



SOCIETY FOR TECHNICAL COMMUNICATION

Viewpoint

Recap of March Meeting
The Wonders of
RoboHELP Office

Reviewed by Dennis Wilson,
Secretary-Treasurer

Silke Fleischer, Product Solutions Specialist for **eHelp Corporation**, presented an overview of RoboHelp 9.0 at the STC SFV March dinner meeting at the 94th Aero Squadron in Van Nuys. She focused on RoboHelp for HTML tips, and demonstrated some of the new features of the RoboHelp product. It features a dynamic TOC, multi-level index, full-text search, short-cuts, training cards, and related topics functions. Some of Ms Fleischer's recommendations for authoring HTML Help or WebHelp are summarized here:

1. To avoid poor font substitution on the end user's system (when viewing your HTML output in their browser), create a font set -- a list of alternate fonts for styles used in your project.

For example, the font set "Arial, Helvetica, Sans-Serif" will assure that your sans-serif font appears correctly on Windows, Mac, or Unix systems.

2. Use cascading style sheets (CSS) to simplify coding and control the formatting of your HTML documents. The style sheet can be embedded into the HTML page, or it can be a separate external entity that is referenced by the HTML page.



Background images and customized bulleted lists can be defined in the style sheet, for use throughout the project. RoboHelp offers a built-in style sheet editor and support for multiple style sheets within each help project.

3. Use relative text sizing (percentages), rather than absolute sizing points, so that users will view your text appropriately regardless of their personal browser display settings. For example, if your Heading 1 style's text size is set to 115%, it will always appear at 115% of whatever the browser's default text size is set to. With absolute sizing, where a specific point size is indicated (10 pt, for example), your fonts will appear at that specific size regardless of the user's personal browser settings. Ms Fleischer pointed out that the resolution on a Mac screen is considerably higher than a PC screen,

(Continued on page 6)

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Calendar

April 17 - Dinner Meeting at Dakota's Mesquite and Steak House at 6:30 p.m.
 See page 3.

May 13 - 16, STC National Conference, Chicago (There will be no Chapter Dinner Meeting in May.)

May 24 - Administrative Council Meeting at Weiler's West Hills Deli, 22323 Sherman Way, Canoga Park at 6:30 p.m.

June 19 - Dinner Meeting -- TBA

July - A Saturday Council Meeting to coordinate turnover of officers. TBA

Excerpts from the**February 2001 Director-Sponsor's Column:**

Report from the Winter Meeting of the STC Board of Directors

by **Andrea L. Ames**

STC Region 8 Director-Sponsor (1998-2001)

The following decisions were made at the Winter 2001 meeting of the STC Board of Directors held in San Diego, California.

* Approved fiscal year 2001 income and expenses as of 31 October 2000. Income and expenses are well within budget. STC will be returning about two-thirds of a million dollars to chapters to support their fiscal year 2001 programs and activities.

Chapter Formations

* Approved formation of the Australia chapter, with a \$350 USD start-up grant (Region 5).

* Approved formation of the Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute student chapter (Troy, New York, USA), with a \$150 USD start-up grant (Region 1).

* Approved formation of the Hill Country student chapter (San Marcos, Texas, USA), with a \$150 USD start-up grant (Region 5).

The total number of chapters is now 153, with 33 being student chapters.

Appointments

* Appointed Kathryn M. Poe to be Manager, STC Public Relations Competition Committee.

* Appointed Paula Stanzioni to be Manager, Education and Research Special Interest Group.

Grants and Loans

* Approved a merit grant of \$3,000 USD to the Mercer University student chapter to build its scholarship fund.

* Approved a research grant of \$10,000 USD for Eva R. Brumberger to complete a study titled "The Rhetoric of Typography: A Study Investigating Typeface Personality and Its Impact on the Reading Process."

More Tidbits

The Board also heard reports about and discussed several other topics of interest.

* **New STC logo.** A graphic toolkit and templates for STC materials will be made available to chapters (presidents, newsletter editors, and webmasters), Society-level committees, and Special Interest Groups (SIGs) and placed on the STC Web site in March. These tools will help guide groups in implementing the new look. Work is underway to redesign the STC Web site. Watch for the first official use of the new logo in the Preliminary Annual Conference Program--coming soon!

Elections. This year, the balloting process will include an option to vote online. The 2001 election material will contain information necessary to ensure secure online voting. Voting online will be optional--members may still choose to vote by mail.

Membership. STC continues to grow at a steady rate, and membership now stands at 23,553. Total membership is projected to reach 26,000 by the end of March. Current distribution of membership:

- * U.S. 87.2%
- * Canada 8.6%
- * Other countries 4.1%

STC's annualized, 10-year growth rate is 4.6%, with growth rates as follows:

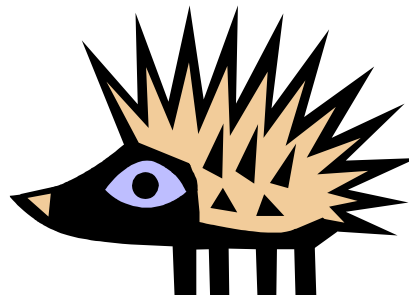
- * U.S. 3.9%
- * Canada 10.8%
- * Other countries 11.7%
(the greatest area of growth)

Membership directory. The STC membership directory has been placed online. It enables members to search on members' first and last names. The results display the member's name, address, phone, fax, e-mail, chapter, grade, and date joined.

About Our Host

This Board meeting was hosted by the San Diego chapter. We had a really fun evening at the San Diego Zoo, where the chapter had arranged for us to meet some of the locals. They included an African Hedgehog, an adorable porcupine, a beautiful kestrel, and several other residents. (My favorite was the porcupine -- she wandered around on her hind legs trying to snatch a cracker from the keeper's hand.)

Note: *Special thanks to Ellen Fenwick, Region 7 Director-Sponsor, for compiling for all the Director-Sponsors the Board actions and some of the additional notes on which this article is based.*



TECHNICAL COMMUNICATORS JOB FAIR

Date: April 23, 2001
Location: La Casita del Arroyo
Address: 177 S. Arroyo Blvd., Pasadena, CA
Time: 6:30 PM - 8:30 PM
Recruiters include:
 Clarity Technology Services, Inc.
 CompuWare
 Countrywide
 Data Processing Resources Corporation
 Earthlink
 EDP Contract Services
 JPL
 Manual Labour, Inc.
 P. Murphy and Associates
 Spherion Technology
 Technical Standards
 Washington Mutual -

Guests:
 STC - San Gabriel Valley
 STC - Los Angeles
 STC - San Fernando Valley
 STC - Orange County

No charge to attendees, except fee payable by recruiters for booth. Contact Maria Christophel at 626.963.7756 or maispeco@aol.com, or Kathy Broman, President SGV Chapter, 818.951.7301.

Refreshments provided by SGV Chapter for all attending members and recruiters.

Directions:

From the 134 or the 210 Freeway:
 Take the Orange Grove exit. Go south on Orange Grove, turn right on Arbor Street, and right again on Arroyo Blvd.

From the 110 Freeway:
 Take the Orange Grove exit. Go north on Orange Grove, turn left on Arbor Street, and right on Arroyo Blvd.

The facility is a one-story house (La Casita) located just on the left side on the edge of the creek. The Colorado street bridge is visible above. There are two entrances for easy access. Parking will accommodate 45 vehicles.

Note: If you pass West Bridge Pl. on your right hand side, you went too far.

APRIL CHAPTER DINNER MEETING

San Fernando Valley Chapter's April meeting will be held **April 17, 2001** at **Dakota's Mesquite and Steak House**, 2525 Stow Street, Simi Valley. **Telephone:** (805) 582-1700. **Time:** 6:30 p.m. until about 9:00 p.m.

Menu: Barbecued chicken and tri-tip beef, salad, garlic mashed potatoes, and barbecued beans. Also includes coffee, tea, soft drinks, and lemonade. Chocolate mousse for dessert. Vegetarians need to indicate they want a pasta dish instead of chicken and tri-tip when they make their reservation.

Cost: \$19 for members and \$22 for non-members.

RSVP by April 12 to Cathy Mills at (818) 701-7356 or via e-mail at cmills@socal.rr.com. **Be sure to indicate if you want a vegetarian dish.** As always, if you make a reservation, you are responsible for the cost, whether or not you attend.

This meeting is structured around a perennial favorite - table topics. We use this format at least once per year, in lieu of a guest speaker. In this format, each attendee engages in a serial of three to five small discussions, each facilitated by a chapter member knowledgeable in the subject. This informal format gives each member a chance to participate in several focused discussions and allows us to interact with one another in a friendly, relaxed environment.

Check the restaurant's website at www.dakotassteakhouse.com for a map and driving directions.

WinWriters Online Help Conference

Santa Clara, California March 4-8, 2001

by Shirley Parker, Editor

It was another wet and windy WinWriters Welcome to this year's Online Help Conference, reminiscent of last year in San Diego, but without the natural and man-made attractions of that area. Attendance was a little lower, about 1,200, due largely to this year's expensive venue. For Dennis Wilson and myself, the conference began early, with registration starting at 7:30 a.m. on Sunday, March 4.

March 4

Our choice for Sunday, the all-day seminar, *XML Intensive*, was presented by Brian Travis, Chief Technical Officer from Architag International Corporation. He explained the new pressures of rising customer expectations: timeliness, individualization and delivery format proliferation. Also, new business models now include: syndication, online commerce and micropayments. Brian explained in depth what XML is and isn't, and covered the hierarchy, constraints, validity, schemas, etc. He explained Information Assets as they pertain to documentation: intellectual material that has been formalized, captured, and leveraged; information products, like books, periodicals and web sites; information *about* products, like user guides and manuals, Help Desk services; information about processes, like invoices, manifests, marketing materials, proposals, version control; "The Elephant" – i.e. the employee who knows how things really get done, as opposed to how they're supposed to get done, has everything in his or her head, but won't or can't write it down.

Brian then gave in-depth demonstrations of coding and XML programming models before moving on to XSL, Extensible Stylesheet Language and XSLT Program Architecture and the rules relating to them, along with the need to use a protocol called SOAP (Simple Object Access Protocol), an envelope for sending XML or XSL packets. This enables information to be sent across multiple platforms.

March 5

There were 23 different session presentations on Monday, and Dennis and I split up to attend as many as possible. In a few cases, a subject would turn out to be not quite what was needed, so we would move on into another session. This was also the day that Microsoft unveiled its preview of their Microsoft Help 2.0. We were each given a CD with the caution that it is not even the beta version and to be careful which machine we install it on. Other topics included designing embedded user assistance, architecting help for B2B enterprise applications, adding natural language query to online help, etc. There were also Exhibitor Booths and Peer Showcases, including Help for children's computer games such as Lego.

The keynote speaker on Monday was Dr. Moira Gunn from NPR's "Tech Nation" who described the "new software" being developed. It's designed to reflect multiple software upgrades and data file upgrades over networks of disparate laptops, desktops, and handheld computers. The human side of all this involves human interface issues, varying literacy levels, and the attempt to deliver our software to people speaking different languages. As most of us know only too well, serious cultural differences can arise with translations. Certain colors and symbols, for example, are often taboo, not to mention regional vernacular differences in both English and Spanish, as well as in other languages. There really is no such thing as a simple, straight across translation.

March 6

Tuesday's keynote speaker was Jared Spool, founder of User Interface Engineering. His topic was *Designing for Doing: What We Know About Web-based Applications*. He discussed the differences between web-based applications and content-based web sites. He spoke on the latest research in building usable applications on the Web, including whether it's better to have a

small number of long forms or a large number of short forms for completion by visitors to your web site.

Tuesday's sessions again totaled 23, so there were many options, including JavaScript, Context-sensitive Help, Adobe Acrobat, Cross-browser Dynamic HTML, palmtop publishing, online indexing, etc. There were three sessions related to Creating Single Source Documents with FrameMaker and WebWorks Publisher. The newest field, with vast implications, is Help for PDAs and cell phones, the *Help in a Square Inch* session. It's an exciting and challenging area! However, at this point, working GUIs are still in development, so such help would need to be created in Notepad. Probably a time-consuming process but that remains to be seen.

March 7

Wednesday's 28 available sessions covered web indexing, Dreamweaver, PhotoShop, language and communication concepts for UI and documentation design, editing that improves the reader's ability to navigate, design of visual instructions, and so forth.

An unusual aspect this year was a third keynote speaker, Vincent Flanders, who gave a humorous presentation on websites that used bad or good design techniques. He covered usability, site structure, navigation techniques, what tends to alienate visitors, and other related topics.

Dennis and I want to acknowledge the continuing support and encouragement by the management at APEX Voice Communications, which enable us to attend such useful events.

Next year's 10th anniversary WinWriters conference will be held in Seattle, from February 10-14, 2002. I can't speak for anyone else, but I can always hope they'll go back to San Diego the year after that.

Recap of February Meeting**Editing Your Own Work**

Reviewed by Shirley Parker, Editor

San Fernando Valley Chapter's February 20 meeting at the Radisson-Chatsworth Hotel, featured a well-attended presentation by De Murr, our chapter president.

"Editing Your Own Work" struck a chord with most technical communicators at the meeting. (Some 30 people.) We have all struggled with the levels of editing, knowing we can't edit for everything without making several separate tasks out of it, yet usually facing someone else's imposed and often unrealistic deadline.

Too many engineers and even non-writer managers think editors only fix typos and other grammatical errors; we are the "pretty-uppers". Such misinformed people can't understand why so much time is needed for editing, in order to do justice to the document. On the other hand, too many authors think editors live to destroy the author's work by rewriting so much that the product becomes unrecognizable. The author, of course, has already rewritten till the document is etched on our fingers. If anyone has an earlier STC T-shirt, you'll know all about Write, Revise, Revise, Revise, (x18, in case you wanted to know), Publish!

However, there is a balancing act involved, particularly when we must take off our writer's hat and put on our editor's hat. First, we need to allow as much time as possible between the writing task and the editing task. Next, we put ourselves in the reader's shoes. Then, we need to read the document several times, looking at different aspects each time. We should aim to make documents more understandable for those who must rely on them to carry out important functions, but we must not change the author's meaning, even if the author is our alter ego.

In the handouts distributed at the meeting was an article by Don Bush. In a *Technical Communication* article (published Fourth Quarter, 1981), he wrote, "Grammatically correct writing is not always readable writing." Nothing has altered that in the last 20 years; we still need to keep it in mind while editing. De presented the types and levels of editing: coordination, policy, integrity, screening, copy clarification, format, mechanical style, language, and substantive.

We need to decide what level of edit we can accommodate when. What is our deadline? What does the author want? Who is the audience? How important is the document? How much is it going to cost?

De also provided tips on killer word pairs: advise/advice, ascent/assent, complement/compliment, its/it's, prerequisite/perquisite, and many more "favorites" (or nemeses) we all can bring to mind. The order in pairs is equally important: shorter words go before longer words ("pears and oranges"), simple goes ahead of compound ("life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness"). Exceptions are when items need to be in chronological order, or when something familiar is presented a different way. (Feel free to send in some examples of the latter if you can think of them!)

Lists go at the end of the sentence or paragraph and should use parallel

structure. Generally, the longest item goes last, and all items should be related. Avoid the use of "foreign" words: via, e.g. i.e., etc., and others like them. These hindrances to comprehension should be spelled out, both for the benefit of native English speakers and for users whose first language is not English. Instead of "i.e." write "that is", and in place of "e.g." write "for example". Instead of "via", write "by way of", and instead of "etc." write "and so forth".

We need to be wary of spellcheckers in word processing software. They will catch the obvious mistakes but will not indicate that **two** is wrong, if **too** was really intended. They will also present ridiculous alternatives to well-known words they don't happen to recognize.

As we review and edit our own documents, we can make a list of all the errors found to see if we can identify a pattern, or determine if previous patterns have changed. Checklists of the things we must catch, such as capitalization, special terms, abbreviations, and so forth, are invaluable. De closed with the following: "And remember, learning to be a good editor will make you a better writer. Happy Trails to You."

(The recently deceased and well-loved Dale Evans had once been a resident of Chatsworth.)

VERY IMPORTANT!

As mentioned on our March postcard, WE ARE GOING TO START SENDING OUR NEWSLETTER ELECTRONICALLY, beginning with the **JUNE, 2001** issue. To do this, we need the e-mail address that you want us to send it to. If you don't have an e-mail address that's approved for attachments, please contact us immediately. (See below.)

Send notification to Tom Berryman at **(818) 348-0639** to tell us you don't have an e-mail address, or to **tomberryman1@excite.com** to tell us the e-mail address you want the newsletter sent to.

If you truly must receive a paper copy of the newsletter, you do need to tell us, because a limited number of copies will be printed and mailed in the future. Otherwise, you will need to visit our new website at www.stcsfv.org to read the newsletter online and/or print it out from there.

We don't want to lose any of our readers, so please let us know your preferences in advance!

(Continued from page 1)

March Meeting

so absolute fonts will always appear smaller on the Mac screen. Also, if a user has set the default font size to a large size, to compensate for vision problems, your absolute font size setting will remain at the size you have chosen, rather than being enlarged on the user's screen.

4. When exporting material from MS Word 2000 to use in your HTML project (or to use in any HTML outcome), use the Office 2000 HTML Filter 2.0, downloadable from Microsoft, to export "Compact HTML" from Word. This gives you much "cleaner" HTML output, eliminating the MS-specific HTML tags that are otherwise part of the exported version.

Ms Fleischer recommended the www.helpcommunity.ehelp.com website as a source of lots of useful information about Help authoring and online technical support for RoboHelp Office. As an example of a completely customized RoboHelp WebHelp presence, she recommended the Copperfield Publishing website, copperfieldpub.com. That site offers a great number of tips and tricks for the help author.

Thirty people attended this fascinating presentation. **Heather Tyree** won the door prize, which was a complete RoboHelp Office 9.0 Suite, courtesy of eHelp Corporation.



FLASH FUNNIES - Proverbs for 2001

- * If the shoe fits, get another one just like it.
- * The things that come to those that wait might be the things left by those who got there first.
- * It's hard to understand how a cemetery can raise burial costs and blame it on the cost of living.
- * Light travels faster than sound. That is why some people appear bright until you hear them speak.
- * I started out with nothing and still have most of it.

- * The only cure for insomnia is to get more sleep.
- * It recently was discovered that research causes cancer in rats.
- * A fine is a tax for doing wrong. A tax is a fine for doing well.
- * As long as there are tests, there will be prayers in public schools.
- * It is said that if you line up all the cars in the world end to end, someone will be stupid enough to try and pass them.

The above is from selected sources and appeared in the January 2001 issue of ForeFrontFLASH. Reprinted with permission.

Region 8 Conference Still Undetermined

Our Region 8 annual conference, rumored to be at Asilomar Conference Grounds in Pacific Grove, is still being kept under wraps. At this point in time, we have been unable to ascertain any knowledge of the conference dates in the Fall or even if a reservation has been made. Unfortunately, Brian McCaleb is said to be recovering from a serious illness and we have been unable to contact any members of his committee. We hope to bring you some solid facts soon, so you can begin planning your budget and/or justifying sponsorship from your employer. We sincerely do regret the lack of information.

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Our Website: <http://www.stcsfv.org>

Region 8 Website information:
<http://www.stc.org/region8/www/index.htm>

Our STC Neighbors (In alphabetical order)

Inland Empire chapter -- Scott Dewbre, Public Relations Manager - scott@iestc.org
<http://www.iestc.org>

Los Angeles chapter -- Betsy Suttle, President (310) 478-5478
bsuttle615@aol.com
<http://www.stc.org/region8/lac/www/lahome.htm>

Orange County chapter -- Bob Courtney (714) 823-4222,
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<http://www.ocstc.org/main.htm>

Santa Barbara chapter --
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San Diego chapter -- Kris Oden, President
koden@invitrogen.com

San Gabriel Valley chapter -- Kathy Broman, President (818) 951-7301,
kabroman@aol.com
<http://www.stc.org/region8/sgv/www/contact.html>

San Luis Obispo chapter -- Regina Brown, President (805) 546-8671
castano@fix.net, or Jan Grammer,

A Big **WELCOME** and Congratulations to **San Luis Obispo**, our newest STC chapter! If you know technical communicators in SLO county, please have them contact **Regina Brown**, President at (805) 546-8671 castano@fix.net, or **Jan Grammer**, Secretary at jkdaley@thegrid.net.



The Society for Technical Communication (STC) is the world's largest organization for technical communicators. STC's almost 24,000 members include writers, editors, illustrators, printers, publishers, photographers, educators, and students. Dues are \$110 per year, plus a one-time enrollment fee. Membership is open to anyone engaged in some phase of technical communication, or interested in the arts and sciences of technical communication, or in allied arts and sciences. You can reach STC headquarters by writing or calling

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901 N. Stuart Street, Suite 904
Arlington, VA 22203-4114
Tel (703) 522-4114
Fax (703) 522-2075
e-mail: stc@stc-va.org

Society Job Listings

The STC maintains job listings on the Internet. You can download listings from the Society's Web site at www.stc-va.org.

Viewpoint

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1/4 pg \$25, 1/3 pg \$30,

1/2 pg \$40, full pg \$50.

Documenting
software is like changing
tires on a moving car.

WEBSITES THAT MAY BE OF INTEREST TO SOME OF OUR MEMBERS

<http://www.writingthatworks.com>

Covers business writing and communications.

<http://www.kids-in-mind.com>

Rates movies on sex, violence, and profanity content. Since the industry doesn't police itself, what goes into your kids' minds is your responsibility now more than ever.

<http://www.pobox.com/~verbivore> or www.pw1.netcom.com/~rlederer/index.htm

Richard's Lederer's website for wordaholics, logolepts, and verbivores. "Fun and food for those who feast on words."



Surfers Advisory

Online Degrees

Utah State University offers a Tech Writing Masters fully online: http://rbw305.rbw.usu.edu/tech_com/grad/index.htm.

In fact, USU's program for Bachelors and Masters degrees is said to be superior : <http://www.usu.edu>

Other online degree programs include: Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute <http://www.rpi.edu> RPI does distance learning for techcomm... <http://www.llc.rpi.edu/grprog.cfm> It's said to be \$700 per credit hour, so read carefully, as you should do at all online sites.

University of Washington, Seattle <http://www.wsu.edu>

An internet search will undoubtedly bring up many more excellent educational opportunities across the country. You don't have to relocate to get the education you want, but you do have to move on it.

Caution: Your company's tuition reimbursement programs may not pay for an online degree program. ASK your Human Resources person before signing up for distance learning programs.



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