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Communicator

The Institute of Scientific and Technical Communicators
Spring 2015

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President's view

I asked in a recent post on the discussion forum if there was any interest in ISTC merchandise, and mentioned that I'd often felt I'd like a mug. As a result, I received an unexpected Christmas present this year: Margaret Aldis sent me hers. Thank you, Margaret, a lovely surprise.

When I mentioned the mug to other members of ISTC Council, I was told about other merchandise that people had tucked away: more mugs, and ties (in various colours) were mentioned. Obviously, at some point in the past, we did have some ISTC merchandise, probably before I joined, as I've certainly never seen any before.

If you want something doing...

No, this isn't a grumble, although I know that statement often precedes one. It's simply a statement of my personal philosophy. If something is very important to me and I want it to happen, I feel I have to put some effort into it.

Promoting the ISTC and technical communication in general fall into that category, and I decided I could work on them in two ways. The first is in my role as President, and I'm on the look-out for ways that we can get involved in anything that will raise our profile. If you hear of anything, please let me know.

The other way I can promote the ISTC is as an individual, and I'm willing to exploit the contacts I have to get our name out there. None of us can do a lot individually, but put all the little bits together and they start to add up. So far, I've managed to get one of my son Andrew's articles (he works for me and writes the Reflections articles for *Communicator*) published in another journal. I am also running



a short series of advertisements that primarily promote my own business, but also mention the ISTC, the fact that we are both members and highlight the importance of good technical communication. It may or may not help promote our profession, but it won't hurt me and isn't costing me any extra.

I'm working at a couple of sites at the moment where there are in-house technical authors who aren't ISTC members, so I'm taking in a copy of *Communicator* to try to get them 'hooked' before my time with them is up. I don't know how successful I will be, but I am trying.

I had already been playing with mug designs before Margaret sent me hers, and I've now got a prototype with the ISTC logo on one side and the various area logos (Community, Resources, Professional Development and Recognition, Awards, Communicator and TCUK) on the other. I know that not everyone has access to the logos to do the same, so I repeat my earlier question: is anyone interested in any merchandise?

Showcasing excellent work

The UK Technical Communication Awards were re-launched last year with new categories. This is not only a great way of recognising the work of some extremely talented individuals and teams but also a way of promoting the value of good technical communication to a wider audience. Entry is open to everyone, and the feedback you get from your peers is invaluable, whether you win or not.

It's always gratifying when the value of the work you do is recognised. I take pride in my work: to me, working to the best of my ability is part of that elusive quality known as 'professionalism'.

Over the years, I've been involved in a few contracts where I've been brought in because there's been a contractual requirement to provide user guidance materials, the development team is already at full-stretch, and I'm cheaper than bringing in a contracting software developer to ease the pressure. Not a great way to start. In a couple of cases,

my final job was to interview for a full-time technical author because I'd shown the value we bring. It meant the end of that particular contract, but it still felt like success.

A balancing act

Someone commented recently that the ISTC was becoming much more 'corporate', and equated this with 'distant'. I sincerely hope this isn't the impression you have: we want to be perceived as professional but not at the cost of appearing unapproachable. Personally, I have always found everyone very helpful and friendly, from Elaine and the team in the office to the people who contribute to the discussion list.

We need to cater for *all* our members, and that's no easy task. We know that different people access and use the ISTC in different ways, and that's OK. For example, the discussion groups comprise a sub-set of the membership as a whole, as do those who attend local area events or the annual conference, and although there is some overlap, they aren't the same people. This shouldn't be (and isn't) a surprise. We have very different levels of experience. We range from sole technical communicators through to those working in large organisations in technical communication teams, and everything in between. Add different working patterns to the mix (full-time or part-time employee, contractor or freelance) and it's no wonder we're looking for different things. And that's before taking sector into account. Or personal preference, for that matter.

The only way we know whether we are meeting your needs or not is if you tell us. Katherine regularly asks for ideas for articles for *Communicator*. This doesn't necessarily mean you have to do the writing (although you'd be more than welcome, I'm sure), but trying to decide what someone else might like is not an enviable task. There are always some articles that are not so relevant to me. If that wasn't the case, I'd be worried: a journal that appeared to cater 100% to my needs probably isn't meeting the needs of others very well at all.

Technical Communication UK

We're off to Glasgow for TCUK this year, at the lovely Beardmore Hotel. See you there? **C**

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