



# Technicalities

Newsletter of the Rocky Mountain Chapter of the Society for Technical Communication

April/May 2006

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SOCIETY FOR  
TECHNICAL  
COMMUNICATION

Creating and supporting a forum for communities of practice in the profession of technical communication.

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## Technicalities

This site is best viewed with Internet Explorer 5x or above.

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Managing Editor: Ron Arner

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Article Editors: Bridget Julian, Jay Mead, Lynnette Reveling

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Newsletter design by Steve Kavalec and Ron Arner

Technicalities is published bi-monthly by the Rocky Mountain Chapter (RMC) of the Society for Technical Communication (STC) and is distributed to chapter members, editors of other STC newsletters, and officers of the Society. It is available on request to anyone interested in technical communication. Other STC chapters and publications may reprint material if credit is given.

This newsletter invites writers to submit articles that they wish to be considered for publication.

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Readers are encouraged to submit material on subjects of interest to Society and chapter members. Please credit repeated material and send a copy of the original material to: [news@stcrmc.org](mailto:news@stcrmc.org).

The editor can be reached during the day at 303.956.1906, by e-mail at [news@stcrmc.org](mailto:news@stcrmc.org), and by postal mail at 820 S. Monaco Pkwy. #286, Denver, CO, 80224. Please submit electronic files in ASCII text format and include a telephone number where you can be reached. If you need to mail or fax articles and/or artwork, please contact the editor for a mailing address and fax number. The deadline for article submission is one month prior to issue release (first of the month, every other month).

The *Technicalities* staff reserves the right to edit articles for clarity and length; substantive editing of feature articles will be reviewed with the author prior to publication.

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### **STC RMC SIG Managers**

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Rocky Mountain Chapter

Society for Technical Communication

820 S. Monaco Pkwy. #286

Denver, CO 80224

[info@stcrmc.org](mailto:info@stcrmc.org)

### **Job Postings**

Send job postings to [jobs@stcrmc.org](mailto:jobs@stcrmc.org)

Jobs are posted on the chapter website ([http://www.stcrmc.org/jobs\\_freelance.jobs.htm](http://www.stcrmc.org/jobs_freelance.jobs.htm)), and are emailed to the techcomm-discuss mailing list.

### Chapter website

<http://www.stcrmc.org>

### STC International Office

901 N. Stuart Street, Suite 904

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703.522.4114

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## Chapter News

### Welcome to Our New Members

New, transferred, or returning members for the months of February and March, 2006:

#### February 2006

- Erinn Agras
- Jonathan E. Eng
- Laura L. Fink
- Laura A. Hartman
- Tonia L. Sharp
- Kari Treleaven

#### March 2006

- Barbara J. Gstalder
- Jessica N. Hausman
- Jim E. Hayhurst
- Jennifer Mattie
- Richar L. McConatha
- Deborah J. McConnell
- Larry J. Prado
- Gena L. Souza
- Debbie Tester
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## Tips from the Trenches

by [Deb Lockwood](#)

Paper or plastic? or "Paper or vapor"? This was a question that I posted recently to my fellow technical communicators asking whether they prefer to read documentation on paper or online.

I love paper copies of books. There's something so satisfying about being able to touch the paper, to hear the pages turn. Plus, if the document is full of reference material I will usually stick a Post-It Note on a relevant page so that it is easy to find again.

And although documentation has been going online for several years, I still find it difficult to read and concentrate for any length of time using a computer monitor. In fact, I find it more difficult as the years go by and my eyes age.

From an environmental perspective, the impact of printing on paper is substantial. More than 100 million tons of paper is printed in the United States every year (according to a study on the Society for Neuroscience's Web site at [www.sfn.org](http://www.sfn.org)). And "although the USA represents less than five percent of the world's population, it consumes more than a quarter of the world's paper and printed products." That number certainly gives one pause.

The questions I asked were:

- Which do you prefer: paper copy or online?
- If you have made the switch to online, what tips can you share with those of us who haven't (e.g., resolution, monitor type, darkened room)?
- Do you both read and edit online?
- Anything else you want to share about this topic?

I would like to thank my fellow RMC members who shared their insights. Their contributions appear below in alphabetical order.

**Cynthia Arbuckle**

I actually prefer paper documentation because I love books, but if the online help is good, I also like to get a quick answer.

Here's a tip: use a font that's easy to read onscreen, and make it large enough for those of us with aging eyes. Make it procedural in nature. If I have to read a lot, I'd rather have a book.

I read online, but when I do my final edits, I do it on paper. The onscreen version looks too pretty, and I miss errors that way.

For several years we produced only online help for our applications. Now we're going back to producing both online help and hardcopy guides. It's easier and less expensive now, because the Portable Document Format (PDF) has become so prevalent. If you give the end users a PDF of the docs, they can print it themselves!

### **Ron Arner**

Which do I prefer: paper copy or online? It depends. For any lengthy reading and final editing, I prefer paper. For short reading/research, I stick with online to avoid wasting paper.

I like a darkened room; I feel the light from the monitor is more than enough. Also, at work, where I can't dim the lights, I use an ergonomic task light over my monitor to help diffuse the glare from fluorescent lighting.

I used to print everything out but I am trying to be more environmentally friendly.

### **Marella Colyvas**

I do about a 60-40 mix, the higher percentage online. It depends on what I'm reading. If it's a novel, poetry, personal development, or general non-fiction, it has to be a paper book. I love the feel of certain types of paper and the weight of the book in my hands!

But if it's news, work information, technical papers, or even school assignments, I do all that reading online. Part of the reason is expediency—I used to print everything, but now I find that a very inefficient process. When I do print articles, managing the paper is difficult; for me, it becomes a never-ending, messy battle. Despising three-ring binders doesn't help.

I also find that if I don't read something online when it becomes available, the illusion of printing and reading it "at leisure" is just that—an illusion. It never happens. If I print it, I put it in a pile and forget about it, adding to the clutter problem. So if I have to read it, or want to and don't think it'll take long, I read it online. If not, well, I guess I didn't really need to read it after all and it goes in the bit bucket.

I do 99% of my editing online; writing, about 85% (the journal and morning pages, when I do them, I still do on paper).

Tips for reading online: Sans-serif font, window size large enough to aid those aging eyes, and bright resolution (but that's me, I like tons of light—my home office gets warm just from the computer, monitor, and high wattage of light I use). A dream of mine is to get a plasma screen monitor, but it's not a high priority.

### **Thomas L'Dara**

I prefer to read from paper, and do whenever possible. Final reviews are always done with paper. I do read and edit online for Web pages and online help.

### **Lynn French**

I've been writing mostly online documentation since the late 90s, but I still prefer paper myself. If I have to read something that requires concentration, I always print it. The same is true for editing.

I do think online documentation is OK for quick reference information, and I like having electronic versions of documentation for easy searching or copy/paste, but not to just read.

One thing I really dislike in online documentation is small chunks in many different files all linked together. I don't think it works well for online use and it certainly doesn't for printing! I know the small chunk paradigm is popular with some folks, but not with me. When I create documentation that doesn't have strict format requirements (e.g., internal documentation), I like to create it with both online and printed use in mind.

### **Linda Gallagher**

Paper copy or online? It depends. If I'm working in a software product, I'll check the online help to find out how to complete a task or what an option means. However, if I need to really study the information (as when I'm going to teach a class or really need to learn a process and retain it), I prefer print.

I do love my 21" LCD monitor, but it has not had any effect on whether I read online help.

I'll read short documents online, such as a short response to a question or source information from a client. However, if the document is more than a couple of pages or contains key source information that I need to delve into deeply or check off that I've used, I'll print.

If I'm editing or proofing a formal document for a client, I always work from print. If I'm editing something less formal that's short (such as an

STC article for someone else or feedback on a resume), I'll edit online.

My pet peeve is "online" documents or Web pages (by definition they're online) that use a serif font, like Times New Roman. They're hard to read and are not really for online use. One key product I use (I won't name it, but many of us use it for long books) has all of its so-called online help in Times New Roman. It's a real pain to read.

## Al Kemp

I always prefer to read printed materials. As I state on page 14 of my White Paper Writing Guide (free download from [www.ImpactOnTheNet.com/wp-guide.html](http://www.ImpactOnTheNet.com/wp-guide.html)), the resolution of a computer screen is 8-16% of laser printing and 2-4% of offset printing.

Of course, there is a huge amount of free material available online. The Internet is a vast, though not always accurate, encyclopedia.

When I'm reading online, I sometimes use my browser options to enlarge the type. Too many designers make the text too small because it looks good that way.

Also, I blink a lot, and I usually drink something. Focusing on the beverage container breaks up the eyestrain. I follow the usual rules about not having a bright light source directly behind the monitor. I have a diffused light source behind the monitor, and I like a fair amount of ambient light. Dark rooms increase my eyestrain.

My 20" CRT is set to 1152 x 870 resolution with a 75 Hz refresh rate. I hate small displays. I have been told that LCD displays are better, but I haven't been willing to pay for a large LCD yet. Plus, the CRT makes a great space heater in winter!

Although I often wordsmith online, I do a lot of substantial editing and rewriting off-line. Writing on paper is not only more intuitive for me, it helps control repetitive strain injury (RSI). I suffer from RSI in both wrists; writing by hand exercises different muscles than typing and mousing. Also, I tend to get caught up editing words when I'm working online. When I settle down with pen and paper, I am much more likely to rethink the ideas. At one job I was known as the Laserhog because I am so fond of editing printed materials by hand.

I don't want you to get the wrong idea, though. There was no handwriting involved in this e-mail message. I composed it 100 percent online!

## Marsha Lofthouse

I still prefer paper copy when I'm reading for understanding. I also prefer to edit a paper copy. However, with Acrobat's relatively new editing tools, I'm starting to prefer to receive edits of my docs online.

## **Karen Miller**

Paper! I'm afraid I'm old fashioned. I haven't tried to read a whole book online and suspect I wouldn't be able to stand it.

I do find it helpful when I'm editing online to change the size of the document, especially if I'm going to look over it more than once. For example, I might do my first pass at 108% and then a second pass at 120%. I don't like working in a darkened room.

I do most of my work editing online unless it's something critical. I find that I miss more typos online than on paper (although online editing is a lot faster than printing a copy, marking it, and then typing in changes online).

Tips? Just the old advice about taking frequent breaks to rest your eyes and take the kinks out of your neck, shoulders, and fingers. It does help, but it sure is hard to remember to do, especially if you have a tight deadline!

## **Martha Sippel**

The developers I used to work with insisted that we turn off the fluorescent lights in large areas with cubicles. I hate reading online—squinting to see my computer monitor in the bright light of my office—and love paper books.

## **Hugh Templeton**

I prefer to edit on paper, but almost half of my editing is online. I find that I must take a break a little more often when editing online (my eyes get tired more easily), but that my editing speed is about the same as on paper.

I prefer a slightly darkened area to edit online, but often do not get it. At work, I turn off the lights in my cube to reduce the glare on the screen. Also, when I edit online, I use FrameMaker or Adobe Acrobat (full version). When using Acrobat, I always highlight the text to be changed, and then use the Notes feature to make the actual change. You can use the Notes by themselves, but I have found that it's easier to find that actual spot of the change if you also use highlight.

If something is short, I usually read it online (unless it contains information I must use as reference in several locations). If something is several pages, and if I am reading just for fun, I do it on paper. If I am reading several pages for work, I prefer paper but often don't have a choice since a lot of work stuff comes in emails and attachments, and it's much quicker to read it online than to print and then read it on paper.

I usually beef up the size of the text (110 to 125% of normal) when

reading online, because of the resolution of the monitor and because it makes the reading easier on my eyes. If I think I have found something in the document that got sized way too small (it shows up as a dot or Greeking), I zoom in until I can determine what it is. However, if something is long and involved, and if I want to make several passes at it or have it ready as source information for something I am writing, I print it to keep it available on paper.

The older I get, the more I want to stay with paper—simply because the monitor flicker gets to me more easily (and my monitor is really good).

## Tammy Van Boening

Paper, paper, paper—to read and edit. Reading because I can't get comfortable sitting upright—I need to be able to adjust the book, to slouch, etc. Also, if I need to return to a previous page, it's a lot easier to paperclip/bookmark a true page rather than a virtual one, and it's much easier to flip back and forth between the compared pages and keep your point of reference straight.

Editing: paper because you get a much better perspective of layout, form, etc. and you can easily mark where you left off on a paper copy vs. online.

I don't know many people who prefer total online to printed paper—like, for example, trying to use Mif-2-Go's online document, because it was written for online only and does not flow sequentially. It jumps all over the place and if you want to print something coherent out, forget it—there are no page numbers, no flows, and it's a mess. Sometimes the "convenience" of no paper is much more of an inconvenience.

*Contributors: Cynthia Arbuckle, Ron Arner, Marella Colyvas, Thomas L'Dara, Lynn French, Linda Gallagher, Al Kemp, Marsha Lofthouse, Karen Miller, Martha Sippel, Hugh Templeton, Tammy Van Boening*



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## The Year in Review

by [Marella Colyvas](#), STC RMC President

Dear Members,

It is difficult to believe that the STC RMC "year" is almost over. Even so, we have some fabulous programs coming up. We have a Contracting and Independent Consulting (CIC) SIG meeting scheduled for May 31 where members will learn how to create and/or brush up on their "elevator speech." To sign up, please go to the booking site <http://www.acteva.com/booking.cfm?bevaid=110307>. Any questions, contact Linda Whitney ([lindag@techcomplus.com](mailto:lindag@techcomplus.com)) or Whitney Broach ([Whitney@BroachServices.com](mailto:Whitney@BroachServices.com)). Good hors d'oeuvres will be served.

On June 3, we have a very special seminar planned—STC FrameMaker Beginning to Intermediate Workshop. Three of your local colleagues who are experts in FrameMaker are teaching a one-day workshop for the low, low membership price of \$140.00, plus cost of the text that you must purchase yourself or download. Contact Bette Frick for details ([efrick@textdoctor.com](mailto:efrick@textdoctor.com)). Non-members may also sign up for \$165.00. Sign up for this excellent educational event at <http://www.acteva.com/booking.cfm?bevaid=110303>.

We have had a marvelous set of programs this year, thanks to the hard work of our program managers Martha Sippel and Frank Tagader. There was the irrepressible Jack Molisani, who challenged us to make six figures in technical communication (I'm still not there); Dave Taylor, who not only gave us insights on how to use blogs as truly meaningful communication, but who was also able to use his technical wizardry and connect to the internet when the building's wireless did not work; insightful Larry Marine, who showed us how to divide the user-centered design process into problem solving and solution creation, so that the product follows Ready, Aim, Fire, rather than the traditional Ready, Fire, Aim; delightful Whitney Quesenbury, who taught us about personas and how they can improve usability testing; Bonnie Biafore, who showed us how to make the most of Project "YOU", as each of us has to take care of and hone ourselves before we can give our products and service to the world; Bill Horton, who entertained and enlightened the senior members at the senior member dinner about heroes, villains, and fools in technical communication; and last but not least, the erudite Ginny Redish, who showed us through insightful examples how websites can be improved

through usability testing.

It has been a fascinating year. For those of you who were unable to attend this year's STC Conference in Las Vegas and are curious, you might be interested in reading a day-to-day blog on the conference written by Matthew Arnold Stern, a member from California: [http://people.lulu.com/blogs/view.php?blog\\_id=13863](http://people.lulu.com/blogs/view.php?blog_id=13863). I'll bet it is a good read for those who were able to attend, as well. You might consider starting your own blog and giving us your impressions! Although I could not attend this year, I am all but certain that the sessions were as challenging, exciting, and educational as they have always been. STC rarely fails to deliver.

I have enjoyed being your president. My (and the entire STC RMC Council's) goal was to have good programs and at least one seminar for you, the members, this year. I think we have, without a doubt, succeeded on that account. What I ask, in closing, is that you support your STC Rocky Mountain Community by 1) giving your whole-hearted support to the new officers; 2) tell us what we can do to make your membership even more meaningful; and 3) plan to attend as many meetings as you can, and give us feedback. We willingly serve as your officers; and, we cannot do our work without your input.

Thanks for a great year!



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## Message from the Editor

by [Ron Arner](#)

As a means of job security, I like to explore ways that technical communication is being or could be used in the world today. With the advent of online banking, electronic funds transfers, and online services such as [PayPal](#), many new opportunities exist in the financial sector for technical communicators.

My investigation into the prospect of financial writing led me to review the basics of Economics, and in turn I became curious about how money itself was invented. I'm not talking about supply and demand, the Stock Exchange, or the current percentage rate. I'm asking at what point in history, and how, did humankind transition from bartering for goods and services to using money to obtain them? What caused this transition to take place, and how can it help us better understand the concept of digital cash<sup>1</sup>?

In a barter economy, one good or service is exchanged for another good or service, plain and simple. At some point in time a certain good or service became universally valuable, acceptable in any barter situation, and valued above all else. Was this the first form of money? Was this done willingly or by force?

Since the first form of money was cattle<sup>2</sup>, the transition probably came about simply out of necessity. Everyone needed milk, a beast of burden, and meat, so cattle became an agreed upon standard of value. This equation is now electronic and more complex, with bits and bytes representing the amount of cash you have on hand. Like any form of new technology, users need user manuals to understand how to work with electronic money, and online help systems to know how to navigate a site. In addition, the need for database driven Websites has skyrocketed with the popularity of online commerce. Online advertising hasn't hurt Marketing professionals either.

So what's been good for the economy has literally been good for technical communicators, no pun intended. Does increased use of digital cash mean that we hold the keys to economic prosperity? I find myself hoping so every time I fill up my car. While the equation may not be so simple, we've certainly seen indications that the tide is turning in our favor. (See the summary of the *Money Magazine* article that lists technical writing as a hot job by [clicking](#)

[here.](#))

Ultimately, I'm once again reminded that technical communicators will best prosper if they can adapt their skills to whatever the hot job market of the day is. If nothing else, I've also learned a new strategy to employ in the case of economic hardship: buy a few cattle, and start over from the beginning.

### Sources

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/moolah/digitalcash.html>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/moolah/history.html>



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## Creating Metada—a Quick Checklist

by [Suzanne Mescan](#)

Metadata is your friend.

Too many technical writers consider metadata to be just one more thing they need to worry about. Used poorly, it is. Used well, it is a technical writer's best friend. It can make content more organized and more efficient to search and reuse.

### Start by defining what content you have

#### Define Your Content

The key is to start big and work your way down. Define what type of content you have; then break it down into meaningful and reusable pieces of content. For example:

1. Lawn Mower Documentation
  - a. User Manuals
    - i. Model numbers
    - ii. Parts diagrams
    - iii. Procedures
    - iv. Cautions and warnings
  - b. Parts Catalogs
    - i. Part numbers
    - ii. Parts diagrams
    - iii. Assembly instructions
    - iv. Model numbers

#### Organize Your Content

Defining your content allows you to see your content reuse potential and to

better organize your content. In this example, you may want to consider storing your parts diagrams and model numbers as a separate collection of content since they are used in both the user manuals and parts catalogs:

### Parts diagrams

Graphic 1  
Graphic 2  
Graphic 3

### Model numbers

Model A  
Model B  
Model C

Then this content can be stored one time, located easily for reuse, and managed for future updates and revisions. Remember to organize your content in the way in which it is reused, not the way in which it is published!

### Apply Useful Metadata

Consider the following:

- How will you want to search for this content? By author? By model number? By the size of the engine? By the date it was written? Make sure key search criteria are included in the metadata.
- How does each piece of content relate to other content? If you change one piece, what else will need to be updated? Such relationships can be expressed in the content's metadata.
- Do you need to process or calculate on this content? Maybe it is useful for your department to be able to count all of the part descriptions that go into a given manual. Add that number to the metadata ("part description = 12").
- What tool should your technical writers use to edit the content: FrameMaker or MSWord? What will the output be: Print, PDF and/or HTML? Clearly identify input and output in the metadata so there are no questions.

### Tips

- Use naming conventions consistently! For example, use "Model number, retired" instead of "Retired model number" for better sorting and easier searching.
- Use metadata in a way that is useful for your department, not the organization next door.
- Make sure that everyone in the department is educated on and thoroughly understands your naming convention and metadata protocol.

### Is it worth it to bring in an outside consultant?

For many companies, yes it is. They find it very useful to have an outside expert opinion assist in strategy development. However, it is also possible to create your metadata strategy on your own if you do some research on how your content is used by your team and plan accordingly.

**Suzanne Mescan**

Suzanne Mescan, Vice President of Marketing for [Vasont Systems](#), is responsible for the Company's overall marketing and public relations efforts. Suzanne most recently served as the Vice President and General Manager of Progressive Publishing Alternatives, a sister division of Vasont Systems offering project management, editorial and design services. Prior to joining Vasont Systems, Suzanne was a Marketing Analyst at Advanta. In this role, she was responsible for product planning, advertising, and the promoting of financial services. Suzanne earned a bachelor's of science degree in Marketing from The Pennsylvania State University.



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## Wiki A, B, and Cs

by [Gloria McConnell](#) Reprinted with permission from [Rough Draft](#), newsletter of the Phoenix Chapter of the STC

"Techwr-I and other lists have been buzzing with comments and questions about wikis and Twikis; [could you] present in an upcoming *Tooling Around*" wrote one *Rough Draft* reader. Very good topic; without further adieu, here are some basic details about some of that buzz...

[What is a wiki?](#)

[What does "wiki" stand for?](#)

[What about accuracy?](#)

[How about TWiki?](#)

[Who else is out there? What features exist?](#)

[How can a wiki be used?](#)

Although I had used wikis and could give a basic definition before this article was written, much of it is my impression of the information I've found in researching the topic. I've tried to credit my research sources. It's entirely possible that I've misinterpreted something, however; anyone with greater knowledge is invited to set the record straight! Send an email to [gloria.mcconnell@honeywell.com](mailto:gloria.mcconnell@honeywell.com).

### What is a wiki?



hyperlinks, is the wiki." Wiki also refers to the software

According to the Wikipedia (by far the most prominent public wiki), a *wiki* is a Web site where documents can be "written collectively in a very simple markup language using a web browser. Individual pages in this environment are 'wiki pages,' while the entire body of pages, which are usually highly interconnected via

(the "engine") that facilitates the operation of such a Web site. Wiki's inventor, Ward Cunningham, called it *"the simplest online database that could possibly work."*

From the first wiki site, created just over a decade ago and dubbed "wikiwikiweb" : "Wiki' is a composition system; it's a discussion medium; it's a repository; it's a mail system; it's a tool for collaboration... it's a fun way of communicating asynchronously across the network." (<http://c2.com/cgi/wiki>)

Wikipedia includes a very good write-up on wiki fundamentals, and it demonstrates a wiki as it explains, so you do not need me to cover the same territory. If wikis are new to you, see the Wiki entry at that site [www.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wiki](http://www.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wiki).

My research indicates that most wikis exist in the business and academic environments; whether we will see a growth of public wikis like Wikipedia is unclear.

### **What does "wiki" stand for?**

Wiki is not an acronym or abbreviation; as you can learn from Wikipedia, the name is derived from the Hawaiian term "wiki," which means "quick."

The "quick" in wiki is not about response time or transmission speed; with a wiki, what is fast is the speed with which pages can be created and/or updated. If you are reading a wiki page and see an error, in many cases you can edit the offending page on the spot.

### **How accurate are they?**

If anyone can edit wiki pages, how do we know they are accurate? We don't. Wikipedia itself acknowledges the risk: "Its open nature allows vandalism, inaccuracy, inconsistency, uneven quality, and unsubstantiated opinions." Some constraints exist—typical users cannot delete pages, for example, but the main source of validation is the vigilance of wiki users themselves.

Since its inception, Wikipedia's accuracy has come under scrutiny. Last year, several issues were raised focusing on both accuracy and bias of certain articles. A study by *Nature* magazine, however, revealed that science articles in Wikipedia are about as accurate as those found in Encyclopedia Britannica. ([Internet encyclopaedias go head to head](#), December 2005)

If necessary, most wiki engines include administrative features that allow you to set permissions for the editing of pages. Limiting who can change a page to specific users is one way to minimize errors.

### **How about Twiki™**

TWiki is the trademarked name for an Open Source Wiki platform for "TWikiSites." Key benefits of TWiki are easy revision control—every change ever made to a page can be tracked—and availability of access control lists.

These features make it well suited for corporate wiki sites.

(Side note: The name "TWiki" is capitalized unusually to deliberately distinguish it from "Twiki," a character from the old Buck Rogers TV series.)

## Who else is out there? What features exist?

In addition to TWiki, many other wiki engines exist (over 200 according to some sources)—*Confluence*, *Dolphin Wiki*, *Moin Moin*, *XWiki*, to name a few. The feature list for them all is significant and varies from wiki to wiki. If you are interested in a summary of products and features, return to Wikipedia and see the [Comparison of wiki software](#) article.

## Features for wiki administration

From an administrative standpoint, many wikis provide the ability to password-protect pages, restrict users, and provide various level of administrative control. Others, however, allow open access to the entire wiki.

Because all wikis are open source, any wiki can potentially adopt features found in other wikis by simply accessing and customizing the source code. Some wikis allow the development and use of plug-ins for specialized purposes, such as enhanced editing, sending of email, and many, many more (depending on the wiki).

## Features for wiki contributors

Most wikis use the same basic page formatting functions (i.e., text editing and image, table, list, hyperlink, and file insertion). Features that are aimed at wiki contributors include inter-wiki linking, link checking, archiving, a "sandbox" area to practice formatting, and user support. Some wikis provide a WYSIWYG editor, spell-check, and/or features such as drawing tools or equation editors.

## Features for wiki users

The following features are primarily for the user who is seeking information, but may not be planning to contribute: a search function (either title or text search may be possible), friendly print capability, page index or topic list, tabbed format providing an article (topic page), discussion area (would say it's similar to a blog), edit history, and ability to compare selected versions.

## How can a wiki be used?

A wiki might not typically be used for traditional user documentation, which is often considered validated information regarding a specific release of a specific product. But think about it... If you post a PDF in a wiki article, you could allow appropriate users to add comments in the article's discussion area. The discussion can be monitored and the PDF updated as needed. (You, the document author, could also explain or defend something you've done.) The wiki's history area tracks each time you update the PDF; it might include

specific details regarding changes you make.

Or, you could take the TWiki approach and incorporate document content right into the wiki itself. See [TWiki Documentation](#) for an example.

A wiki can definitely be used as a document management tool. Other possible uses include those listed in the following table. Is this all? Of course not!

Use	Discussion
Company intranet	<p>Because content is maintained by employees, the theory is that outdated and inadequate intranet content can be minimized.</p> <p>The reality may be different. Employees everywhere are busy; wiki organization can suffer; personality issues/ disagreements may exist. Formal responsibilities may need to be assigned for the monitoring and update of wiki content; write access to various topics may be needed.</p> <p>For other opinions on potential pitfalls, see the TECHWR-L. For example, technical writer Joe Malin writes "Wikipedia also illustrates the most important part of a wiki: moderation/ editing. An unmoderated, unedited wiki will quickly devolve into a morass of unorganized pages with excessive duplication. I have seen at least one internal wiki exhibit this behavior." (<a href="#">RE: Getting started with wiki?</a> February 2006)</p> <p>In fact, keep these sorts of pitfalls in mind when reading the remainder of this table.</p>
Knowledge base or FAQ system	<p>This usage seems like a perfect match for a wiki. With proper organization and monitoring, support engineers can enter information and solutions about the problems they encounter every day. Customers may be allowed to enter discussion groups as well. Instead of all of that knowledge residing in each engineer's head, the wiki makes it possible for all appropriate users to find it when needed.</p>

Software design and documentation	<p>One of the original and highest uses of wikis, because they allow easy collaboration, tracking, and recordkeeping. Here's what Eric Baldeschwieler, Director of Software Development of Yahoo!, had to say:</p> <p>"We use TWiki internally to manage documentation and project planning for our products... Our development team includes hundreds of people in various locations all over the world, so web collaboration is VERY important to us. TWiki has changed the way we run meetings, plan releases, document our product and generally communicate with each other." (<a href="http://twiki.org/">http://twiki.org/</a>, quote from 2004)</p>
Tracking issues ("bugs") and features	<p>The TWiki Codev site itself is managed this way. Codev is TWiki's main collaboration area for TWiki development. For a taste, see the <a href="#">Codev home page</a>, and click the <b>Bugs changes</b> link.</p>
Broader collaboration	<p>Follows naturally from discussions above.</p>
Software or documentation archive	<p>Ditto above discussions. Sometimes wiki archiving is compared to programs such as Lotus Notes; wikis are much easier to use.</p>
Internal message board	<p>For example, use a wiki for job listings. That type of message board would definitely need restrictions as to who could post or change information.</p> <p>What about a company carpooling message board, though?</p>

Hope that this introductory article on wikis has been helpful to you. If you have wiki experience, please send us some info about your experiences!



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## Technical Writing is *Money Magazine's* "Lucky Number 13"

by [Maurice Martin](#), STC Communication Director

*Money Magazine* and [Salary.com](#) have just released a new list of the 50 "Best Jobs in America"—and *technical writing* landed at number 13! What's more, two other job titles used by STC members—*curriculum developer* and *editor*—scored numbers 18 and 19, respectively.

In evaluating the jobs, *Money* used such criteria as salary, growth, stress levels and flexibility in hours. You can view the complete list at: <http://money.cnn.com/magazines/moneymag/bestjobs/top50/index.html>

The list is targeted at those considering a career change, but how does it help you, the practicing technical communicator? You can use the list to publicize what you do and the current industry recognition it's receiving! Consider bringing the list to the attention of your manager or supervisor. Other recipients might include your internal or external customer organizations, and perhaps your company newsletter and Website as well.

At the very least, the list is a prestigious acknowledgement of the rising profile of technical communicators. So, spread the word! And, congratulations—you have one of the "Best Jobs in America"!



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## Making the Most of Project You: February Chapter Meeting Review

by [Ron Arner](#)

In February, members of the STC RMC met to hear author, speaker, and trainer Bonnie Biafore talk about the most important project you'll ever have to work on: Project You.

Biafore first outlined three keys to success you will need in order to make your project successful:

- Identifying Success
- Building Success
- Managing Success



Bonnie Biafore shares her thoughts on *How To Make the Most of Project You* to a captive audience at the February chapter meeting.

## The Three Successes

The first key to success begins by identifying what success means to you. Where are you going? What are your objectives? What are your customers' objectives? What you're shooting for is a gameplan in which your goals are aligned with your customers' so that you have a win-win situation.

The second key to success, Building Success, is delivering quality, pure and simple. This can mean going above and beyond your customers' expectations. There are times, of course, when we simply can't deliver what's expected. Biafore recommends coming up with an alternate plan if this occurs, and then communicating that plan to your client ASAP!

The third key to success is Balancing Success. Success does not come without time commitments. In fact, the more successful you are the less free time you may have. Biafore believes the best way to keep success from taking over your life is to:

- Know your goals
- Plan
- Focus on what's important



Members of the STC RMC enjoy a little humor with Bonnie before her presentation. From left to right: Martha Sippel, Bonnie Biafore, and Sam Omatseye.

## Planning and Tracking for Success

Biafore then shared with those present how she plans and tracks her time for success. She recommended using a PM (Project Management) tool for complex projects, and also said you should track your time even if your employer doesn't. To help you organize your time more efficiently, she suggested reading *Take Back Your Life* by Sally McGhee and *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* by Stephen Covey.

Biafore concluded her talk with more suggestions for optimizing success such as working when you're most productive and switching to something easier when you're stuck. She also gave some advice on how to further control success by weeding out unprofitable customers and learning how to say no *without* burning bridges.

If you'd like more information on Biafore's keys to success, just visit her Website at: <http://www.bonniebiafore.com/>. You'll also find a complete list of the books she's written and more on her site.



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## Don Zimmerman Receives Best Teacher Award

 by [Deb Lockwood](#)

Don Zimmerman, one of the Rocky Mountain Chapter's distinguished Fellows, received a Best Teacher award from Colorado State University (CSU) on April 21, 2006. Don is a professor in the school's Journalism and Technical Communication Department. The six recipients of this year's Best Teacher awards were selected from a pool of hundreds of professors who were nominated by CSU students, faculty, staff, and alumni.

Following is a reprint of the notice written by Kristen Deahl that was published online at <http://comment.colostate.edu> (reprinted here by permission):

Don Zimmerman, a professor in the journalism and technical communication program, is a well-respected member of the technical communication field. In addition to teaching, Zimmerman advises graduate students, tirelessly working to help them get ahead in their careers. He is a great source of encouragement to all his students and inspires them to believe that they can successfully complete a challenging master's program.

"Don works hard to provide research and teaching assistantships, to welcome new recruits and to stay connected to alumni," said an alumna. "I see Don as the central figure in our professional network today. No professor has to go that far to support his students, but Don always has."

Zimmerman is so well known and respected in the Front Range area that students who graduate with his influence on their education often have an advantage.

During my interview for my first job after finishing graduate classes in the technical journalism department, the hiring manager's most important question to me was, "Have you taken Don Zimmerman's information design class?" an alumna said. "I had. I got the job."

I would personally like to congratulate Don on receiving this award from CSU, and wish him continued good fortune. Please let him know how much you appreciate his continued support of our chapter and our profession!



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