InfoPlus⁺

Contents

ISTC news

Technical Communication UK 2011 update

From the Technical Communication UK team

We're on the final countdown for Technical Communication UK 2011 now, and it's looking like a very exciting event – not least because more people are attending than ever before.

In spite of a few late drop-outs and changes, the programme still offers an interesting range of sessions, with something to appeal to people at all stages of their career, in all industries, whether employed, freelance or long-term contractors.

Our interactive sessions are shaping up nicely. This year we're offering two sessions that give anyone attending the event the opportunity to get up and speak:

■ Questions and Rants
The popular session introduced in 2010 returns. This is a chance for anyone to ask a roomful of technical communicators some questions, or just to get something (tech-comms related!) off their chest in a sympathetic environment.
www.technicalcommunicationuk.com/index.php?/general/programme.html#QuestionsRants.

- **'If I ruled the world…'**
  New for 2011. In this session, we invite attendees to put their superhero capes on and tell us how they'd go about dealing with one of the issues that get in the way of technical communicators being able to do their jobs. They could even become someone's personal hero by telling them how they've already dealt with their issue in your own work. www.technicalcommunicationuk. com/index.php?/general/programme. html#LightningTalks.

Also new for 2011 is the 'TCUK fringe'. This has come about as a result of requests from delegates who want the opportunity to meet with others who use the same software tools, from sponsors who want to run question and answer sessions or demos, and from all kinds of crazy folk who want to go for a run on the morning after the gala dinner. All the sessions in the TCUK fringe are organised and run independently, but the Technical Communication UK team will be publishing information about them as we get it. Look out for updates on the programme page of our website and (for those attending) in the conference folders and notice boards around the venue.

For more information on all of the above, visit: http://tiny.cc/tcuk_program.

For those who aren't attending: we'll also do our best to summarise the topics in the interactive sessions for you. As last year, we'll be videoing some of the sessions and publishing them after the event (in case you missed them, you can see last year's videos here: http://tiny.cc/tcuk10_videos) and the programme page will be updated afterwards with links to presenters slides, where we have them.

Those of you on twitter can follow the conference as it happens, by following the #tcuk11 hashtag.

For those who are attending: see you there!

ISTC marketing update – improving connections with Business Affiliates

The ISTC depends in part on support from Business Affiliates, many of which have had a relationship with the organisation over many years. We recognised earlier this year that we haven't always done a great job of keeping in touch with our affiliates, or of updating them on our projects or informing about opportunities to make contact with our members. For the last few months, a project has been underway to address this.

Here's what we've been doing:

- Introduce a designated Business Affiliate liaison role. Felicity Davie has now taken on responsibility for keeping Business Affiliates up to date on ISTC activities and helping to ensure they get good value from their relationship with us – and that the relationship offers benefits to members too.

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- Felicity invited all our Business Affiliates to answer a questionnaire by email or phone, to tell us about what they currently get out of affiliation and what they'd like to get out of affiliation.

About half of our affiliates responded, and from their comments we developed an action plan that includes:

- Updating information on our website and flyer, to make the benefits of affiliation much clearer.
- Quarterly communication with affiliates, keeping them up to date and inviting input.
- New regular slot coming soon to *InfoPlus*+ to tell our members more about our affiliates (we suspect that many members don't currently know who some of the affiliates are).
- Added requests from affiliates to other ongoing projects, including website, Communicator, and *InfoPlus*+.

ISTC poll – top three issues facing technical communicators

From Emma Bayne

Ahead of TCUK 2011 the ISTC Council decided to send out a poll asking technical communicators 'What are the top 3 issues you face as a technical communicator trying to do your job well?'. A total of 229 people responded to the poll which ran between 3 and 15 June 2011.

As responses were given in free text form the responses were then grouped in 21 different categories. In cases where a response fit into two different categories (for example, 'not enough people or training'), it was placed in the first category as numbered within brackets (that is, 'not enough time/people to get the job done'). Finally, a total of 89 responses did not fit into any of the categories below; these responses included a broad range of topics such as discrimination, work-life balance,

saying no and political hidden agendas within the organisation.

Categories (numbered for analysis – numbers in brackets) from most (top) to least (bottom) frequent:

- ▶ (7) Getting information about what to write about (excluding specification creep) – 93 responses
- ▶ (6) Tools, technology and IT (including training) – 71 responses
- ▶ (2) Technical communicators as a profession: people don't understand what technical communicator skills are/ that technical communicators have skills; people have misconceptions about what technical communicators do – 61 responses
- ▶ (1) Not enough time/people to get the job done (includes insufficient time in project time scales) – 53 responses
- ▶ (8) Business value of technical communication – 51 responses
- ▶ (3) Getting reviews/feedback/QA done (excluding customer feedback) – 50 responses
- ▶ (9) Misfit with project timescales/ processes – 46 responses

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- ▶ (12) Practitioner issues (how to write, single source, make content findable) – 26 responses
- ▶ (14) Line management – 19 responses
- ▶ (4) Getting input from users (target audience (research and feedback) – 15 responses
- ▶ (11) Finding work and getting paid for it – 14 responses
- ▶ (5) Noisy/distracting environment – 12 responses
- ▶ (13) Scope creep/specification creep/ vague requirements – 11 responses
- ▶ (10) Hiring – 7 responses
- ▶ (17) Team work/working with other teams – 7 responses
- ▶ (16) General budgeting/resources (where specific, these have gone into 'not enough people' etc) – 5 responses
- ▶ (18) Styles/consistency – 5 responses
- ▶ (20) Distribution – 3 responses
- ▶ (15) ROI and metrics –2 responses
- ▶ (19) No influence on UI – 2 responses
- ▶ (21) Isolation – 2 responses

The ISTC Council wishes to thank everybody who has responded to this poll.

ISTC local area group news

Report on London meeting, 26 July

By Claire Hooper

The London ISTC group met in the foyer of the Royal Festival Hall. Nine of us assembled without difficulty and for most of the evening competed enthusiastically with a steel band that began by rehearsing and ended by performing about 20 yards from where we sat.

This time, unusually, five authors worked in the same company and a sixth had until recently, so they had fun comparing current and previous employment while the rest of us marvelled at belonging to a company with five (or more!) technical authors. We also talked about the merits and pitfalls of our respective publishing software, which lone authors can only do at these meetings. There was a lot of interest in the TCUK conference in September, particularly since the choice of goodies on offer means that you have to plan in advance which talks to attend.

ISTC Affiliate news

Content Strategy: *Its importance across the organisation*

Free eSeminar presented by Adobe, in association with the ISTC

A recent Twitter chat simultaneously highlighted the perceived chasm between content strategists who are focused on the web and largely marketing materials and others who see content strategy as being about many channels (print, web, mobile) and across many information types (technical communication, learning, digital publishing).

Is it about the channel? Is it about the type of content? Is it a process? Is it a best practice? Can these diverse areas come together to ensure the delivery of a cohesive content strategy for the entire organisation, which includes Marketing, Technical Documentation, learning and more?

Join this eSeminar to hear distinguished industry experts debate this topic: Colum McAndrew, Senior Technical Writer, IDBS; Lise Bissonnette Janody, Owner and

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Content Consultant, Dot-Connection; Clare O'Brien, Managing Director, CDA; Ann Rockley, President, The Rockley Group, and Bill Swallow, Manager of Content Solutions, LinguaLinx.

This eSeminar is being held on 15 September. For more information and to register, visit: www.adobe.com/cfusion/event/index.cfm?event=detail&id=1870056&loc=en_us.

Industry news

Scary localisation stories

Localization World is hosting its first 'crowd-sourced' session and it's sure to elicit some gasps from the audience, as the topic is Scary Localization Stories.

It will be a 50-minute session and you're invited to share your scariest story from your personal localization experiences. Like the one about the vendor who, days before he was scheduled to hand over all completed work to the client, disappeared and demanded a ransom from the company if they wanted to meet their release schedule.

If you have a truly scary localization story that you experienced first-hand and would like to share with the audience, we invite you to submit a 150-word (maximum) description of the story. To protect the privacy of other companies involved, please substitute any company other than your own with 'Company X'.

Each selected story will receive approximately five minutes of 'story time'. At the conclusion of the storytelling session, we will vote for the scariest story and award a suitable prize.

Please submit your story to submissions@localizationworld.com with a subject line of 'Scary Story submission'. The deadline is 12 September, 2011.

You don't need to be at the conference in person to tell your story; we can accept a story that can be told by audio or video without your presence.

Our review committee will be working quickly to select those stories that will be presented in the session. Localization World reserves the right to reject any story, and there is a limit of one story per person.

Localization World will make the submissions available on its website for those who are not able to attend the conference. By submitting your story, you are granting Localization World Ltd permission, at its discretion, to use your submitted story in the conference, on the Localization World website and other places and formats as it deems appropriate. Localization World may also edit your submission for proper spelling, grammar and to protect the privacy of those involved.

See the 'Events listings' section for details of the conference.

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Education news

Online graduate programs receive funding at Missouri University of Science and Technology

Three technical communication graduate programs will now be available online at Missouri University of Science and Technology (S&T), thanks to $58,000 in funding from the University of Missouri (UM) System eLearning initiative.

The initiative was created to increase access to full degree and degree completion programs at the UM System's four campuses. Students could begin taking the online courses this fall for Missouri S&T's technical communication Master of Science degree, graduate certificate and graduate minor. The courses required for the certificate and minor are a subset of the courses required for the master's degree.

'We're excited to offer these programs online,' says Dr. Ed Malone, associate professor and director of the English and technical communication department's online programs. 'This is the first completely online technical communication master's degree available in the state of Missouri.'

Malone says the tuition and content for these online courses is the same as for the on-campus courses.

The program includes 10 courses for a total of 30 credit hours. Courses will be delivered with Blackboard course management software and will include live online meetings. 'There will also be audio and video components,' says Malone.

Also working on the project are Dr. Kathryn Northcut, associate professor of English and technical communication, and Dr. David Wright, assistant professor of English and technical communication.

To learn more about the online technical communication graduate courses, visit: http://english.mst.edu/academicprograms/webpage.html.

Blog news

See you at TCUK?

By Gordon McLean MISTC

I'm struggling to believe it's September already (although that does mean the Technical Communications conference is only a few weeks away), and whilst I've been busy working on the new ISTC website, the blogs continue to produce some excellent, thought provoking posts. Let's dive in.

Mike Pope breaks the news that Microsoft will soon be issuing a new version of their Manual of Style. I know a lot of people use it as a reference source, so it will be interesting to see the reaction to the news that 'A broader change has to do with recommendations for style and voice. Following a general trend in the industry, the company's official position is moving toward less formal tone in documentation.'

Content Strategy continues to be discussed on the blogs, and first up this month is our very own Roger Hart who writes about a new tool to help with the *achingly boring* content inventory. Called Page Trawler, 'The core idea is quite simple – automatically generate content inventories. Simple.'

Sticking with Content Strategy, [David Farbey ponders the Myths About Content](#) that you may be familiar with: 'People who aren't directly involved in creating content often hold a set of beliefs about what content is and how it is created that can only be described as myths. That may sound a little harsh, because believing in myths implies being divorced from reality, but I can't think of a better explanation ... "Content exists" and "Content doesn't need processing" are two of the most widespread myths about content.'

Moving to a more day-to-day concern, [Kai Weber writes about how 'Structured content is cooler than you may think](#). As a model for technical communications, it suffers from several misconceptions which prevent that you and your organization get the most out of it.'

Patty Blount has written previously on this topic and continues to share her experiences in her post titled [Adventures in Scenario-Based Documentation](#); 'Scenario-Based Documentation focuses ONLY on the information needed to solve the problem described in a very specific user story. If there are twenty fields on a UI dialog, but only three of them are needed in a particular scenario, then only those three are documented. The balance will be documented in some other scenario until, eventually, all fields are documented.'

Cherryleaf have published results of their recent online survey that 226 Technical Authors completed. They've captured a lot of information, analysed the findings, and presented them in three different ways: [In figures](#), [in words](#) and [in pictures](#).

And finally, those of us who have to use Microsoft Word may have suffered a few frustrations, in which case I think you'll appreciate [this particular bon mot](#) captured by Rhonda Bracey.

As ever, if you know of a blog that you think others would be interested in, please get in touch at blogs@istc.org.uk.

A technical writer for almost 17 years, Gordon has been blogging for almost 10 of those. He monitors a large breadth of blogs covering most aspects of technical communications. You can download the full list of RSS feeds from his blog at www.onemanwrites.co.uk.

Quick links to the bloggers and their blogs

Mike Pope:
www.mikepope.com/blog/DisplayBlog.aspx?permalink=2302

Roger Hart:
www.simple-talk.com/community/blogs/roger/archive/2011/08/08/102732.aspx

David Farbey:
www.farbey.co.uk/index.php/2011/08/myths-about-content/

Kai Weber:
http://kaiweber.wordpress.com/2011/08/22/structured-content-more-than-style-guide/

Patty Blount:
http://writetrends.wordpress.com/2011/08/16/adventures-in-scenario-based-documentation/

Cherryleaf survey:
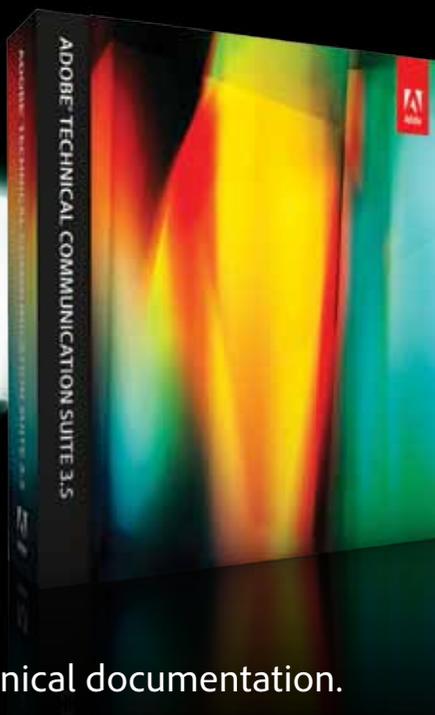www.cherryleaf.com/blog/2011/08/cherryleaf-technical-author-survey-11-in-figures/

www.cherryleaf.com/blog/2011/08/cherryleaf-technical-author-survey-2011-%E2%80%93-in-words/

www.cherryleaf.com/blog/2011/08/cherryleaf-technical-author-survey-2011-%E2%80%93-in-pictures/

Rhonda Bracey:
http://cybertext.wordpress.com/2011/08/15/talking-word/

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Training courses

September

2 **Advanced Adobe FrameMaker**
Teaches the use of FrameMaker's advanced and difficult-to-grasp features when working in unstructured mode. Learn how to produce books comprised of multiple documents, generate a table of contents and index, and insert cross-references.

10% discount for ISTC members.

Armada, Bromsgrove, Midlands.
www.armada.co.uk/framemaker-training-course/.

15-16 **Introduction to Adobe InDesign CS5**
Provides a comprehensive introduction to the powerful capabilities of InDesign, including using InDesign's most popular features.

10% discount for ISTC members

Armada, Bromsgrove, Midlands.
www.armada.co.uk/indesign-training-course/.

22-23 **Introduction to Adobe Captivate**
Course for beginners, teaches how to create web enabled simulations, demos and tutorials for software applications.

10% discount for ISTC members.

Armada, Bromsgrove, Midlands.
www.armada.co.uk/captivate-training-course/.

26 **Introduction to technical authoring**
Short course for new technical authors and people in other roles who need to carry out technical authoring work. Covers audience analysis, structuring and designing documents, writing in plain English, punctuation and grammar, designing an effective layout, reviewing and proofreading.

10% discount for ISTC members.

Armada, Bromsgrove, Midlands.
www.armada.co.uk/technical-author-training-course/.

27-28 **Intermediate technical authoring**
Building on basic course, teaching key issues that define high quality technical authoring. Learn to use a detailed end-to-end writing process to design, draft, and improve technical documents, developing critical skills, create more effective technical documents, and present a consistent and homogenous document set to the users.

10% discount for ISTC members.

Armada, Bromsgrove, Midlands.

www.armada.co.uk/technical-author-training-course/.

Listings are restricted to scheduled courses that are low cost or are in some way unusual. Listings are a service to members. A listing does not imply ISTC endorsement.
If you hear of any training courses that you think might be of interest to *InfoPlus*+ readers, please contact the Newsletter copyeditor at newsletter.editor@istc.org.uk.
If you would like to promote your course or event to ISTC members, why not consider giving ISTC members a discount for courses and events listed in our newsletter. For more information, please email istc@istc.org.uk.

...September

29-30   Advanced technical authoring
Intensive course for career technical authors who want to improve their skill set and the quality and effectiveness of the documentation they produce.

10% discount for ISTC members.

Armada, Bromsgrove, Midlands.

www.armada.co.uk/technical-author-training-course/.

October

13-14   Website creation essentials with Adobe Dreamweaver
Course for new or novice website designers, and anyone who is responsible for creating or updating web pages. Teaches how to design, develop and maintain a professional website using Dreamweaver. During the course, delegates create a fully functioning website.

10% discount for ISTC members.

Armada, Bromsgrove, Midlands. www.armada.co.uk/dreamweaver-training-course/.

Events listings

This section introduces new events and reminders of the most relevant events in the coming months. ISTC events are highlighted. You can view previous events listings on the ISTC website's Newsletter archive at www.istc.org.uk/Publications/Newsletter/newsletter.htm. To include an event in the listings, please email events@istc.org.uk

8   North-West Area Group meeting
When Psychology Met User Experience – a talk by Chris Atherton at MadLab in the centre of Manchester. Contact: David Jones e-mail: northwestengland areagroup@istc.org.uk

September

15   Content Strategy: Its Importance Across the Organisation
A free eSeminar presented by Adobe, in association with the ISTC. For information, visit:

www.adobe.com/cfusion/event/index.cfm?event=detail&id=1870056&loc=en_us.

20-22   Technical Communication UK 2011
The largest UK conference for technical communicators, Technical Communication UK is the annual conference that aims to meet the needs of technical communicators, their managers and clients, from every corner of the industry. The Oxford Belfry, Thame.

www.technicalcommunicationuk.com.

25-27   SfEP annual conference
Skills, freelancing, Education, Practice – and so much more. Takes place at:

St Catherine's College, Oxford.

www.sfep.org.uk.

October

18-20   tcworld conference 2011
The tcworld annual conference. Rhein-Main halls, Wiesbaden, Germany.

www.tekom.de/tagung/tagung.jsp.

Back page

Reminder about new feature:
My other life

From the editor

As mentioned in May's *InfoPlus*⁺, we'd like to introduce a new feature for the back page called 'My other life'. The idea is for technical communicators to write about their hobbies or tell us about things they do in their spare time, which perhaps give them life skills that apply in the workplace.

Here's a reminder of what we're looking for:

We'd like readers to send us their stories about their 'other' life apart from their work as a technical communicator. Perhaps you have a pastime that helps you unwind from the 'day job', yet still uses your skills or experience as a technical communicator. Or maybe you do something that, at face value, seems totally unrelated to your work, yet teaches you skills that improve your ability to work as a technical communicator.

Tell us about your technical communication job

Start by giving us a brief description of your work as a technical communicator. Just a few lines so we understand your 'day job'.

What do you do in your other life?

Tell us about one or two activities and give a brief description if it's not something others will necessarily relate to. For example, when I used to have spare time, I did quite a lot of music production. This involved recording, mixing, arranging and producing music for songs and instrumentals written and performed by other artists. In many cases, I contributed as a musician too by playing keyboards. Music has always been a great way for me to unwind detach myself from some of the pressures of work. What about you?

Using your work skills or experience

In my case, one slightly tenuous link is that some of my layout, design and copywriting skills comes in useful when designing album artwork and marketing materials. Probably more important is the fact that I've worked in the Information Technology sector for over a quarter of a century. I come into contact with a lot of technology in music production, so this has been a real help. How do you use your knowledge or experience as a communicator in your hobbies?

Learning from your pastime

We'd like to know what you gain from your 'other life' that helps you do your job.

Send us a picture

We'd like to include a picture of you with the article. Even better if it's linked to your pastime.

A few rules

Please try to keep the article succinct. Something between 700 to 1,000 words would okay. We may need to edit content, so please be prepared for some 'tweaks'.

Please don't use this as a forum to advertise a product or service. We don't mind hearing about activities that earn you extra income, but keep the content as a story rather than an advert or we might have to reject it.

We'll publish one article per month. Please send your articles to newsletter.editor@istc.org.uk. Depending on the level of response, we may not be able to include your article straight away. If we do use it, you'll be sent a proof before publication.

The editor's decision is final in respect of what is put forward for publication.