

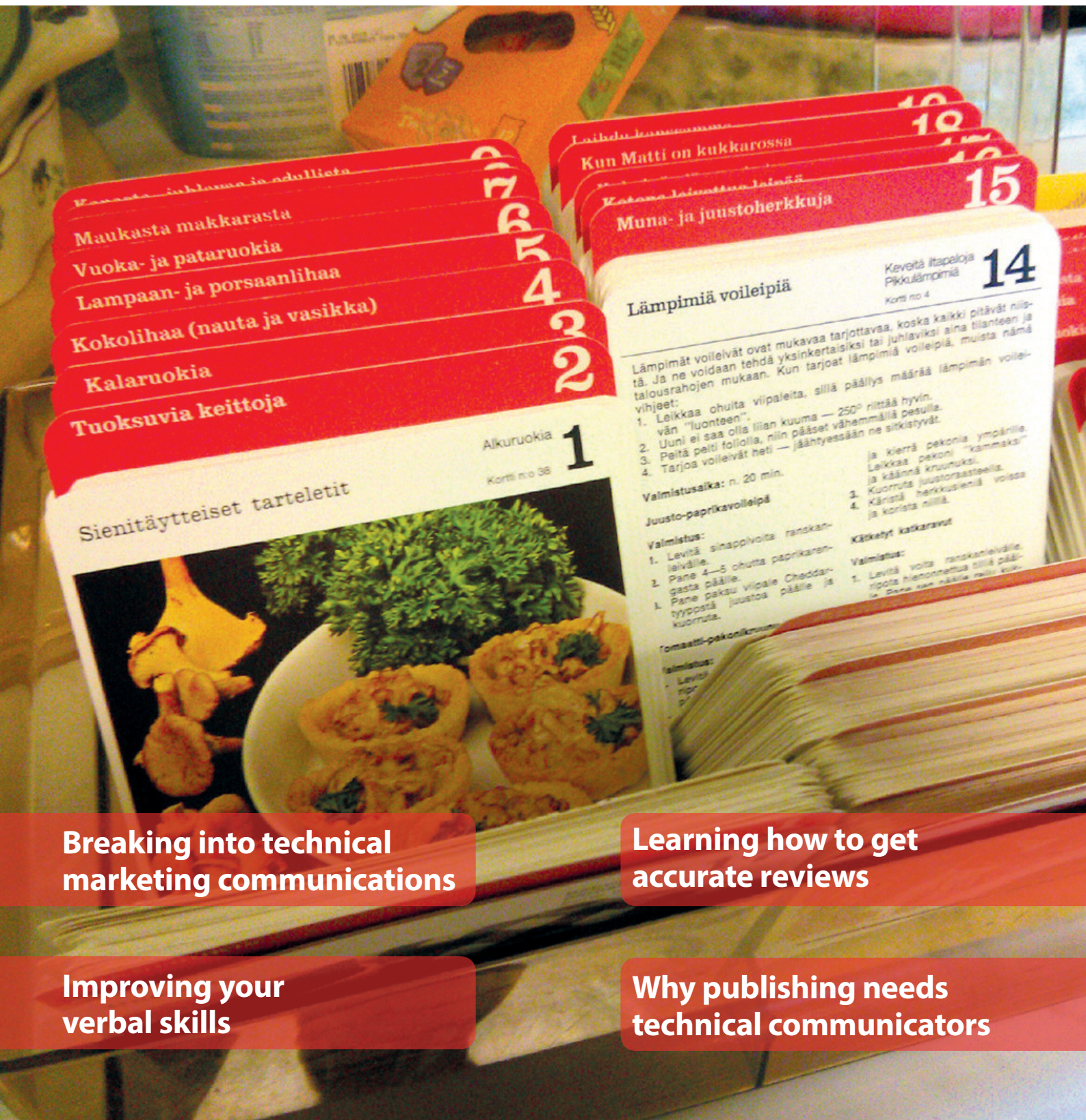
# Where are technical communicators?

## Finding the location of your colleagues



# Communicator

The Institute of Scientific and Technical Communicators  
Autumn 2014



Breaking into technical  
marketing communications

Learning how to get  
accurate reviews

Improving your  
verbal skills

Why publishing needs  
technical communicators





## President's view

### A little perspective

As I retire as ISTC President, I thought I would take the opportunity to share my professional journey and how my perspective of the ISTC has developed as my involvement has changed over 20 years, and as the ISTC has evolved.

### The view from the outside

I first became aware of the ISTC shortly after I became aware that Technical Authoring existed as a job. We are talking 1994 and I had just joined TMS Computer Authors Ltd in Godalming. I was taken on to sell technical documentation projects and some of my colleagues were ISTC members. As the projects team struggled, I was moved to the booming agency team and within months realised I had found a world where I could thrive. I spoke to hundreds of companies and hundreds of technical authors – and enjoyed it. I was vaguely aware of the ISTC as a professional body, but membership of the ISTC certainly didn't figure as an important criterion for customers.

### The view from the fringe

I started to attend the annual ISTC Conference (I think in Windsor in 1995). As a salesman, I used the opportunity to meet some of the people I had only spoken to on the phone. I remember feeling rather isolated and exposed, and for the next few years of attending the conference, the focus was on the bunch of TMS sales people not getting too drunk on the Friday night so that they could still function the next morning. I am sure I must have attended sessions and learnt something but I have no idea what. I was aware of the rivalry between TMS and the

other services companies such as Kudos, Plain Words and AST. At those late 90's conferences, it did seem to be a professional community that was thriving – although I remember individual authors still complained about themselves and their profession being undervalued just as some do today...in fact I am sure some of them are the same people.

By 2001, I was starting to meet authors in other countries, and attending Society for Technical Communicators (STC) Chapter meetings in Europe. With that experience, the ISTC conferences and the atmosphere within the UK profession started to look insular and despondent. My perspective had changed.

### The view from the inside

When I set up 3di in 2002, my perspective changed again. I needed to build a business, and that was going to rely on being able to find customers, and resources. I was also going to need to become far more expert in my chosen field than I had needed to be up to then. The ISTC was a good place to start. I joined as an Associate member, and then became a Member a year or so later. I started writing articles for and advertising in *Communicator* and *InfoPlus+* and continued attending the Conference. I learned to appreciate the professional development opportunities and encouraged (and for a time even paid for) 3di contract authors to join the ISTC.

### The view from the centre

The more I learnt about the profession I was part of and depended on, and the markets in which it operated the more I realised that the ISTC had the potential to do much more to support and help that profession thrive. I started to help with the Marketing and joined Council in 2004.

My investment of time, energy and money in the ISTC started to pay dividends. I won projects I would never have been aware of, and I worked with technical authors I would never have known. And I learnt new skills: being interviewed about industry salaries for *Reader's Digest*, taking part in a discussion about instruction manuals for BBC Radio 4. Giving presentations and writing articles. Recognising and applying my relative professional strengths and collaborating with others to learn from theirs.

### The view looking out

For me, the opportunity for professional collaboration has been the key benefit of being part of the ISTC. It's collaboration that enabled the new Technical Communication UK conference to turn from an idea into a reality.

Although benevolent dictatorship has its advantages when you run your own company, it simply doesn't work in a volunteer-based professional body that has to sustain itself and thrive as volunteers come and go. You need to pool your energies and agree shared goals. Those in the centre need to look out towards the membership and beyond, to the wider profession and the markets they serve. With that perspective, those in the centre can work steadily and sustainably to meet their needs.

From my perspective, I think all of us who have worked on the inside and at the centre of the ISTC in recent years can be immensely proud of what we have achieved so far, a few highlights being:

- a new, thriving conference
- a journal of consistently rich and useful content
- new mentor and CPD programmes
- new local area groups and support framework
- new user and industry groups
- a coherent brand and better marketing assets
- regular surveys
- a trusted and efficient admin and project support team
- an open, team-based, sustainable governance structure
- a talented and growing network of volunteers

### What's your perspective?

You may well see a different ISTC to me. My journey has been my own and will continue to provide me with different perspectives as my volunteer role changes and I start to move away from the centre.

It's been a privilege to serve as ISTC President for the last four years and I am looking forward to continuing on the Council team and collaborating with Alison Peck, your new ISTC President. **C**

Bonetta, L (2011) 'The best words in the best order' *Nature*, Vol 475: 255-257  
[www.nature.com/naturejobs/2011/110714/pdf/nj7355-255a.pdf](http://www.nature.com/naturejobs/2011/110714/pdf/nj7355-255a.pdf) (accessed August 2014)

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