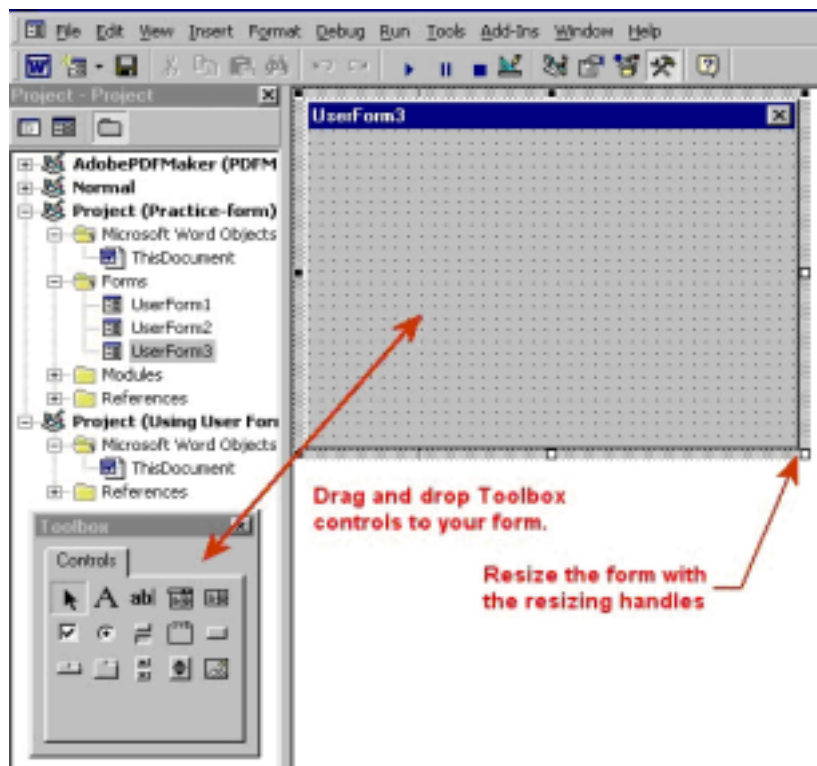

Figure 2: Blank Form and Toolbox

    Every control has two options: Properties and View Code. Right-clicking a control displays a shortcut menu from which you can choose either option. Use the Properties option to alter the appearance of the control.
3. Use the View Code option to change how the control works.

Problems Solved Here

(Continued from page 6)

Using Graphics in Microsoft Word

Document specifications require that the graphics be imported by reference and have callouts. These graphics must be edited and resized for the document.

- PaintShop Pro provides easy resizing to the exact inch size required. When you import the graphic, it is in the proper size.
- Contact Bob Mohr, STC Pittsburgh member. Bob has written an e-book on Microsoft Word techniques. His email address is bob.mohr@billingzone.com. His web site is www.writemohr.com.
- Use PowerPoint to draw a box for the callout and type the entry. Copy and paste the drawing a into PaintShop Pro drawing.

Finding Work
- Work your network.
- Contact job contractors.

Last Minute Changes
- Use consistent naming conventions and lexicon so that you can do a search and replace for name changes.
- Keep a log of changes.

Documenting for Users With Widely Different Reading Levels
- A good index is very important.
- Put the active verb in bold-faced type.
- Provide telephone support for initial uses of the document.
- Print only what the particular user needs.

Usability Testing
- Video-tape the test session, but ask the subject first.
- Sit in another room to take notes; your presence can bother the subject.

Redesigning an Installation Guide
The goal was to make an installation guide more usable by decreasing the size (and possibly extracting content into a separate location).

The following suggestions were made:
- Remove some content and put it on the web instead.
- Rather than simply putting the files on the web, also include the HTML on the CD (so users are not required to access the web at that time).
- Include just the main points in print and put the more in-depth information somewhere else.
- Use separate sheets for the special situations (since they change more often, it will be less expensive from a printing standpoint). (An alternative is simply to include updates on printed sheets, or on the web — i.e.,

include the special situations in print, but don't update the entire guide for every change in them — use the web for that.)
- Find out from someone who knows what the customers want.
- Print two separate guides, a "beginner's" or "basic" guide, and then an "in-depth" guide. (But there would be shipping issues, with ensuring everything is in the box.) An alternative suggestion was to do something similar, but keep it all in a single guide — just with clearly marked distinct sections that almost act as different guides.
- Include some of the information in other documentation (such as in Getting Started guides, for example), rather than in the installation guide.

Other topics discussed were how to start on a project that is totally unfamiliar, how to handle people who do not understand what a writer does, and how much time it takes to do our work.

Report on the September 2001 STC Board of Directors Meeting

(Continued from page 6)

  o Fitchburg State student

  o Eagle (Denton, Texas) student

  o Saskatchewan

e. The following merit grants:

  o US$3,000 to the Northern New England chapter for a scholarship program at the University of Massachusetts. This scholarship will be in honor of Millie McGuire, founder of the chapter.

  o US$2,000 to the Atlanta chapter to create a new résumé database.

  o US$1,235 to the Central Ohio chapter to support its new High School Learning Program.

f. The following loans:

  o US$3,000 to the Southeastern Michigan chapter for the Region 4 conference.

  o US$3,000 to the Canada West Coast chapter to host the Region 7 Conference in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada, in November 2002, subject to formal approval of the conference budget.

g. A financial recovery/special need grant of US$715 to the Netherlands chapter to cover past-due costs incurred for the March 2001 membership meeting and to ensure the future of the chapter.

h. An increase of the stipend for the Industry Fellowship for Faculty and for the Teaching Fellowship for Practicing Professionals to US$4,000 each.

i. Julie Bommarito as the Program Manager for the 2004 STC Annual Conference to be held in Baltimore, Maryland.

j. Rhonda Stanton for a Journal Editor Fellowship.

The Executive Council approved the following since the May 2001 board meeting:

a. Pacesetter Awards for the Orlando chapter and the Mercer University student chapter. (This was a pro forma vote to acknowledge awards granted at the STC Annual Conference in Chicago in May 2001.)

b. Formation of the University of Wisconsin-Stout student chapter with a US$150 start-up grant.

c. Formation of the Single Sourcing SIG with a proposed first-year budget of US$1,400.

If you would like to learn more about decisions made during this or any other board meeting, or if you would like to have a motion or discussion item brought forward, please contact your Director-Sponsor. For items you want addressed at the January 2002 meeting, please alert your Director-Sponsor by early December.

Note: For Chris Benz's previous Director-Sponsor articles, please visit

http://www.stcregion.org/region2/chair.shtml

You can reach Chris at 919.479.4891 or

cjbenz@unforgettable.com

Employment Roundtables

October Meeting Summary

By Nancy Carpenter

Thanks to the efforts of Noelle Conover, the guest speakers, and other chapter volunteers, our annual employment meeting was another success. The meeting was well attended, and everyone left with practical employment information and stronger network connections.

Recruiter

Pam Schmidbauer is a recruiter with Aquent, Inc., a contracting agency. She talked about what services her company can offer to technical writers. She understands what writers do, and was the first in her company to work to place writers, proofreaders, and sometimes indexers in contract positions. Universities are requesting contract writers to assist with teaching materials, since there is a big influx into retraining. Pam also said that online portfolios are very useful for writers looking for work.

Certification Program

Bob Reitman is Director of the Institute for Technical Communications, Department of Outreach and Cooperative Extension, Pennsylvania State University, and former head of documentation for Minitab, Inc. Bob shared some of his strategies for hiring writers and also talked about the new certification program in technical writing that will begin in March 2002 at three Penn State campuses. The program offers courses in technical writing, technical editing, information design, usability analysis, and project management. For more information, contact Bob Reitman at rpr1@outreach.psu.edu.

Software Testing

Suzy Fontrier teaches database systems at Penn State and works part-time doing behavioral interviews for DDI. She has had many roles over the years — programmer, project leader, software designer, documenter, trainer, tester, requirements analysis, system administrator, and self-acknowledged peon. Suzy discussed all aspects of working in the technical field, but focused on how writers can enter the field of quality assurance. She advised that writers get into the design meetings and get upper management to support their involvement.

Employment Roundtables

(Continued from page 14)

Portfolios

Nancy Ott and Marlene Miller are well-known long-time members of our chapter, with years of experience in the technical writing field. They discussed four types of portfolios that they have used in job interviews: a full portfolio that is used for "show and tell," a smaller portfolio that can be left behind, an email, and an online/CD portfolio.

They suggested that if you rewrote a document, discuss the before and after. Highlight the improvements. Discuss how you became involved, problems you encountered, and your solutions. If you use proprietary items, get permission or negotiate for permission to use part or eliminate the confidential material. If you still cannot use the item, create a sample procedure in the format of the work that you did.

You can put the online version of your portfolio onto a CD or set it up on a web page. Some considerations for online portfolios are: can the audience see it? If you need a computer, is there one available? If you bring a laptop, will the batteries last for the whole presentation, or is there power available? If you use a CD, be sure it has been virus-scanned, and make the CD auto-running so that the viewer does not have to struggle to launch it.

Marketing for the Consultant

Noelle Conover has been self-employed for close to ten years. She shared some of the proven marketing techniques that have kept her employed. Online searches can be profitable. STC national and Pittsburgh often post opportunities. Talk to your past clients and ask for referrals. Send cards to past clients, but not for Christmas; pick a time that is unusual like Thanksgiving.

Hiring, from the Manager's Viewpoint

Jean Siegel is consulting for a small start-up venture. In the recent past, she managed a 5-person technical writing department in the software industry. They maintained a strong internship program and good hiring program. Jean discussed what hiring is like from the manager's viewpoint, what she looked for in writers, what kinds of skills are needed, and how internships worked. She decided what knowledge and skills were needed for a job, and put them in the job description. After reading resumes, she arranged telephone interviews with the best candidates and asked questions on how they started a new project, how they interacted to get information, etc. When a candidate was interesting, she requested a sample. And she always checked references. Jean advised that you call your references before you send out resumes to tell them that you are looking and subtly remind them of the work you did for them.

Resume Evaluation

Mary Ecsedy is president of our chapter of STC and president of Circuit Riders, Inc., which offers software design and documentation services. She is experienced both in independent consulting and in working as a member of a writing department. She reviewed resumes at the meeting and provided advice on ways to clearly present your skills.

You should submit a cover letter with your resume. The cover letter and resume should be tailored to the job. Most important of all: NO TYPOS!

Most resumes should be about 2 pages long. If you are newly graduated, include courses, but relate it to technical writing. For instance, you researched and wrote papers for course X. Mary advised that an objective and summary at the top of the resume is very useful. Make them succinct, and minimize the marketing talk.

If you claim knowledge of specific tools in a Skills Summary, be sure to relate them to specific tasks in the Experience section. Use keywords related to the fields so that you will get a hit during a search.

If you use an online resume, use links to the sections to minimize the scrolling. You can send a PDF or other format if you know what the employer can read. Keep a resume in text file format so that you can paste it into a monster.com job search engine.

Keep a record of the resumes you send, ads you responded to, results, impressions.

Tools and Tips Column

Using Word's User Forms
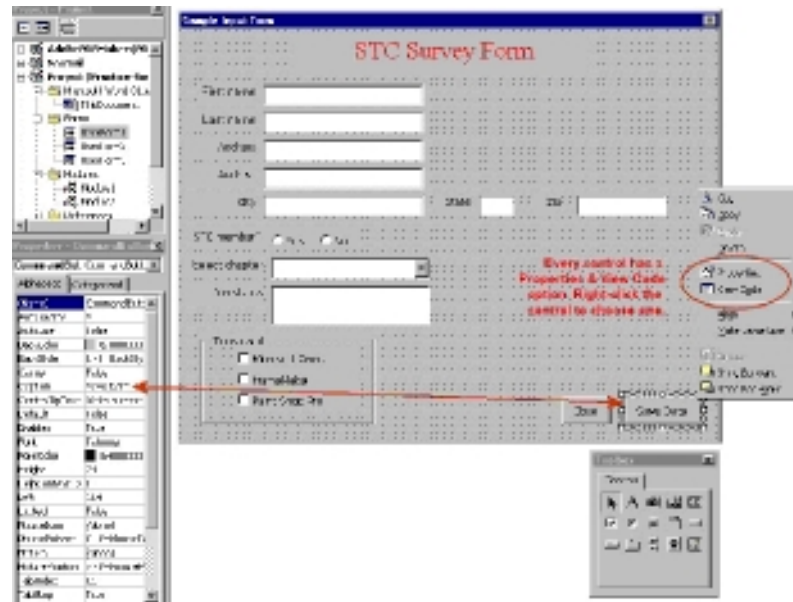
(Continued from page 13)

Figure 3: Accessing Control Options

The form also has properties and code behind it.

4.   Right-click anywhere on the form to access its options.

The code for the form (shown below) tells Word which form to load into memory and display. It also initializes the controls containing data:

```
Public Sub UserForm_Click()                        'entry point to the form

    Load UserForm1                                 'loads the form into memory

    userform_initialize                            'initialize the text, list, & combo boxes

    frmuserform1.Show                              'displays the form

End Sub
```

Once the form has been created, the next step is to create a Module that contains the VBA code to open the form and prepare a data file.

5.   Select **Insert** > **Module** from the main menu bar.

This creates a new module and gives you a blank space in which you write your code. (You can change the module name by clicking in the Name field of the Properties window and entering a new name.)

The code in this sample application also includes prompts asking the user whether to create a new file or use an existing file (to which the data would be appended). In the case of a new file, the user is prompted to enter a filename. In the case of an existing file, a standard (Windows) File Open dialog box is called so the user can navigate to an existing file and select it.

Tools and Tips Column

Using Word's User Forms

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The following Module code produces Figures 4 through 6, depending on the user's responses:

```
Dim filename As String                          'filename is made "global" to all functions
Public Sub Sample_form()
    Dim filecreate As String
        filecreate = MsgBox("Do you want to create a new file?", vbYesNo + vbQuestion + vbDefaultButton1,
"Create File")
    If filecreate = 6 Then                      '6 is equivalent to Yes
        enter_filename
    Else
        select_existing_file                    'call standard file open dialog box
    End If
    Open filename For Append As #1 'open file for writing
    UserForm1.Show                              'call and display the form
End Sub
Public Sub enter_filename()                     'prompt for new file name
    filename = ""
    Do While filename = ""
        filename = InputBox("Enter a file name", "New File")     Loop
End Sub
Public Sub select_existing_file()               'call standard file open dialog box
    Dim buttonval As String
    With Dialogs(wdDialogFileOpen)
        buttonval = .Display
        filename = .Name
    End With
End Sub
```


Figure 4: First prompt the user sees

Tools and Tips Column

Using Word's User Forms

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If **Yes** was chosen, Figure 5 is displayed:

Figure 5: Prompt for new filename

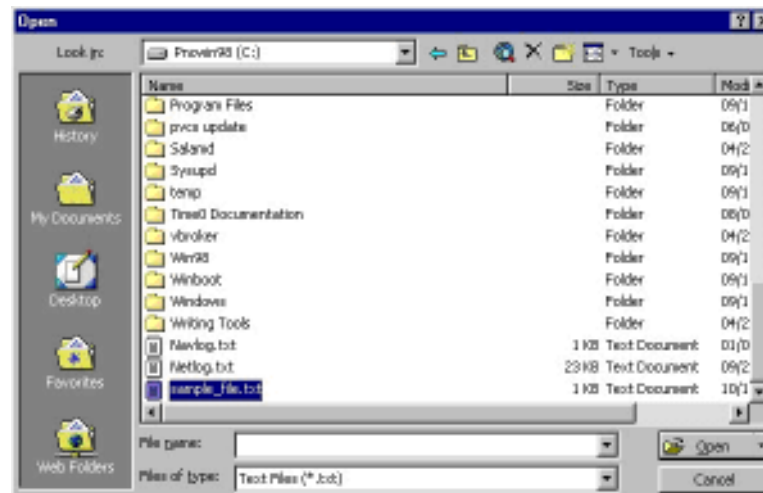If **No** was chosen, Figure 6 is displayed

Figure 6: The standard Windows File Open dialog box

Once the status of the files has been established, the macro displays the form for data entry. Each time the user completes a screen full of data, the Save Data button (see Fig. 1) is clicked. The code behind the Save Data button does several things:

• Writes the current data to the file.

• Clears the form and redisplays it.

• Reinitializes all variables.

The code behind the Save Data button also formats the data being output by placing the delimiter character ("|", a.k.a. a pipe character) between each data field. The code can also do things like make sure the state data is always saved in upper case letters by converting it before writing it to the file.

Tools and Tips Column

Using Word's User Forms

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Here's the code for the Save Data button:

```
Private Sub CommandButton1_Click()                      'This is the Save Data button
       'Write data to the file when the button is activated
    Print #1, TextBox1.Value; "|";                      'separate fields with "|" character
    Print #1, TextBox2.Value; "|";
    Print #1, TextBox3.Value; "|";
    Print #1, TextBox4.Value; "|";
    Print #1, TextBox5.Value; "|";
    Print #1, UCase(TextBox6.Value); "|";               'convert state data to upper case
    Print #1, TextBox7.Value; "|";
    If OptionButton1 = True Then
        Print #1, "Y"; "|";                             'print Y if true, N if false
    Else
        Print #1, "N"; "|";
    End If
    Print #1, ComboBox1.Value; "|";
    Print #1, ListBox1.Value; "|";
    If CheckBox1 = True Then                             'print Y if true, N if false
        Print #1, "Y"; "|";
    Else
        Print #1, "N"; "|";
    End If
    If CheckBox2 = True Then                             'print Y if true, N if false
        Print #1, "Y"; "|";
    Else
        Print #1, "N"; "|";
    End If
    If CheckBox3 = True Then                             'print Y if true, N if false
        Print #1, "Y"
    Else
        Print #1, "N"
    End If
```

Tools and Tips Column

Using Word's User Forms

(Continued from page 20)

```
    initialize_boxes                    'empty the text boxes, reset buttons
    TextBox1.SetFocus                   'return to first name field
End Sub
```

6. When all data entry is complete, click the Close button.

    The code behind this button is simple: It closes the output file and ends the macro.

    The end result is a pipe-delimited text file that can be imported into any software/application capable of importing delimited character files. Here's an example of what the file might look like:

```
Bugs|Bunny|100 Star Drive||Hollywood|CA|90220|Y|Other|Consultant|Y|Y|Y
Daffy|Duck|Apt#32|Pond Ave.|Miami|FL|12345|N|Other|1099 Contractor|N|Y|N
John|Doe|1134 Strawn Ave||Arnold|PA|15068|Y|Pittsburgh|Part-time|Y|N|Y
```

WORD SMITH

November STC Chapter Meeting

Educational Opportunities for Technical Communicators

Whether you are a newcomer or potential newcomer to the technical communication field, or you are a current technical communicator and would like to enhance your academic credentials, this month's meeting is for you.

The November monthly chapter meeting will feature speakers from Penn State, Carnegie Mellon, and Point Park College, who will discuss their institutions' educational programs in technical communication.

The month's chapter meeting is at a new venue for the Pittsburgh STC. The Technology Council is located in the Voicestream Building, 2000 Technology Drive, in the Pittsburgh Technology Center. The Technology Center is a riverfront office park on Second Avenue in the Hazelwood section of Pittsburgh, just off the Bates Street Exit of the Parkway West. See the calendar on the STC Pittsburgh web site for a link to Map Quest directions.

Parking is free in the Technology Center's lighted parking lot. The lot and building are patrolled by Technology Center security.

WHEN: Tuesday, November 27 2001, 6:30-8:30P pm.

WHERE: Pittsburgh Technology Council Training Room

COST: There is no charge for this meeting. Light refreshments will be provided..

RSVP: Please reply by 3 pm on Friday, November 23, to Darlene Mullenix, Meeting Coordinator, by calling her at (412) 288-8676 or by emailing her at

dmullenix@federatedinv.com.

STC society for technical communication

P.O. Box 133
Pittsburgh, PA 15230

NOVEMBER, 2001

FLEXIBLE WORK ARRANGEMENTS