blue pencil

Spotlight on STC's Special Interest Groups:

Looking for Work? Let STC Help.

By Janis Ramey

STC WorkQuest is a new special interest group for technical communicators looking for work. We talk about things such as improving resumes and motivating yourself to do better in your job search. We try to both guide the newly unemployed and motivate the ones languishing in their search. It's also for people who are underemployed or thinking of changing jobs. People other than STC members may also be involved.

We concentrate on the specifics of job hunting such as interviewing skills, strategies, etc., and encourage people to share their successes and frustrations. The group also

offers a chance to talk with experts about job search techniques, such as speaking skills, dress for success, etc.

Potential meeting topics include:

- Improving resumes

- Brainstorming for job leads

- Job-hunting strategies

- Portfolios

- Cover letters

- Internet resources. Other resources.

- $$$ — insurance, paying bills, creditors, etc

- Interviewing skills

- Business cards

- Dress for success

- Testimonials from successful job seekers

- Psychological and emotional coping skills

Independents and SIGs in the Pittsburgh STC Chapter

The Independents and SIGs is a specialized group of STC members who either work as independent writers or who belong to one of the many Special Interest Groups available through the STC (such as Lone Writers, Information Design, Management and Usability).

The group meets every other month at a central and convenient location to network and discuss issues of relevance to those who are working on an independent basis and also address the needs of some of the special interest groups. One of the recent meetings included a presentation on insurance plans and retirement funds available

for small business owners with guest speakers Mitchell Letwin and Andrew Neft of Northwestern Mutual Financial Network.

The group also discusses how to get started in the small business arena and some of the issues that come with going independent, such as getting projects, networking (this is a skill and a valuable one for those who are independents), building your business and various methods of advertising and promotion.

The meetings are organized so that attendees can network, discuss issues and ask questions of each other to continue to learn

Contents

President's Letter

I was surprised by this year's chapter membership statistics. Our membership was down from well over 200 persons during most of 2001-2002 to just under 180.

Although the numbers were disappointing, the individual stories were even more discouraging. Some chapter members with more than five, even 10, years of tenure did not renew. Some companies were conspicuously absent from our roster.

A few telephone calls to former members confirmed my suspicions.

- Some members experienced unemployment during the past year.

- Others who were working as freelancers or consultants had to make drastic budget cuts as work slowed down.

- Several Pittsburgh-area companies that traditionally employ substantial documentation departments had stopped reimbursing members for STC dues.

As a chapter, we can do one of two things to compensate for our membership drop (which the entire Society has experienced). Our first option is to do nothing. In a year, or perhaps two, our membership will rise to previous levels as the Pittsburgh and national economies improve.

Our second option is to expand our membership base. There are several sources of potential members in the Pittsburgh area that are relatively untapped. The chapter needs to work to expand the involvement and membership of local college and university students who are enrolled in technical communication programs. We must work to publicize the Society, especially the Pittsburgh chapter, to local technical writers who may

not be aware of the organization. Furthermore, we must reach out to former members who have left the organization.

What's possible? We can emerge from this economic downturn as a larger and stronger organization that can provide more value to each of its members.

What can you do to accomplish this? Help to spread the word about the benefits of the Society. Reach out to new technical writers who are entering the field. Invite a colleague to one of our meetings.

The Society's formal membership drive will begin in September. My hunch, however, is that our informal efforts will yield the best results.

Alan Houser

President, Pittsburgh Chapter

Farewell from the Retiring President

It's only been two years since Heather Lumm approached me with the opportunity to become the chapter vice president, but so much has happened since then! This has been a period of profound changes for all of us, and working with Heather at Highmark seems like something from another lifetime.

Can you remember the summer of 2000? Y2K had come and gone, the tech bubble was bursting, the layoff announcements were beginning in earnest, and job security vanished for many of us. During these past two years I've gone from being a W-2 contractor, to a full-time employee, to a laid-off employee, to an independent contractor. I know that many of you have gone through similar upheavals and more, and that many of you are currently looking for work.

No technical writer in Pittsburgh has to struggle alone with this situation. The people of the Pittsburgh chapter have a long history of helping one another through the rough spots, and I'm sure that this will continue. One of the most important projects we worked on this past year was the review of our chapter through the back issues of the Blue Pencil. One of the recurring themes in the newsletter was how the Pittsburgh technical writing community coped with the economic upheavals of the 70's and 80's. Those of you old enough to remember those times know what it can be like. Those of you who are too young to remember may want to take advantage of the experience of others on how to survive an economic contraction.

I encourage all of you to make the effort to come to meetings as a part of your basic economic survival strategy. Networking really does work; we can't help you if we don't know you're there. Aside from the networking opportunities, we have tried to give you something practical for your time. We have focused our meeting topics on providing practical information on technology, project strategies, and economic matters, and this will continue under our incoming president and vice president, Alan Houser and Nancy Ott.

Whatever success our chapter has experienced over the past couple of years is due to the time and effort of many people. I would like to thank everyone who has served with me on the board, or who has otherwise volunteered to help. I am very grateful to you all for your help, support, and for your encouragement most of all. I could not have done this without all of you.

Our chapter is going into the next season in good shape financially, (although we need to seriously consider some fundraising activities). We have a solid, active membership base, a terrific board, and a pool of additional volunteers to help with various projects.

My only regret on leaving my position as chapter president is that I was unable to devote as much time and energy to it as you deserved. I also feel that I'm just now getting the hang of it, and now it's time to move on. Life's like that. @:)

So thank you one and all. This has been a wonderful, challenging experience that I will always treasure. It has been an honor to serve this chapter, and I am deeply grateful to you all for your patience and confidence.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Mary Ecsedy

****

President and principal writer

Circuit Riders, Inc.

Technical communication services

Pittsburgh, PA

412-422-0213

ecsedym@circuit-riders.net

www.circuit-riders.net

People News

Current Chapter: 183

Total STC: 20,086

New Members

Devon C. Cole

Jennifer A. Cramer

Kathleen Lynch

Michael J Powers

Gladys B. Wilson

Member transferring into chapter

Wendy W. Austin

Welcome back reinstated member

Richard G. Sobocinski

Society for Technical Communication

Pittsburgh Chapter
P.O. Box 133
Pittsburgh, PA 15230
Contact: Alan Houser
Phone: 412-363-0387
arh@groupwellesley.com

National Office
901 North Stuart Street
Suite 904
Arlington, VA 22203-1822
Phone: 703-522-4114
Fax: 703-522-2075

Looking for Work? Let STC Help.

- Helping family, especially teens, get through this period

- Value of additional schooling, special courses.

- Schedule of the day and of the week while job hunting (your day planner should be full).

- Making effective phone calls.

- Networking – what it is and how it's done. Why it's important. (90% of new jobs come from someone you know.)

- Changing careers

- What do hirers look for?

- Role of search firms, placement agencies, and job counselors

- Getting, negotiating, and evaluating job offers

We meet once a week on Tuesday mornings (after traffic). Meeting announcements appear on the STC Pittsburgh Chapter website (www.stcpgh.org). Contact me (Janis Ramey) if you're interested or if you know someone who should be invited to these meetings.

Contact information:

Janis Ramey

412-833-5548

ramey@technical-writing.net

Independents and SIGs in the Pittsburgh STC Chapter

more about the business and how to be successful in this specialized area. There is also time allotted for a small presentation on the topic of the evening, which is an issue specific to the needs of independent writers and other SIGs, such as getting started, time management, accountability and running your own business.

The next meeting is scheduled for September. An exact date has not been set; however, to be included on the meeting announcement mailing, you can join the Pittsburgh STC mailing list and also watch the Web site for meeting announcements.

For more information on the group and meetings, contact Barbara Stanton at:

Bstanton@seec.com

or (412) 893-0383

Employment Issues

Objective Statement vs. Profile Statement

By Pam Schmidbauer
Area Manager, Aquent

Did you know that your resume has about 30 seconds to make a positive impression on a potential employer? So those first few lines of your resume could be the most important words you ever write. So what do you include at the top of your resume, an objective or a profile statement?

For years it's been thought that an objective statement is a necessary component of a resume. The objective statement is a brief statement that tells the type of employment you are seeking. Sometimes it includes a specific title, or perhaps the name of the company you are sending your resume to, at the very least, the type of industry. A well-written objective statement gives the reader the sense that you have a purpose and direction.

Objective statements should avoid terms such as*: opportunity for advancement; a challenging position dealing with people; a progressive company; position that requires creativity; a company that recognizes...; a chance to...* These terms may sound nice to the job applicant, but they have little meaning to the person making the decision to invite you for an interview. Terms like those mentioned above can indicate that the candidate has no idea how to write an objective.

Here's an example of a well-written objective.

Objective: *Desire a technical writing position with supervisory responsibilities in an engineering firm.*

The focus of a profile statement is a little different. It tells the reader what you have to offer. A profile statement details three to five key strengths, experiences and interests that one has to offer the employer. It tells the employer what you can do for them. When developing a profile statement, take into consideration the specific position of interest and mention the skills, knowledge and abilities that you would bring to the position.

Here's an example of a well-written profile statement.

Profile Statement: *Highly skilled technical writer with three years publishing experience. Knowledgeable in current web design technology. Experienced communicator and team player.*

The above list could be bulleted as well for easier reading.

- Highly skilled technical writer

- Three years of publishing experience

- Knowledgeable in current web design technology

- Experienced communicator and team player

No matter which format you choose to use just remember to be clear and concise so the employer knows exactly what skills you can bring to the position.

Pam Schmidbauer is Area Manager of Aquent's Pittsburgh office and can be reached at pams@aquent.com or 412-322-4940. Aquent (aquent.com) is a global professional service firm delivering Creative and IT solutions. Through a network of nearly seventy offices in twelve countries, Aquent provides staffing, consulting, and outsourcing services in the areas of print and Web design and production; application and database development; and project management. In its fifteen-year history Aquent has made over 200,000 matches of independent professionals with client companies worldwide. Aquent is headquartered in Boston, Massachusetts and is privately held.

Goodbye and Thank You!

By Christina Downs

This fall, I will be ending my time as Blue Pencil Managing Editor and handing over the reins to a new editor, Meg Papa, who will continue delivering and improving the newsletter. Nancy Carpenter will remain as Production Editor and Heather Lum as Assistant Editor. I will remain, at least temporarily, as an Assistant Editor, as I help with the transition. In the future, I plan to contribute to the newsletter by writing articles. However, I am unable at this time to devote as much time as I have in the past as editor, and I am glad that Meg has stepped up to take over at just the time when I needed to step down and take a break. Thank you, Meg, for volunteering your time and expertise to this worthy endeavor so many STC Pittsburgh members look forward to.

Thank you, everyone, for your support and patience, as I took the Blue Pencil online last season. I know it wasn't always easy, but we got through it together, as a team. Please give Meg your support and assistance, as well. In particular, I encourage more STC members to contribute, by writing articles or columns, by volunteering time to help Meg and the rest of the newsletter staff, or by forwarding relevant and timely information to Meg to include in the newsletter. As you surf the web, please be on the lookout for articles that could be reprinted in Blue Pencil, and give Meg the contact information, so that she may request permission from the author. It's difficult for a single person to find these types of articles AND keep up with other editor duties, so the Blue Pencil staff needs you to be their eyes and ears. We appreciate the help we have received so far from members, particularly from the ongoing columnists and others who have contributed articles or other information.

Keep up the good work!

If anyone needs to contact me, I can still be reached at:

stcdowns@aol.com,

chrdowns@aol.com

or 724-532-3669. If my contact information changes, I will update the member list on the STC Pittsburgh site.

Again, thank you. I regret leaving as editor, but I know the Blue Pencil is in capable hands, and, moving forward, I believe I can contribute more effectively in the role of contributor.

Welcome, Meg!

Sincerely,

Christina Downs

Hello from Meg Papa

New Blue Pencil Managing Editor

I must say that I am a little intimidated taking on the managing editor position of the Blue Pencil. But I am looking forward to the experience, because I enjoy writing, editing, and using my skills to make other people's lives a little better or easier. I hope, with your input, to be able to do that through this newsletter.

My main writing interests are in web page design and content development, editing, and science writing - with a definite leaning toward working in the non-profit sector. I received my Bachelors degree in 1992 from Carnegie Mellon University, and currently work at CMU writing, editing, and compiling web and print publications for a research center in the college of engineering. I am also in the process of earning my Masters degree in professional writing at the same institution.

While my frame of reference is somewhat different that that of many STC members, I believe that multiple points-of-view bring greater understanding of the issues that all writers and communicators face: how do we better communicate information to the people who need it in a way they can use it? Therefore, I make a plea to you to please share your experiences, your insights, your suggestions (and your writing) with me. This is your newsletter. You can help make it a useful tool. Elsewhere in this newsletter is an article that outlines the schedule for the newsletter and lists possible topics for future articles. I urge you to take a look at it and pick a topic (or two) for which you would like to contribute an article.

As is true for each one of you, I am more than my job, so here are a few personal notes. I live in Wilkinsburg with Brian, my husband of almost nine years, and our two cats. I play piano and flute and sing in my church, and spend my free time (when I am not working or doing classwork) practicing, reading, and walking. The best book that I have read in the last year is Volcano Cowboys by Dick Thompson. Though I have been in Pittsburgh for 15 years, I am originally from Connecticut, and have family in New England. Finally, the most unusual place I have ever been is Albania.

I look forward to meeting more of you as the year progresses.

Meg A. Papa

Blue Pencil Managing Editor

Editorial Calendar

The "C" in STC stands for "Communication," so we want to start off a new year communicating as much as we know to chapter members about upcoming events.

Meetings for the Pittsburgh Chapter of the STC will be held the second week of the month for the 2002-2003 year. It is our hope to have a profile of the speaker and subject of each upcoming meeting in the Blue Pencil. In addition to a speaker profile, the newsletter will include periodic columns on employment issues, writing tools and tips, and other topics of interest to technical communicators. Finally, we want to include articles written by you, the members of the chapter.

To get your creative juices flowing, here is a list of possible topics for articles. If any of these topics pique your interest, please contact Meg to discuss details.

Documentation Process, Quality Control, and Management:
- Managing a documentation team
- Team dynamics
- Conducting peer reviews
- Style guides
- Documentation processes
- Quality Management
- Single-sourcing

Tools and technology:
- Tools for an online medium
- Tools for a print medium
- HTML/XML/SGML/style sheets
- Reusable Information Objects (RIO)
- Desktop Publishing (DTP) tools

Technical Writing Specializations:
- API documentation
- Technical marketing writing
- Creativity in technical communication

- Documenting engineering software and other applications
- Embedded help
- GUI design
- Research topics
- Science/medical writing
- Usability testing
- Instructional design
- Information design/architecture
- Technical training/trainers
- Technical editing
- Prototyping

Industries:
- E-Commerce
- Telecommunications industry
- Wireless technology
- Software industries
- Biotechnology

Graphics Topics:
- Graphics and illustrations
- Technical illustrator
- Graphic designer

Other Topics:
- Overview of STC SIGS
- Employment trends
- Telecommuting (Flexible Work Schedules)
- Technical Communication in academics/education
- Copyright issues/legal issues
- Professional development
- Plain English
- Grammar issues

For newsletter information to be timely for members, we plan to publish the newsletter two weeks before the meeting. In order to publish on time, we would like to have all articles three weeks before the publication date (or five weeks before the meeting). A tentative schedule for the fall is below:

Meeting Date	*Blue Pencil* Publication Date (Monday)	Article Submission Deadline (Monday)
September 10	August 26	August 5
Week of October 7	September 23	September 2
Week of November 11	October 28	October 7
Week of December 9	November 25	November 4

Meg Papa contact information:

mv0t@andrew.cmu.edu

Home phone: 412-243-3026

Work phone: 412-268-8520

Upcoming Meeting

Human Factors: Methods for evaluating products

Heather L. McQuaid

Senior Interaction Designer, MAYA Design

The first meeting of the new year will be Tuesday, September 10 and will feature Heather McQuaid, Senior Interaction Designer at MAYA Design. Heather will discuss several techniques for gathering information on users, tasks, and products (interviews and contextual inquiry), organizing that information (tasks lists and flows, and personas), and evaluating products heuristic evaluation and user testing).

For the past five years, Heather has worked as an Interaction Designer at MAYA Design, Inc., helping make technology easier to use. She relies on her knowledge of human learning, memory, and problem solving to design products that allow people to focus on their goals rather than on the tools used to achieve them. To determine what people's goals are, she uses several methods of gathering information, including contextual inquiry, task analysis, interviews, questionnaires, and surveys.

Heather also has experience evaluating products for usability. She presently coordinates MAYA's in-house usability lab and conducts laboratory and field experiments. She has experience in conducting heuristic evaluation, cognitive walkthrough, and think-aloud protocols. In addition, Heather manages projects and has authored or co-authored several papers on MAYA's expert analysis method that have been published in the conference proceedings of the Association for Computing Machinery's Special Interest Group on Computer-Human Interaction (ACM-SIGCHI) and the Usability Professionals' Association (UPA).

Heather has several master's and bachelor's degrees: an M.S. in cognitive psychology from the University of Pittsburgh, an M.A. in professional writing from Carnegie Mellon University, and both a B.A. in psychology and a B.A. in German from Allegheny College.

Heather can be reached at:

Voice: 412-488-2900

Fax: 412-488-294

mcquaid@maya.com

WHEN: Tuesday, September 10, 2002, 6:30-8:30 pm.

WHERE: The training room of the Pittsburgh Technology Council. See below for directions

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

RSVP: Please reply to

Darlene Mullenix at:

dmullenix@federatedinv.com

Reminder: Authors' Deadline

With this season's meetings moving to the second week of each month, it's important that the newsletter have an earlier publication date than in the past. Please support the newsletter staff by providing material with enough lead time to prepare and publish each issue in a timely manner.

(See page 7 of this issue for the schedule.)

Thank you.

Alan Houser

Directions to September Meeting

This meeting is in the training room of the Pittsburgh Technology Council. The Technology Council is located in the

Voicestream Building, 2000 Technology Drive, in the Pittsburgh Technology Center (on Second Avenue in the

Hazelwood section of Pittsburgh, just off the Bates Street Exit of the Parkway East). Parking is free, plentiful, and secure.

STC's 50th Anniversary

In May of 2003, STC will celebrating our 50th anniversary as a national professional organization. Please see the web site to find out where you can send your memories and to find out how the Pittsburgh Chapter plans to mark this occasion.