Aloha Tech Writers
Tips to Improve Writing, Communication Dominate Regional Conference in Hawaii
by Jessie Miyasaki
SVC vice president

The Hawaiian sun and tropical breezes did their best to lure technical communicators to the beaches. However, conference attendees showed their dedication by filling the session rooms at the Pan-Pacific conference. More than 500 technical communicators attended the conference in mid-

October. Some sessions were repeated to give attendees who attended other tracks a chance to attend.

Apparenty most conference attendees arrived in Hawaii a day or two early. On the morning of the preconference workshops, volunteers at the conference check-in table

CONFERENCE, Page 5

New Logo Mirrors Valley’s Energy
Graphic Artist Gives Contemporary Look to Chapter Logo

The STC’s call for logo-design proposals was a fun project for graphic artist Gayle Madden, partly because the stated criterion were very clear. Working on a volunteer assignment always allows a measure of creative freedom not usually found in a contractual or employment situation.

Madden, who works for Adobe Systems, obtained an official version of the STC by-line from the Virginia office. The STC provided it as a graphic, as it was originally created from a font that has never been computerized. With a bit of vector manipulation using Bauhaus, she created a similar group of characters for the words Silicon Valley.

Then it was a matter of rejecting some of the all-too-easy images that spring to mind with the words Silicon Valley: computer circuits, chips, bridges, bays, and rolling hills and valleys. She avoided references to any one industry, no matter how predominant, and stuck with the basic concept of the mission of the STC.

In the finished design, the predominant gold color represents California, the LOGO, Page 8

Graphic artist Gayle Madden gave the new chapter logo features to represent the STC (the italicized “i” for information) and the state of California (the color gold).

Early Nov. Meeting; No Dec. Meeting
The STC SV Administrative Council canceled December’s chapter meeting because of its proximity to the holidays. See you at our monthly meetings on Nov. 16, which is earlier in the month than usual, and Jan. 25!
Connection

About the STC
The Society for Technical Communication (STC) is a nonprofit international organization of more than 20,000 members and 144 chapters worldwide. As the largest professional society devoted to technical communication, STC works toward educating and advancing the skills and knowledge of its members.

Membership
Membership includes writers, editors, artists, illustrators, printers, publishers, educators, students, engineers, and scientists in all areas of technology. Society membership is $95 per year, plus a one-time $15 enrollment fee. Student memberships are $40 per year.

To join, contact the International Society office at membership@stc-va.org, or phone (703) 522-4114.

Chapter Meetings
Silicon Valley Chapter (SVC) meetings are held on the fourth Thursday of the month (unless otherwise determined) at the Four Points Hotel by Sheraton in Sunnyvale. For a schedule of events, directions, and a description of the meetings, refer to the chapter meeting pages within each issue of Connection, call (650) 961-3127, or see http://www.stc.org/region8/svc/www

Administrative Council Meetings
Council meetings take place on the second Thursday of the month at 6:15 p.m. Contact the president for the meeting location. All members are invited to attend.

About Connection
Connection, the newsletter of the Silicon Valley chapter of STC, is published six times a year as a benefit to all chapter members. One-year subscriptions are from June to May for $25. Contact Thomas Albert, at talbert@WORDesign.com to subscribe.

Connection Reprints
Material appearing in Connection may be reprinted if credit is given and a copy is sent to the newsletter managing editor.

Article Submission Guidelines
We solicit your contributions on topics regarding technical communication—tools of the trade, challenges in the workplace, contracting, deadline management, and so on. We also welcome letters to the editor, reviews of meetings and workshops, and calendar entries. E-mail your contributions by the second Friday of the month to newsletter managing editor Joe Lowell at jdlowell@yahoo.com.

Limit articles to 400 words, and submit them in the body of an e-mail, or as an ASCII text file or Word document attached to e-mail. Include a title for your article, your name, phone number, and a brief biography. Articles undergo editing for space and content. We also publish photos of chapter-related events as space allows in each issue.

Administrative Council

President
Guy Haas
(408)545-2514
gkhaas@usa.net

Vice President
Jessie Miyasaki
(408)227-6178
miyasaki@ix.netcom.com

Directors
Programs and Events Manager:
Emmah Smyth
smythemmah@yahoo.com

Regional Activities and Employment Information Manager: Vacant

Public Relations Manager:
Beau Cain
(650) 354-6012 (pager)
bododo@yahoo.com

Membership and Volunteer Manager:
Grace Pamidi
(408) 531-9223

SIGs Manager:
Melissa Clark
(408)231-5605
lissa_1978@yahoo.com

Newsletter Managing Editor:
Joe Lowell
(408)853-6652
jdlowell@yahoo.com

Treasurer
Fred Sampson
(408)367-4667
fred_sampson@peoplesoft.com

Secretary:
Vicki Blodgett
(831) 429-0159
vickib@cruzio.com

Nominations Manager and Immediate Past President:
Virginia Beecher
(408) 522-7162
virginia@idiom.com

Region 8 Director-Sponsor
Andrea Ames
(650)365-7520
andrea@verbal-imagery.com

Advertising
You can reach more than 1,600 technical communicators by advertising in Connection. Contact Ivan Linderman at (408) 378-5634, or via e-mail at ivan@bkbytes.com for information or a contract. Send ads as line art or half-tone EPS files at 600 dpi, including all fonts, via e-mail attachment.

Advertising Rates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Size</th>
<th>Member</th>
<th>Non-member</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2-1/8 x 3</td>
<td>$ 80.00</td>
<td>$100.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-1/8 x 4 1/2</td>
<td>$125.00</td>
<td>$150.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-1/2 x 3</td>
<td>$165.00</td>
<td>$200.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-1/2 x 4</td>
<td>$225.00</td>
<td>$270.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-1/8 x 9</td>
<td>$225.00</td>
<td>$270.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
“If you don’t punctuate your sentences right, I’ll come back and haunt you.” Lois Rew, an English and technical communications professor at San José State University (SJSU) found herself repeating this basic writing tenet to her students of five and ten years ago.

The STC Silicon Valley September chapter meeting sponsored a talk by Rew and Bonnie Cox, who is also a professor at SJSU about the importance and beauty of grammar in the written word. The room was full; many of the attendees were students of Rew and Cox, and these women had their rapt attention.

According to Rew, the basics of technical communication are twofold: know your tools and how to communicate effectively. To be an effective writer there are five key elements to keep in mind.

- Know your purpose. What is the purpose of the document: Inform? Instruct? Persuade? Describe?
- Know your audience. Find out who the readers are and tailor the document to their needs.
- Master the basics of writing. The basics include functional grammar, syntax, diction, punctuation, and writing concise sentences.
- Consider the intercultural and international influences of your readers and sources.
- Organize your time and material.

Even if you have the latest software tools and solid writing skills, if you can’t get along with people, you won’t be an effective communicator.

Understand and respect the tremendous resources you have at your disposal, including:

- Subject Matter Experts (SMEs)
- Editors
- Cross-functional team members like quality assurance, marketing, and customer support
- Clients

All of these people have demanding schedules and workloads. Make it easy on them and yourself by:

- Doing your homework
- Formulating questions ahead of time
- Taking good notes

Cox confirmed the importance of writing basics but emphasized the single most important tool for a writing professional is the brain. “For what it’s worth, I can’t remember the last time I saw an ad or a job description for a...”
workforce experience, so Rew shifted the project to a real client.

“Her practical, well-written textbook, her no-nonsense teaching style, and her carefully designed curriculum prepared me for the job market,” said Angela Whitney, one of the graduate students that Rew mentored. “The semester project gave our class valuable insights into the Technical Communications Industry and taught us the personal, technical, and communication skills that we needed to become effective, articulate, and productive technical communicators.”

As for advice, Rew suggests that students, “Learn (the) basics of being a good writer. Get internship experience. Take the initiative to learn the technical tools and keep up on the tools. Join the STC. Take the coursework seriously…”

Rew is an expert in the technical communications field who is respected and admired by both her colleagues and students. She has published two books: *Introduction to Technical Writing* and *Editing for Writers*.

Rew believes the most important issues are “staying current with current tools and technologies, adapting to changing document formats, balancing the workload with getting a product out, and maintaining quality while under pressure.”

Rew, a member of the STC for 14 years, regards the STC and other field-related organizations as important to technical communicators. She believes field-related organizations keep you from getting tunnel vision on the job and provide you with feedback. “You need to build a network of people you know in the field,” said Rew. “So if you need to change jobs, you have contacts.”

Rew is not looking forward to retirement—too soon. “(Last semester when I was gone,) I missed the classroom. I missed the student contact and intellectual contact,” said Rew. As for her retirement plans, they don’t include slowing down. Rew plans to write one or two more books (in her realistic-fiction children’s literature series) about her mother’s family and work on refinishing antique furniture.

*Melissa Clark is a technical writer for e-Publishing Corp. in Santa Clara.*

---

**Online & Interactive SIG Tours New Facility**

Kerry Kelly, a technical editor at On Command and a member of the Online & Interactive SIG, looks at printing machinery at ePAC in September.

ePAC, a Print-On-Demand (POD) company, focuses on information technology as well as print technology, not on print technology alone, according to Tim Nisbet (timn@ePAC.com), an ePAC official who hosted the O&I SIG in September.

ePAC’s San Leandro facility helps high-tech companies reduce inventories and obsolescence of printed materials (manuals, datasheets, marcom) and manage customized documentation on an hourly, daily, and weekly basis.
Traditional subjects, as well as the latest trends, were popular:

- **Project Planning and Management**: The popularity of project planning and management sessions was understandable because many attendees were managers or senior-level communicators. They sought answers to the challenges of shorter product release cycles, limited resources, and changing documentation media.

- **Help Techniques**: Help sessions included the latest features of popular help software and help techniques for web-based, interactive, and dynamic interfaces. One session discussed the challenges of writing help files for devices with limited space, such as PDAs.

- **Global Communication**: Global communication was the theme of this conference, so naturally sessions on writing for translation and managing global departments were popular. Speakers from India and Israel delivered their presentations to attendees from as far away as China, Japan, Korea, and the Netherlands.

- **Programming**: Sessions and workshops in API writing, JavaScript, XHTML and XML emphasized the increasing need for technical communicators to understand programming.

- **Web Content**: Conference attendees learned the latest and greatest techniques in writing, researching, and managing content for the Web.

Other popular sessions included: instructional design, usability, single sourcing, and FrameMaker 6 techniques. The topics covered were amazing. One novice writer felt completely overwhelmed by the skills she would have to learn to land the good jobs. A veteran writer offered this advice: Learn the basics, but choose the subject that you really enjoy. You’ll have fun learning it and the jobs will come to you.

The conference proved educational and entertaining for hundreds of writers from Asia, Australia, New Zealand, and North America. The conference was hosted by STC Regions 7 and 8 at Waikiki Beach.

If you weren’t able to attend, visit the conference Web site at www.panpacific.org, and still enjoy the presentations—without the sunburn!

**Jessie Miyasaki is a senior technical writer in the computer and pharmaceutical industry.**
Silicon Valley STC November 2000 Chapter Meeting

**Topic:** Role of the Technical Communicator in User-Centered Design

**Speaker:** Lori Fisher

**Abstract:** What is user-centered design? Can technical communicators implement a user-centered design process even if the rest of their company does not formally recognize this process? What role can technical communicators play in user-centered design if this process is being followed at their company?

Does user-centered design only apply to software? How can the principles of user-centered design be applied to technical communication? If you have any of these questions, Lori Fisher will spend time helping you discover some answers.

Lori manages the Data Management User Technology at IBM, an organization of information developers, human factors engineers, graphic designers, and production staff working on data management software products.

**Menu:** South-of-the-Border Buffet includes Bean and Corn Salad, Taco Salad, Chicken Fajitas with Salsa and Guacamole, Chili Relleno Casserole, Soft Corn and Flour Tortillas, Spanish Rice, Refried Beans, Flan, Churros, Brewed Coffee, Decaf, and Tea.

**Date:** Thursday, Nov. 16, 2000 (Meeting date earlier than usual!)

**Schedule:**
- 6:00 p.m.: Networking/Jobs Corner, beverages
- 7:00 p.m.: Announcements
- 7:15 p.m.: Presentation

**Location:** Four Points Hotel by Sheraton (formerly the Sunnyvale Hilton), 1250 Lakeside Drive, Sunnyvale, CA

To reserve your space for the Nov. 16 meeting, send email to smythemmah@yahoo.com by 5 p.m. on Sunday, Nov. 12. If you do not receive confirmation of your reservation by 8 a.m. on Monday, Nov. 13, you should assume you do not have a reservation. A $5 late fee, which also applies to walk-ins, will be charged for any reservation received after Nov. 12. We regret that scheduled speakers occasionally cancel; if that happens, we make every effort to find a suitable substitute program. If you have a question, please call (408)-965-6274 and leave a message, including your name and telephone number. If you make a reservation and your plans change so you can’t make it, please let us know.

---

**Reservation for the Nov. 16, 2000 Chapter Meeting**

Name and e-mail address:__________________________________________

- [ ] $15.00 member food  [ ] $6.00 member no food
- [ ] $20.00 non-member food  [ ] $12.00 non-member no food

Mail form and check to:
STC Meeting Reservations
PO Box 3709
Saratoga, CA 95070-1709

---

**Directions**

From 101, going south:
1. Exit at Lawrence Expressway.
2. Get into the left lane immediately, as Oakmead is just one block and comes up quite soon.
3. Turn left onto Oakmead.
4. Go one block to Lakeside Drive.
5. Turn left on Lakeside Drive.
6. Ignore the first driveway — it leads to the Faultline Brewing Company.
7. Enter the hotel parking lot by turning right into the second driveway (across from the Toscana Apartments) or the third driveway (past the Toscana).
8. Park, and go to the main lobby. Look for a sign.

From 101, going north:
1. Exit at Bowers/Great America Parkway.
2. Turn left at the end of the offramp.
3. Cross over 101 and make the first right at Augustine Drive.
4. Turn right at the next corner, which is Lakeside Drive.
5. Follow around (paralleling 101) to the Sheraton.
6. Turn left into the parking lot just before the Toscana Apartments.
7. Park, and go to the main lobby. Look for a sign.

Extra parking:
If the hotel parking lot is full, additional parking is available behind the hotel.
1. Take Lakeside Drive to Oakmead and turn left.
2. Go down three or four buildings.
3. You will see a big sign on the left: Oakmead Village Office Park 1255 - 1263.
4. Turn left into the parking lot.

The entrance to the Sheraton is between Buildings 1259 (Widata) and 1261 (Digital Market). The walk to the Ballroom is very short and takes about two minutes. Cross over the bridge onto the Sheraton property. Turn left and walk to the last building by the pool. Turn right to enter the building and walk to the front of the lobby. The Ballroom is on the corridor on your left just before the front entrance of the lobby.
Why is the distinction between independent contractor and employee so important to the IRS and other governmental agencies?

There are about 2 billion reasons. That’s an IRS estimate of how many tax dollars are lost each year. Agencies like the Franchise Tax Board, the Employment Development Department, and the Department of Labor are very interested in collecting on those distinctions, according to Teresa Marchese, VP Business Development, Consultant Billing, Inc. Marchese spoke at the August Silicon Valley chapter meeting.

Through careful auditing, these agencies are finding about half of the independent contractors are reclassified to employee status. California labor law defines an independent contractor as “any person who renders service for a specified recompense for a specified result, under the control of his principal as to the result of his work only and not as to the means by which such result is accomplished.” Government rules determine if a worker is a contractor, not written agreements.

To evaluate the status, the IRS looks at three factors:

- Behavioral control
- Financial control
- Relationship of parties

In behavioral control, the IRS looks to see if the contracting client provides training or instruction or sets work hours. Under financial control, the IRS examines whether contractors are paid by the job, rather than by the hour, cover their own business expenses, have significant investment in their business, and can realize a profit or loss on the project.

The relationship of the parties are scrutinized by the intent of the parties, whether benefits or employee perks are provided to the contractor, or whether the contractor’s services contribute directly to the client’s core business.

If the contractors are misclassified, there can be serious consequences for both parties. For the contractor, these can include:

- Disallowed business deductions on Schedule C
- Disallowed Keogh plan
- Penalties and interest may be due on those adjustments

Two of Marchese’s clients were reclassified by the IRS. After she made a compliance program, one of her services, for her clients, she then evaluated the current contracts. “There were some that fit the compliant relationship format, others did not. There were two contractors who did not want to be employees so their relationship was grandfathered in. The IRS auditor said the two people were employees and disallowed their business deductions. The contractors also had to pay back taxes.”

Independent contractors can structure a compliant relationship by:
LOGO
Continued from Page 1
Golden State. The italic “i” symbolizes the mainstay of STC, information. The dynamic line extending from the “i” is a heartbeat pulse readout and is meant to show the human connection with information. With a little good-natured humor, one can see that it can equally represent earthquake country.

The logo, which will debut in an upcoming redesigned Connection, as well as chapter stationery and Web pages, was completed on a Macintosh using Adobe Illustrator and Photoshop with output suitable for any platform.

For her next project, Madden will help redesign Connection to give it a new look, and design templates and styles.

She’s worked in the graphic/production side of technical publications long enough to remember cutting and pasting with an X-acto knife. The Colorado native’s past employers include StorageTek, NBI, Solbourne Computer, and Impact Technical Publications.

She lived in the Bahamas for three years where she found contract work with U.S. companies. While there, she took a short dip in the teaching profession and attempted to teach high school students the exciting art of bisecting lines and other joys of technical drawing.

Connection Staff
Managing Editor:
Joe Lowell
(408) 853-6652
jdlowell@yahoo.com

Associate Editors:
Sara Tarr, Liz Silva, Marilyn Merkel

Design and Graphics Editor:
Gayle Madden

Advertising Manager:
Ivan Linderman
(408) 378-5634
ivan@bkbytes.com

CONTRACTORS
Continued from Page 7
- Making an agreement with the client for exact deliverables within a specific time frame
- Insisting on contracts that do not include control language (hours, code of conduct, supervisors)
- Delineating the explicit intention of the proposed relationship
- Getting a business license
- Incorporating
- Developing a client list

Sara Tarr is a contract technical writer and a former high school science teacher.

Useful URLs
Silicon Valley Chapter Home Page:
http://stc.org/region8/svc/www

Chapter/Region STC Information:
http://stc.org

STC Office Home Page:
http://www.stc-va.org

Join a SIG Today!
Members of the Silicon Valley Chapter of STC meet in special interest groups to expand professional horizons:
- Consulting and Independent Contracting
- Online and Interactive Information
- Student
- Writing and Editing
- Usability
- Internationalization and Localization
- Tools and Technologies
- Peninsula Consulting

See http://stc.org/region8/svc/www for meeting times and places. Or, contact SIGs Manager Melissa Clark at lissa_1978@yahoo.com for more.