

Meeting user requirements

Learn how to design better documentation



Communicator

The Institute of Scientific and Technical Communicators
Summer 2014

Find out more about
multi-device learning

Use mediation as a
management tool

Understand localisation
opportunities in Brazil

Read a Doc-to-Help
case study





Helen Harbord describes her new venture

I'm mostly a technical writer, maintaining help and user documentation for a GP decision support tool and a clinical trials management system. But being part time, I'm able to fit in a few other things. And one of those things is a completely new venture.

A few years ago I was planning a holiday to Cornwall. Being an avid reader, I wanted to find some novels set in Cornwall to take with me. I couldn't find much beyond Agatha Christie and Enid Blyton and thought, 'Wouldn't it be great if there were a site where you could search for novels set in real places?'

I looked and looked but there wasn't anything. So, with the help of a web developer friend, I decided to create it.

After a lot of hard work, www.yonndr.com was launched this May. Type the name of a country, city or region into the search box and you get a list of books set in that place which you can then filter by genre and time period. It's a fantastic tool if you're planning a holiday and it's

just as relevant if you're not; a well-written book full of sights, sounds and smells can transport you to a place for much less than the cost of a real trip. It encourages you to add books too so the database is always growing. In the book 'Inkheart' by Cornelia Funke, Meggie's book-loving Aunt Elenor is asked if she has ever been to Persia and replies, "*Yes a hundred times. Along with St Petersburg, Paris, Middle Earth, distant planets and Shangri-La. And I never had to leave this room.*"

My technical writing background has certainly affected the way I have gone about developing Yonndr. The name itself caused great distress, as having always been a determined stickler who shudders at the thought of 'Toys 'R' Us' and 'KT's Cakes', I found it hard to go with a name that messes with spelling, especially as the site is all about literature and good writing. But after days of deliberation and hours lost in the depths of a thesaurus, 'yonder' was simply the best word for the job. And with corporate battles raging over the associated URL, I went for the next best thing and Yonndr was born. I'm originally from Gloucester and I must admit I do rather like the way that 'Yonndr' sounds just that little bit 'West Country'.

Usability is important to me and function always wins over form. Oh, except for the icons that display with each book to show which genre it belongs to. From the very beginning I'd imagined those icons and I was determined to use them even though I knew that text labels would be clearer. So I made them and I used hover text for the labels and they looked fantastic. And the first thing that everyone said during user testing was, 'Very nice but what do those icons mean?'

Of course, hover text doesn't work on mobile devices. So I was forced to add labels after all. Lesson learned!

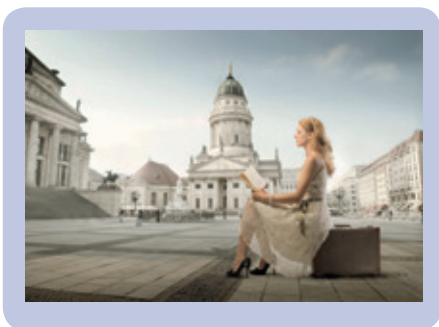
I also do a bit of acting and film/

TV extras work which has been the main source of funding for Yonndr. This means the site development rate mirrors the amount of work I get. Which wasn't much during a flurry of films based around armies and therefore mostly requiring male extras to be soldiers – think War Horse, Prince of Persia and Captain America (although I did manage to sneak in to two of those as a nurse and a villager).

There have been some memorable moments that you might appreciate. When filming on Nowhere Boy, I was on an outdoor set for a 1950's church fete and one of the stalls proudly displayed a sign reading, 'Guess the way to the cake'. Read that aloud and you'll realise what it was supposed to say.

Then on a Harry Potter film, I was playing a worker in the Ministry of Magic just after it's been taken over by the baddies and we all had to scuttle around looking terrified and oppressed. One of the Assistant Directors was trying to get us in the right frame of mind by reminding us what was happening but as he accidentally kept referring to the Dark Lord as 'Lord Voldemart' (groceries for dark wizards) instead of 'Voldemort', and to the non-wizarding folk as 'miggles' instead of 'muggles', it had the opposite effect.

Friends often comment on the apparent diversity of the acting and technical writing worlds but actually, both are ultimately about communicating to an audience and working out how best to present information. And now that I also have a website to run, I am determined to carry over the same principles. I'd love to use Yonndr to encourage people to read more and to link it with online libraries and education. For now though, it's about building content and getting the word out so please have a look and if you like it, tell your reading friends. And do let me know if you find any spelling mistakes! **C**



Helen Harbord MISTC is based in Tunbridge Wells, Kent. She has worked as a technical writer for 15 years and is currently in the IT healthcare industry.
W: www.yonndr.com
E: helen@yonndr.com