What's the Rub Against Word's New Ribbon? - *by Robert P. Mohr*

Ever since the release of Word 2007, I've heard and read lots of negative responses from experienced Word users about its new interface. Most of it is grumbling over the fact that it's so different from Word's traditional toolbars and menus. Why did Microsoft make such a drastic change?

Microsoft determined that personal productivity would be improved if the most-often used features were made more accessible—right out in the open, without burying them under layers of drop-down menus. The result is called the Microsoft Office Fluent user interface. That new interface contains a ribbon, contextual tabs, galleries, and live previews.

Each tab on the ribbon contains groups of commands. Some tabs contain galleries of predefined page layouts, styles, table formats, and previews of each. This visual approach combined with point-and-click accessibility is very quick and easy. Naturally, there are options for adding your own content and modifying existing content.

The biggest hurdle for experienced Word users is finding the commands they need within the new interface.

Microsoft offers two options for easing the transition from the old menus to the new ribbon.

The first is a simple cross-reference that lets you find Word 2003 commands in Word 2007. The *Reference: Locations of Word 2003 Commands in Word 2007* is in the What's New section of Word 2007's online help. A more dynamic way of finding the same information is to use Microsoft's *Interactive Word 2003 to Word 2007 Command Reference Guide*. This is a downloadable and interactive Flash file. You traverse one or more menus in a Word 2003 interface to a specific

Ribbon, cont. on page 5

An Example of the New Word Ribbon

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Competitions Entry Deadline is November 3

Fall is upon us, and that means changing leaves, cooler days, and the beginning of the Competitions season! The deadline for entries is Monday, November 3. Detailed instructions for submitting entries to the Online Communications Competition, the Technical Art Competition, and the Technical Publications Competition are on the Chapter's web site, www.stcpgh.org. The Competitions Committee is also seeking volunteer judges to review and evaluate the entries and assign awards. You can contact Marlene Miller, the Competitions Manager, at mgmiller33@hotmail.com or 412-421-6342.

STC
SOCIETY FOR TECHNICAL COMMUNICATION

President's Column - *by Bryce Walat*

Recently, I've heard other STC members talking about the economy, especially the rising cost of fuel, food, health care, and other necessities, and the falling value of their homes and investments. For some STC members, their membership in STC is a prime candidate for an "extra" item to cut from their personal or professional budgets. You may be thinking about not renewing your membership in STC when it expires, or if you aren't a current member, you may be having second thoughts about joining STC. If you still plan to renew or join STC, you may also be thinking about cutting back on meetings or events.

Before you decide not to renew or join STC, or skip a meeting you'd like to attend, I'd like to ask you this question: Over your lifetime, what is your most valuable and biggest asset?

- Your home

- Your education

- Your career

- Your retirement plan

Answer: Your career is your biggest and most important asset. Your career gives you the income to get the necessities of life, such as food, clothing, and shelter, and also to get an education, real estate, a retirement plan, and other investments and assets. When you think about how much of your time every day you spend working and how much of your lifetime is spent working, you can see why your career is so important. That's why it's important to manage your career well.

STC helps you manage your career by helping you to:

- Launch your technical communication career or transition into a technical communication career

- Learn new skills and enhance existing ones

- Find opportunities to network with fellow technical communication professionals

- Find a new job or a better job

- Launch an independent technical communication career

- Find help when you need it

- Improve your "soft" skills, such as public speaking or team-building

The cost of STC membership is "chump change" compared to the value it adds to your career. For example, STC's free or low-cost articles, seminars, and conferences give you knowledge and skills to not only keep up with changes in the fast-paced technical communication field, but also get ready for the technical communication jobs of the future.

On a personal note, I've now been through four "career transitions" in my eight years as a technical communicator. In some cases, they occurred because of circumstances beyond my control, such as economic conditions; in others, there were things that I could have done or not done that might have led to a different outcome. In every case, I found STC to be a helpful resource to manage these transitions. STC proved valuable as a go-to for technical communication job leads, a source for ways to improve my technical and interpersonal skills, and a place to know that I wasn't alone in my career transition. STC Pittsburgh's WorkQuest

was, as the MasterCard slogan goes, priceless. Also, in every case, employers and potential employers noticed my membership in STC on my résumé, and some even knew of me from STC.

As President of STC Pittsburgh, part of my job is promoting the chapter and the Society, and I wrote this column as a way to promote STC and to make a case that STC is more important to your career in times like these. But I also wrote it to explain how STC helped me and why I joined STC.

With that in mind, if you join or renew your membership in November, you'll receive two months free, because your membership won't expire until the end of 2009. Visit stc.org to join or renew. Also, ask me about membership, because not only am I STC Pittsburgh's president, I'm also a member!

On a final note, WorkQuest celebrates its sixth anniversary! If you are in a career transition, or think you may be facing one, WorkQuest is the place to go.

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STC Pittsburgh's Mission Statement

STC Pittsburgh's mission is to provide professional support for technical communicators in the region. The chapter strives to:

* Provide opportunities for professional enrichment

* Help members achieve their career goals

* Support the local business community

* Promote technical communication as a career.

STC's Mission Statement

The STC's mission is "creating and supporting a forum for communities of practice in the profession of technical communication."

Keep Your Information Current

Receive your STC emails and publications on time! Update your STC contact information at www.stc.org. STC Members, Member Directory, Address/Restriction Change Form link: (http://www.stc.org/stcmembers/formAddressChange01.asp).

STC National and Regional Notes

Upcoming Web Seminars

Time: 1:00 - 2:30 p.m. ET

Cost: Members - $79; Non-members $149

Thursday, October 23

Task Support Clusters: A Focused Architecture for Practical User Assistance (Presented by Michael Hughes)

Wednesday, October 29

WinHelp, WebHelp, DotNet Help... Help! (Presented by Neil Perlin)

Wednesday, November 19

How to Avoid Common Graphical Mistakes that Technical Communicators Make (Presented by Naomi Robbins)

Call for Proposals for 2009 National Summit

STC has officially issued the Call for Proposals for the 2009 Technical Communication Summit. You may submit more than one proposal, but each must be submitted separately. Proposals may be submitted and updated online until 10:00 a.m. Monday, October 20, 2008.

STC's 2009 Technical Communication Summit will be held May 3-6 at the Hyatt Regency Downtown, Atlanta, Georgia. The preconference sessions will be held on May 2-3, and Leadership Day will be Sunday, May 3. Should you have questions about your proposal content or format, contact a Track Manager—their contact information can be found in the Call for Proposals. For all other inquiries regarding the Proposals or the system

in general, please contact Lloyd Tucker (Lloyd@stc.org), Director of Education & Membership, STC. For the most complete submittal information, please visit the Summit Call for Proposals web site: www.softconference.com/subs/stc/2009/.

Distinguished Awards

To recognize members who demonstrate exemplary dedication and service to their STC communities, the Society runs three special award programs: the Distinguished Chapter Service Award (DCSA), the Distinguished SIG Service Award (DSSA), and the Distinguished Service Award for Students (DSAS). The deadline for submitting recommendations is November 30, 2008. If you have an idea for someone who deserves to be recognized for one of these awards, please contact Bryce Walat (walat_bryce@msn.com) as soon as possible.

First Chapter Peer Review Clinic Is a Learning Experience - *by Marlene Miller*

The September 9 meeting of the Pittsburgh Chapter of STC was dedicated to improving the work of individual technical writers with a Peer Review Clinic. Five writers brought items to review, and everyone present served as reviewers to answer questions and offer suggestions about the items.

Jerry Born had concerns about the screen shots in his online help CAD software training guide. He brought the printed version for review. Jerry wondered how much of the screen should be included when certain areas of it might be mistaken for the actual screen. He didn't want customers to be clicking on screen shots when they needed to be clicking on the actual screen. Reviewers suggested using Photoshop to "fade" the screen shots at the edges to make it apparent that they are not actual screens. Several screen capture applications were mentioned, such as Snag-It, FullShot, and IC Capture, some of which have the functionality to edit screen shots.

Jose Amayo and Jason Butina (not present) authored online help and print versions of a guide for a shape manager used in the rebar industry. The shape manager is used to set up rods for bending them into required shapes to be used in construction. While we could find little in the guide to revise other than too many steps in procedures, and an occasional typo or missing punctuation, we all were fascinated with the subject matter. Most of us

had little idea of what rebar is, much less the varied shapes rebar can take and the software that is used to shape it. It was an instructional review for everyone.

Lydia Daniels, an instructor in college freshman biology, brought an article for review that she hopes to submit to a professional magazine as a query for publication. The subject of the article was basic genetics including the Epigenetic Code. Once again, reviewers were educated in an area in which most had little knowledge. After we pointed out a disconnect in logic in the article, a few typos, and some missing or misspelled words, we prevailed upon Lydia to explain the genetic concepts in more detail. She was willing to answer our many questions and demonstrated her able teaching skills.

Time ran out before we could get to any other reviews. The chance to do some hands-on review of the work of our peers and exchange ides was stimulating. One thing everyone agreed on was the need for a style guide, which streamlines things like punctuation and word usage and lets the technical writer concentrate on the content.

command, and the software dynamically flips to a Word 2007 interface and shows you where to click to find the same command. You can download the Flash file from http:// office.microsoft.com/en-us/word/HA100744321033.aspx.

If you are accustomed to using keyboard shortcuts, you'll be relieved to know that most of the old keyboard shortcuts to commands remain the same. Shortcuts are available for every task and subtask on the ribbon. To view the shortcut keys, press and release the Alt key.

The ribbon is taller than standard toolbars and does take up more screen space due to all of its content; however, it can be toggled off and on by pressing Ctrl+F1. When toggled off, only the tab names and the Quick Access Toolbar remain.

Speaking of the Quick Access Toolbar (QAT), it can be relocated at any time to appear above or below the ribbon. Clicking the drop-down arrow on the QAT displays the location choices as well as options to customize the content of the QAT. You can choose from a long list of standard Word commands or add your own macros using a simple

drag-and-drop window. Since the QAT is always displayed, it can give you one-click access to the commands you use most.

Word 2007 does not allow you to create custom toolbars. However, if you open a Word doc or template that already contains a custom toolbar, an Add-ins tab is displayed on the ribbon and the toolbar's contents are displayed there as a group. All buttons and drop-down menus on a custom toolbar display and operate as they did in previous versions of Word.

In case you're wondering, the ribbon can be customized. You can do it yourself if you have some knowledge of XML, or you can purchase a software tool designed to do the job for you through a simple user interface. Microsoft's site contains the details on how to modify the ribbon manually using XML. An easier (and inexpensive) option is the Ribbon Customizer application. This software is available in a free "starter" version and a $29.99 "Professional" version. Check this web site for details: http://pschmid.net/office2007/ ribboncustomizer/index.php.

In summary, if you're an experienced Word user you may find the new interface to be frustrating at first because it's so different from the old drop-down menus. But, once you get accustomed to it, you'll no doubt find that you're able to do your work faster and easier than before. If you're new to Word you should find the interface easy to use and you'll probably wonder what all the fuss is about.

Robert Mohr is a senior member of STC and can be reached at rpmohr@ writemohr.com.

November Chapter Meeting: The Write Stuff for Search Engine Optimization

Date: Tuesday, November 11

Time: 6:30 p.m.

Bryce Walat, an SEO copywriter, and Missy Karwowski, a Search Education Specialist, both employees at IMPAQT, a Greentree-based search marketing firm, will talk about writing Web content for SEO.

Search engine optimization, or SEO, means making your Web site's content easily accessible to search engines like Google and Yahoo. Writing Web content for SEO means writing for two kinds of readers: human readers and non-human readers, namely search engines. Search engines look for particular keywords that searchers enter and return the most relevant results first.

Writing Web content for SEO helps your Web site be among the first results that searchers see when searching for specific keywords and entices searchers to visit your site from a search, especially visitors who are likely to use your products or services. There's more to SEO than just adding popular keywords—it's important to write the content to appeal to searchers and emotionally engage them to keep them coming back for more and telling others about your site.

Bryce and Missy will explain just what search engines are looking for when you enter search terms into a search engine, and what to consider. If you think your organization's Web site could use some SEO, Bryce and Missy will be glad to answer questions, as well as refer you to SEO experts.

Bryce Walat is a SEO Copywriter on IMPAQT's Client Services Team. At IMPAQT, Bryce is responsible for developing and optimizing Web content for search. Bryce has more than eight years' experience in professional writing, instructional design, and research. Bryce has lent his skills to Carnegie Mellon's Software Engineering Institute, Concurrent Technologies Corporation, UPMC, and Five Star Development.

Missy Karwowski is a Search Education Consultant and Technologist on IMPAQT's Education Services Team. Prior to this role, Missy was an IMPAQT Search Associate where she worked on client campaigns designed to improve the Internet search rankings of Organic (natural) and Paid search engine results. Missy came to IMPAQT with extensive expertise in customer service as well as Web design and programming experience.

Place: Pittsburgh Technology Center, 2000 Technology Drive, Pittsburgh PA 15219

Cost (includes dinner): Members: $12, non-members: $15, students/unemployed: $10

RSVP: by Friday, November 7, to Lisa Over at lisa.writer@yahoo.com or 412-571-2244.

2008-2009
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