blue pencil

STC 2005 Membership Renewal Begins in November

When you receive your STC 2005 dues renewal form in November, you'll notice there are new membership options available from STC. One of the biggest differences with these new membership categories is that you will now have the choice to join your local chapter (or any chapter). If you don't want to join a chapter, you have the option to scale back your membership and the dues you pay.

Before you renew your dues and/or update your membership status, it is very important to understand the types of membership categories. The following is a summary of the memberships types (excerpted from www.stc.org), most relevant to the majority of our chapter members.

"Classic" Membership
This category entitles members to the paper versions of *Intercom* and *Technical Communication* and access to the online versions; full access to the members-only area of the STC Web site; and a choice between the following options for membership in STC communities (Communities refers to chapters and SIGs):

- one chapter and one SIG, or
- three SIGs

The cost of classic membership is $145.

If you choose classic membership, you may join additional SIGs at a cost of $5 per SIG and additional chapters at a cost of $10 per chapter.

E-Membership
This category entitles members to the same benefits as classic membership, except that e-members will not receive paper copies of *Intercom* and *Technical Communication*. E-members may join additional SIGs at a cost of $5 per SIG and additional chapters at a cost of $10 per chapter. E-membership costs $135.

"Limited" Membership
This category includes subscriptions to the paper versions of *Intercom* and *Technical Communication* and full access to the members-only area of the STC Web site. Limited memberships do not include membership in communities (chapters or SIGs). The cost of limited membership is $125.

The Board would like to encourage you to select either the Classic or E-Membership category and choose to join the Pittsburgh chapter. The President's column provides four compelling reasons why joining your local chapter is a benefit to you. Plus, joining your local chapter also benefits the chapter for purposes of financing and programming. Please think of the value that you've received by being a member of the Pittsburgh Chapter and choose the Pittsburgh Chapter when completing your membership renewal form.

Legal Issues in CyberSpace

By Nancy Ott

At the September chapter meeting, Christopher Juillet gave a presentation entitled "CyberLaw and You: What New Media Professionals Must Know." He gave an overview of the current state of online legal issues that are important to both content producers and content consumers. Here are some highlights:

- **Copyright** is an exclusive right to copy a work for a fixed period of time. It ap-

plies to things like writing, images, sounds, source code, and object code. It doesn't so much protect a work as give the copyright holder a tool to punish infringement. Copyright attaches when a work is set down in tangible form (that is, when it's written, recorded, filmed, etc.) A formal copyright notice isn't required.

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Message from the President

This month you will begin to receive your membership renewal information from national and notice several changes in the types of memberships available beginning this year. As you begin to contemplate the membership you want to select, I would like to offer the top four reasons why renewing your chapter membership is so important.

4. Need. The Pittsburgh chapter provides several resources that you need in your technical communication career. Monthly chapter meetings offer a way to further educate you on trends in the industry such as networking, new technology and handling issues such as cyber law and freedom of speech. The chapter meetings also give you the opportunity to network and meet new people in the business that you may someday need for information and advice.

3. Price. The price you pay for the knowledge of approximately 160 other professionals is the best value yet. If you meet three new people each month by attending monthly chapter meetings that's 30 new people in the industry who you will have made some contact with. There may not even be 30 people in your department, given the job situation. There are several scenarios that put into perspective how inexpensive your membership cost is, but the Lunch Out example is pretty simple. Under the new membership categories, if a Classic membership is $145 for a year and you spend $30 dollars a week on lunch, the cost of your membership is equal to lunch out for a little over one month.

2. Interest. This is a fairly broad reason because you have an interest in joining the chapter and the chapter has an interest in you joining. The meeting topics and the possibilities that can arise from you meeting new people in the industry alone should spark some interest in you pursuing a membership in the chapter. The board has an interest in making sure your needs are met and providing you with valuable programming so you will want to keep coming back month after month.

1. Value. I think if you add up reasons 4, 3 and 2, you will see that value is the biggest reason to join your chapter when you renew your membership. You get quality programming coordinated by a group of industry professionals with your same interests in mind. You have the opportunity to meet several new people in the industry and learn about a variety of subjects in the field. You have a wealth of resources and knowledge at your disposal when you include the web site, newsletter and knowledge base of other members. You have the opportunity to volunteer in several capacities and add something to new to your resume or list of professional accomplishments.

You get all of this for the price of lunch out for only a month! I think that may qualify as a "super value."

Barbara Stanton

Free Graphics Tools for Windows, pt. 2

Bill Lawrence

Editor's Note: This is part two of a two-part article on free graphics tools for Windows. Part one, published in the October Blue Pencil, included an introduction and a review of vector editors.

Bitmapped Editors

GNU Gimp is the reigning powerhouse bitmap editor in the Linux world, and a Windows port is available at www2.arnes.si/~sopjsimo/gimp/. The GIMP has about 80% of the functionality of Photoshop and also supports numerous plug-ins. I've used it primarily as a photo-editor, and find that it's quite capable. For example, if you're familiar with the "keystoning" effect in photographs (where vertical lines appear to converge to a point somewhere in space), you can easily adjust perspective to correct this by simply pulling the top corners of the image outward, and then cropping the resultant image to a rectangular shape.

The only real drawback to the GIMP is its user interface, which could charitably be described as odd and clunky. It's a confusing mass of windows, fly-out menus, and a compact array of buttons with obscure icons. However, there are a couple of eBooks available that explain its use. For examples, "Grokking the Gimp" can be found at: gug.sunsite.dk/docs/Grokking-the-GIMP-v1.0.
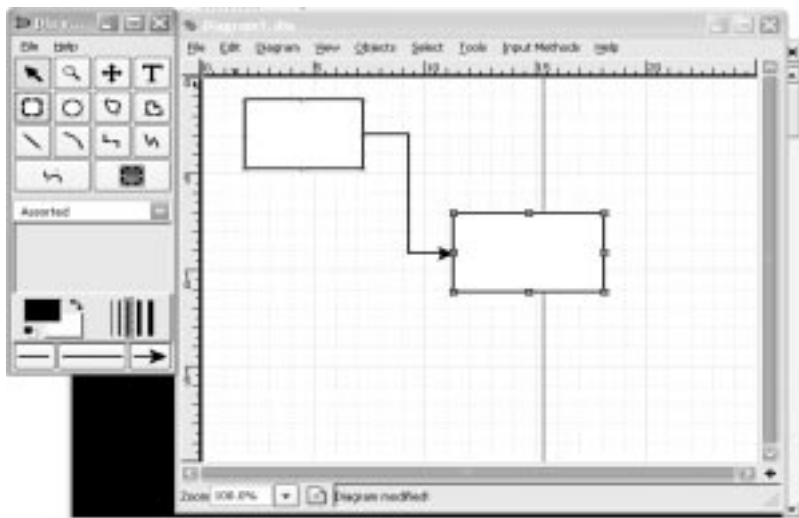
XnView is French freeware (an English version is available), and includes both a GUI application and a command line interface for batch use. While not an editor per se, XnView is a superb program for converting graphics from one format to another. It also includes capabilities for changing resolution, shifting color balance, brightness, etc. You can find XnView at www.xnview.com.

XnView is available for the Pocket PC as well, so now you can have a powerful, free graphics tool available on your PDA. (OK, I can't really think of a practical reason for this, but given that it's free why not?)

Diagramming Tools

DIA is another open-source Linux program that's been ported to the Windows world. Like Visio, it has a drag-and-drop interface and lots of features for building flow charts. It even has libraries of shapes for various types of specialized flow charts, such as data flow diagrams and UML. DIA can be downloaded from the site dia-installer.sourceforge.net. You'll also want to pick up the documentation while you're at the site.

Dia, in action

Notes from the National Office

Upcoming Society Events

Wednesday, November 10, 2004

Telephone/Web Seminar

Introducing Windows "Longhorn" Help – Char James-Tanny

1:00-2:30 PM ET

The next generation of the Microsoft Windows operating system, code-named "Longhorn," is due for release in 2006. Longhorn's dramatically new Help environment uses a structured authoring model built around an XML format called MAML (Microsoft Assistance Markup Language) and is designed to provide solutions to user issues. It will respond to - and solve - real problems that customers experience. Windows "Longhorn" Help has a well-designed application user interface, and assistance is available directly from the application.

Cost: $99 (STC Members), $149 (non-members). See www.stc.org/seminars.asp for more information.

January 15-16, 2005

The James River Chapter STC will hold its 2005 Regional Conference at the Four Points by Sheraton hotel in Williamsburg, Virginia. The conference theme is "Information Design and Management."

For more information, please contact: Don White IDM2005@stc-jamesriver.org www.stc-jamesriver.org

May 8-11, 2005

Mark your calendars. STC's 52nd Annual Conference will be held in Seattle, Washington.

STC Offers Scholarships in Technical Communication
Pass the word to students you know - the STC is offering two graduate and two undergraduate $1000 scholarships to students pursuing degrees in some aspect of technical communication.

- Applicants must have completed at least one year of post-secondary education.
- Applicants must be full-time students. They may be either graduate students working toward a Master's or Doctor's degree, or undergraduate students working toward a Bachelor's degree.
- Students should have at least one full year of academic work remaining to complete their degree programs, although under exceptional circumstances an award may be granted to a student for the final half-year.
- They should be studying communication of information about technical subjects. Other majors, such as general journalism, electronic communication engineering, computer programming, creative writing, or entertainment, are not eligible.

The deadline for receipt of applications is February 15, 2005.

For more information, or to download an application, visit http://www.stc.org/scholarshipInfo_national.asp.

Deduct your STC Dues
If you pay taxes in the United States, keep in mind that STC dues are tax deductible. Please note, however, that dues must be deducted from the tax return filed for the year in which they were paid. In other words, dues paid in 2004 may be deducted only from 2004 tax returns. Therefore, if you pay your 2005 dues on or before December 31, 2004, these dues can be deducted only from your 2004 return. You can claim dues as a deduction in several ways: as a charitable expense, a business expense, or a miscellaneous deduction.

For more information, see the October issue of Tieline at www.stc.org/tieline.asp.

New Definition of Student Membership
The STC board of directors has adopted a more stringent definition of student membership. To be eligible for student membership, a member must now be a full-time student. Previously, professional technical communicators enrolled in part-time continuing education classes could qualify for student membership. The new definition ensures that the benefits of student membership are available, as intended, only to students.

Membership at a Glance

(as of September 30)

National

Total Members: 17,980

Total chapters: 147

Pittsburgh Chapter

Total Members: 146

No New Members

Society for Technical Communication
Pittsburgh Chapter
P.O. Box 133
Pittsburgh, PA 15230
Contact: Barb Stanton
Phone: 412-893-0383
bstanton@seec.com

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

Shaping Experience through Information Design

Our October chapter meeting featured Karen Schriver and a topic that is dear to her heart – information design. Karen described her top ten information design challenges for organizations:

1. **Organizing content around stakeholders' goals**. You can have multiple and conflicting audiences.

2. **Evoking a positive persona**, or personality, via word and image. The document reflects a company's image.

3. **Providing summaries, previews, bread crumbs**. This type of information gives context and cues for navigation.

4. **Composing and formatting headings**, which help the reader to navigate and to decide what to read. Headings should stand out from the text.

5. **Displaying the hierarchy visually**. Graphics should stop people at the right places. Design should take advantage of the whole visual space –

such as facing pages in a double-sided book.

6. **Shaping content** to meet hybrid rhetorical goals. A document may have to serve as both advertising and instruction, for example.

7. **Cueing similar content consistently**. Typography, layout, cues should be consistent. This concept applies both within a single document, and across multiple documents for the same organization.

8. **Employing contrast** to escape "grey pages." Check the look of the document both in print and on-line.

9. **Breaking content into meaningful chunks**. Ideas should be completed in one chunk; the ideal chunk size is smaller on-line than in a printed document.

10. **Creating graphics** as replacements for prose. Graphics should be useful and convey information.

Karen then showed examples of many of the pitfalls. For instance, a web page that lists problems and solutions becomes confusing if we have to scroll, and lose sight of the headings. Another example showed how some color combinations work well in print but not on the web. Other examples showed some common elements that can reduce readability or legibility: lists of right-justified text are hard to scan; tight spacing makes it difficult to separate sections in multicolumn design; and text in all capitals is difficult to read. She also showed some examples of successes and redesigns that improved documents and web pages tremendously.

Karen is President of KSA Document Design & Research, Inc. She holds a PhD and is a Fellow of STC. You can reach her at kschriver@earthlink.net.

Grammar Game – Reader Ideas?

by Meg Papa, Blue Pencil Managing Editor

There is no new Grammar Game column this month, in part because the explanation of last month's column is lengthy. Instead, I want to take the opportunity to solicit your ideas for future columns. Are there any grammar or style issues that puzzle you? Bug you? Are there routine abuses of the English language that make you want to scream? (If I get enough original examples, I'll probably make a column out of them.)

Send me your ideas at: meg@alumni.cmu.edu.

(P.S. I know this doesn't have much to do with grammar, but who else is heartbroken to read that Dave Barry will be taking a sabbatical? Ahh, to have a mind like his…)

Solution to Last Month – No no no no no no no no no no…

"It's hard not to believe it's not a terrorist act. Why would the authorities not say that?"

Okay, so what was the mystery gentleman trying to say? If we just look at the first sentence, he seems to imply the two plane crashes were not terrorist acts. If we substitute "easy to" for "hard not to," the sentence becomes *"It's easy to believe it's not a terrorist act."* If that is what he meant, then the second sentence seems to imply that he is confused that the government is saying the crashes *are* terrorist acts.

If you read the entire article, however, you would find that the opposite is true. Here is an excerpt from the Washington Post article written by Susan Glaser and Peter Finn and run in the Thursday, August 26 edition of the Philadelphia Enquirer:

> "The first thought is that this is the 9/11 in Russia," said Alexei Venediktov, chief editor of the independent news radio station Echo Moskvy, "and that the government cannot acknowledge anything like a terrorist act comparable to 9/11."
>
> Venediktov and others pointed to Sunday's presidential election in Chechnya as the likely trigger for the crashes. "To admit this is more than a weird coincidence would be to admit their defeat in their war on terrorism," he said.
>
> Vladimir Ryzhkov, an independent member of parliament, said he, too, found the official statements difficult to swallow.
>
> "It's very hard to believe two planes can crash at the same time," he said. "It's hard not to believe it's not a terrorist act. Why would the authorities not say that? Because every year under Putin there have been more terrorist acts and more victims. That means that under his leadership Russia is a less safe country, and the president and the authorities don't want to admit it."

DISCLAIMER: The use of this article is in no way intended to convey my opinion about the Russian plane crashes or President Putin. It was just too good an example of loopy language use to pass up!

Legal Issues in CyberSpace

- **Infringement** is the willful or unintentional copying of a copyrighted work. Fair use in the form of excerpts and parody is permitted, although a number of recent lawsuits have tried to limit this right. The problem with digital works is that a browser automatically makes a copy of downloaded material (like web pages), which, strictly speaking, is a form of infringement. Currently, downloading copyrighted material is defended as an implied license. However, "deep links" (links to material that is not specifically published on the public pages of a web site, such as links into a database) and displaying content in frames can constitute copyright infringement, so beware!

- **Registering a copyright** gives the holder a number of advantages in court if infringement occurs, including the right to get up to triple the damages for infringement, claim statutory damages, and be awarded attorney's fees.

- **Works for hire** are creative works commissioned and performed for another as an employee or independent contractor. For employees, the work must be part of their assigned duties for the copyright to be held by the employer. For independent contractors, the work must be contracted and copyright assigned to the client in writing; otherwise the work belongs to the independent contractor. Juillet's advice was to make sure your contracts state that the copyright reverts to the client when the bill is paid. Contractors can collect fees from reluctant clients by reminding the client of who holds the copyright!

- **Electronic publication rights** were not automatically assigned to the creator of a work until a court case decided otherwise. Standard contracts now include language that specifically as-

Legal Issues in CyberSpace

signs these rights.

- **The Digital Theft Deterrence Act** jacked up the statutory damages for infringement and made copying as little as $2000 worth of digital material a felony. Juillet's advice: remove illegal copies of software because it just isn't worth getting caught.

- **Trademarks** (indicated by ™) protect word marks, logos, designs, slogans, jingles, and so forth. The holder must be the first to use the mark. It must be used consistently and continuously as an adjective or label for a product or service, not as a noun to identify the product or service itself. "Aspirin" and "elevator" are two trademarks that are no longer protected because they have become the commonly-used words for these items.

- **Registered trademarks** (indicated by ®) are trademarks that are officially registered with the Federal Patent and Trademark Office. Registration can cost up to $3000, but provides the holder with a higher level of protection against infringement and dilution.

- **Trademark infringement** occurs when someone uses a mark that is identical or confusingly similar to a trademark. Example: the adultsrus.com domain name infringed on the Toy 'r' Us trademark because it was judged to be confusingly similar.

- **Domain names** fall into the gray area between trademarks and addresses. A wave of cyberspace land speculators snapped up domain names for products and trademarks that corporations had overlooked. Congress passed an anti-cybersquatting act that made this illegal. However, if the domain name's registration is allowed to lapse, it can be snapped up again!

- **Cyberstalking** another person is prohibited in most states, either explicitly or through interpretation of existing anti-stalking laws.

- **Spam** was first used as an official legal term for unsolicited bulk email in the opinion for Compuserve vs. Cyber Promotions, where the judge compared it to the famous Monty Python Spam skit. Federal laws like the CAN SPAM act don't do much to prevent spam, however, and in some cases have actually weakened existing state laws against it! Spam will remain a problem for the foreseeable future because spammers have been able to stay one jump ahead of the techies who fight them.

- **Spyjacking** is when a web site illicitly installs programs on your computer to harvest information about your web surfing behavior. Juillet's advice: do a Google search for "Hijack this" to find a free package to protect your computer.

- **Jurisdiction** is the power of a court to assert authority over an individual or company. This becomes murky for online issues because it isn't always clear who has jurisdiction in a case. The defendant may not reside in the state where the lawsuit is being brought, but the state court may have jurisdiction if the defendant has sufficient business contact within the state to be subject to its courts.

- **The Uniform Computer Information Transactions Act (UCITA)** has been adopted by several states. It treats service providers like contractors as "merchants," which holds them to a higher level of knowledge and therefore legal liability. UCITA creates a set of implied warranties for merchantability, fitness for a purpose, and information content, which must be explicitly disclaimed in writing. It also automatically causes electronic rights to revert to the client, not the creator (the reverse of the previous court decision), unless the contract specifies otherwise. This has several consequences for independent technical writing contractors. UCITA can apply to technical communication products like computer documentation. A technical writing contractor could be held responsible for bad content that was supplied by the subject matter experts for whom the contractor was working. This could create serious liability issues for a sole proprietor. Juillet's advice: consider incorporation or LLC.

- **A web site legal audit** is essential to protect your company! Web site work is often divided up between several groups within a company, leaving no one person in charge of content or aware of legal issues surrounding the site. A thorough legal audit will identify potential problems and suggest ways to resolve them.

Christopher Juillet is a member of the Michigan Bar and currently practices law. He has over 20 years experience in technical writing, including 15 years as an independent consultant. He is also one of the founding members of STC's Consulting and Independent Contractors (CIC) SIG and an STC Fellow.

November Chapter Meeting Addresses Electronic Documentation Review

Date: Monday, November 8, 2004

Time: Meetings start at 6:30 p.m. with 1/2 hour for networking/light dinner. The presentation runs from 7:00 – 8:00 p.m.

Topic: Electronic Documentation Review with Adobe Acrobat and Quadralay FinalDraft

Speaker: Alan Houser

This talk will address the process of electronic documentation review and how two software packages, Adobe Acrobat and Quadralay FinalDraft, can make that process efficient and straight-forward.

A longer abstract and a speaker bio can be found at the STC Pittsburgh website: http://www.stcpgh.org.

Cost: $5 for members; $7 non-members; $3 for students & unemployed

RSVP: by November 5th to Darlene Mullenix - 412-288-8676 or dmullenix@federatedinv.com

Location: Pittsburgh Technology Council building, 2000 Technology Drive, Pittsburgh, PA. Directions @ http://www.tc-p.com/aboutus/directions.asp

Editorial Calendar

Below is the editorial calendar for anyone who will be writing an article for the Blue Pencil. Don't forget to submit your Quick Tips, too! Articles are due to me, Meg Papa, three weeks before the monthly meeting. Publication of the Blue Pencil will occur ten days later, or roughly ten days before the monthly meeting.

Article Submission Deadline (Monday)	Blue Pencil Publication Date (Thursday)	Meeting Date (Monday)
November 22	December 2	December 13
December 13	December 23	January 10
January 17	January 27	February 7
February 21	March 3	March 14
March 21	March 31	April 11
May 2	May 12	May 24 (Tuesday)

Meg Papa contact information:

Email: meg@alumni.cmu.edu
Home phone: 412-243-3026

Editor's Note:
Due to some complications, the redesign of the Blue Pencil has been delayed a month. It's coming, though. I promise!