

blue pencil



Tools and Tips: Spinning a Web with Word

By Robert P. Mohr

As a follow-up to last month's review of Word 2002, I'd like to expand on Word's new functionality regarding HTML and Web pages.

Mention using Word to create web pages, and the skin on most folks starts to crawl. "Word throws in extra code. It bloats the size of the files." Those are true statements—especially if you're some sort of HTML purist. And while I understand the concerns behind those statements, my response to them is often, "So what?"

Let me explain what I consider to be advantages to using Word to author web pages. One advantage is that Word 2002 makes it

possible for you to round-trip a document from a .doc file to an .html file and back to a .doc again without losing the formatting—for the most part.

Another reason, and the most obvious to me, is ease of use. Novice web spinners can easily create some very attractive web pages. Word's WYSIWYG environment, combined with any of its 27 web themes, backgrounds, form controls, browser preview, and built-in hyperlink capabilities put a lot of potential at a user's fingertips. If a user is already familiar with one tool and can get double duty out of it with virtually no learning curve, then isn't that worth something?

A file with excess code in it is bigger than it could be, but how big is too big? With the popularity of high-speed connections and faster browsers, I wonder if slightly bigger files are really a burden, especially when creating HTML files for a corporate intranet. If file size really is an issue, you can use Word's built-in HTML filter to remove the excess code. You'll lose the round-trip capability, but that may not be important for a given application.

To save a "clean" HTML file with Word 2002, click **File > Save As**, and choose a file type of "Web page, filtered." If you're using an earlier version of Word, you can sani-

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Technical Standards Names Worst Manual

ANNUAL CONTEST TAPS INTO UNIVERSAL FRUSTRATION CAUSED BY POOR DOCUMENTATION AND UNDERScores THE IMPORTANCE OF CLEAR TECHNICAL WRITING

San Diego, 2002

Technical Standards, Southern California's source for specialized documentation staffing and technical writing, today announced the winning entry in its second annual "Worst Manual" contest. This year's top prize goes to a human resources manual that cautions employees that workers' compensation insurance is not intended to cover "stupidity or incompetents."

"The frustration that's caused by a poorly written technical manual is almost a universal experience," said Jim Desmond, presi-

dent of Technical Standards. "On the other hand, good product documentation results in satisfied repeat customers, reduced costs, and limited liability exposure for companies."

With entries solicited from the 25,000-plus membership of the Society for Technical Communication, Technical Standards' Worst Manual contest is designed to underscore the importance of clear technical writing for everything from consumer products, computer hardware and software, to

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STC Gift Store

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Blue Pencil

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TECHNICAL STANDARDS NAMES WORST MANUAL

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employee handbooks. Entries from across the United States and Canada represented a panoply of poor communication that causes more confusion than comprehension and could lead to liability issues and hidden costs for companies.

THIS YEAR'S WINNER: EMPLOYEE MANUAL

This year's "Worst Manual," submitted by Lauren Swerdlove of San Diego, is an employee handbook for a small service company. The manual reads like a human resource lawyer's worst nightmare. Under suggested rules to follow are: stealing, loafing, and malicious gossip.

The manual goes on to clarify safety and workers' compensation issues with the following: "Remember workmen compensation insurance was not provided to cover stupidity or incompetents."

"This manual might seem comical, but employee handbooks are sensitive documents that establish the ground rules for a relationship between employer and employee," said Jennifer Lutz, an employment attorney with Klinedinst, Fliehm & McKillop in San Diego. "When done correctly, an employee manual can help guide workers through a satisfactory working relationship with their employer and protect companies from lawsuits by employees who felt they were treated unfairly."

RUNNERS-UP

Often, poorly written manuals for consumer products can be attributed to translation problems. Clear, accurate translations are extremely important when communicating health and safety warnings associated with operating a product.

One of the contest's runners-up, instructions for a "sliding bicycle" (actually a two-wheeled scooter), was full of nonsensical phrases, which were the obvious result of direct translation. The directions for assembly warned ambiguously: "Do not re-

solve and refit the product optionally due to safe reason."

Some of the other runners-up violated cardinal rules of technical writing with disastrous results.

A gas fire log manufacturer included a manual that used a confusing myriad of fonts, colors, and text sizes to explain the installation of the product. The result was difficult to read and hard to understand.

"Fonts, spacing, text size, and boxes of text should be used to produce a manual that is easy to follow, emphasizing key points without bombarding the reader with too much information," said Desmond. "In this case, the use of an overwhelming array of graphics and redundant warnings resulted in utter confusion."

Yet another runner-up erroneously employed a diagram to demonstrate how to change the blade of a utility knife. Diagrams can be very effective when used properly in manuals by saving words and avoiding translation problems. But in the case of this entry, the illustrations were cropped incorrectly, omitting the key part of the illustration that demonstrated correct use of the product.

"For many end users, bad documentation amounts to nothing more than an inconvenience," said Desmond. "But for companies, the results can affect the bottom line in terms of overloaded help lines, reduced revenues from dissatisfied customers who won't come back, and increased liability."

"Some businesses have learned the hard way that materials that accompany a product may be legally considered essential parts of the actual products themselves and that companies may be held liable for poor-quality information," said Desmond.

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Tools and Tips: Spinning a Web with Word

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tize an HTML file after saving it by running it through Microsoft's HTML filter. (This is available as a download from <http://office.microsoft.com/assistance/2000/htmlfilter.aspx>).

Word also offers 10 HTML form controls that include text boxes, radio buttons, check boxes, command buttons, list boxes, and combo boxes. Each can be dragged and dropped onto your form from the Controls Toolbox. Once on the form, simply right-click on a control to change its properties. (By the way, these controls can also be used in standard .doc files.)

And finally, if you're into writing scripts for your HTML files, you can use Word's built-in script editor. It's a full-fledged development tool in its own right and adds another level of convenience to web page creation. The script editor contains a project task pane so you can work on multiple HTML files, a debugger for your script code, and an extensive online help system that includes tutorials on Jscript, VBScript, HTML and DHTML, and style sheets.

To use the script editor, start with a web page already open, and click **View > HTML Source**. This opens the script editor and shows all of the page's HTML code (in a color-coded layout). From there, you can add, remove, or change whatever you like.

If you already have an HTML authoring tool, you'll no doubt continue to use it. However, if you don't have one, and you do have Word 2002, then give Word a try for your HTML pages. You may find that it will satisfy all of your requirements.

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Online Help with Doc-To-Help

MINUTES OF THE MARCH 19 MEETING

By Nancy Carpenter

Pittsburgh-based ComponentOne, maker of TrueHelp, recently acquired Doc-To-Help and ForeHelp, making ComponentOne the second-largest vendor of authoring tools for Windows online help. These tools were integrated to produce ComponentOne Doc-to-Help 6.0.

Two representatives of ComponentOne spoke at our March meeting. They were John Jubak, Lead Developer of Doc-to-Help, and Adam McElhinny, Territory Manager for ComponentOne sales. John described the history of this tool and its present capabilities.

The new version of Doc-to-Help has many improvements:

- Improved conditional text allows you to easily customize for the level of learning of a user.
- Different templates are easy to apply to a document. Just use the same style names in the templates, but give them different properties.
- You can develop your own template.
- The software supports secondary windows. Merely define the paragraph style as opening in a secondary window.
- It works with Windows 2000 and 2002
- It produces cross-platform HTML, printed documents, and JavaHelp.
- The help is built into the tool. Definitions and instructions pop up as you use it.
- This release has been tested against the latest version of Internet Explorer and against Netscape 4.7.2. (Apparently Netscape 6 has some real problems, and Doc-to-Help users should not to install it at this time.)

- Microsoft Word uses a positional scheme for lists that causes problems with help tools. We might find weird indenting. Doc-to-Book tried to fix this.

This new version has a few limitations. It does not yet provide full text search or support conversion of ForeHelp files. ComponentOne hopes to provide these features in future releases, and plans to explore an interface with FrameMaker, provide a web-based component and a mif processor, and support Microsoft Help 2.0 and .NET.

Meeting attendees received an evaluation copy on CD, and a ComponentOne t-shirt. So you really missed a lot if you were not there!



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New Members

No new members to report

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STC Gift Store

STC has a new specialty gift line featuring the updated STC logo. There are some very professional and some just fun gifts. Consider the chrome-plated letter opener with the @ symbol. The STC logo and web address are printed in black on the front of it.



Or a crushable foam computer or cell phone. Good medium for taking out your frustrations!



There are shirts, pens, pins, mugs, a writing pad, a back pack, and magnet poetry. To see this collection, log onto

www.stc.org/specialty_gifts.html.

Technical Standards Names Worst Manual

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More information about Technical Standards' second annual "Worst Manual" contest can be found at www.tecstandards.com.

ABOUT TECHNICAL STANDARDS

Technical Standards provides documentation writing and staffing services to companies in a wide range of industries. Carefully assessing the specific needs of its clients, Technical Standards provides a customized fit for each job by hand-picking candidates from its pool of thousands of writers. When handling outsourced projects, Technical Standards produces clear, accurate, and understandable documentation to help ensure end-user satisfaction and reduced liability.

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Minutes of STC Board Meeting

March 6, 2002

By Nancy Carpenter

A synopsis of the minutes was published in the March issue. Following is a more complete account.

Treasurer and Vice President

These positions must be filled by the end of this season.

Chapter Work

Volunteers are greatly needed in all areas of chapter work, particularly to help with the newsletter and web page — even just to have on board as second-stringer backups to take some of the pressure off.

Competition

No competition awards were given this Spring because too few candidates were received. If any members receive an award at the national contest, we will honor the occasion at the next meeting.

Writers Available/Needed

Employment in Pittsburgh is on the rise! Keep posting your notices with Noelle Conover, our employment coordinator.

Newsletter

Chris Downs will contact Karen Schnackenberg to see about getting a CMU student to help on the *Blue Pencil*.

Membership

Our chapter has not managed to attract and keep many writers who are managers, students, very high tech, or hardware only. We need to develop a strategy to bring more of these writers to meetings.

Fund Raising

We need continued discussion of fund raising ideas. Possible projects include “hiring” an STC member to evaluate a project or to provide specific training.

Listserv

Alan will see Marlene Miller regarding fixes to the following listserv issues:

- Only half of our membership is on the list. Its instantaneous communication needs to be extended to the entire membership.
- Can replies be sent to just the requestor, instead of to the entire list.
- The list addresses are easy to obtain, so they are not well protected.

Updates on Web

How can people change their contact information on the web site? Joan Bondira will put a link on the site to allow submission of changes.

Meetings

The April meeting will be a joint meeting with PittMark.

For the May meeting, we hope to have a trip report from the national meeting, and to have Pittsburgh chapter presenters do their talks at that meeting. Alan will look for attendees.

A summer fun gathering is still in discussion.

The 2002-2003 agenda is half completed. Some meetings are confirmed, the rest are in progress. Please direct any topics to Alan.

Agenda items must be posted on the web calendar as soon as they are confirmed, even if they are a year in advance. Joan will consult with Marlene regarding how to set up a real-time calendar. Processes were put in place for getting the meeting notices disseminated by the end of the first week of the month.

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Monthly Chapter Meeting: XML Publishing in Pittsburgh

Sure...people talk about XML for technical publishing, but nobody actually does it. Not true! Speakers from ANSYS and USAirways will discuss why and how they use XML to create, maintain, and publish their technical documentation.

April's monthly chapter meeting is a joint event with the Pittsburgh Markup Language Users Group (www.pittmark.org). We will have two speakers.

Jeff Beal, ANSYS: "XML in ANSYS Document Production." Jeff will share an overview of ANSYS's completely XML-based document production cycle. From authoring to delivery, ANSYS is using XML to produce technical manuals and online help for its finite element modeling products.

Bill LeRoy, USAirways: "Taking off with XML." Find out how USAirways manages the black bag of documents airline pilots carry into the cockpit. Bill will also discuss activities of the Air Transport Association (ATA) for improving the delivery of flight operations information using XML/SGML.

The Pittsburgh Technology Council is located in the Voicestream Building, 2000 Technology Drive, in the Pittsburgh Technology Center. To get there, take the Oakland exit off the Parkway East. This takes you around in a curve onto Bates Street. You can only turn right off this exit. At the bottom of the small hill is Second Avenue. Turn right and look for the Technology Center entrance.

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

WHEN: Wednesday, April 17, 2002, 6:30-8:30 pm.

WHERE: Pittsburgh Technology Council, Voicestream Building, 2000 Technology Drive, in the Pittsburgh Technology Center. Parking is free in the Technology Center's parking lot.

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

RSVP: Please reply to

jroberts@pghtech.org



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APRIL, 2002

XML PUBLISHING