



Technicalities

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

December 2004/January 2005

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

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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.

The editor can be reached during the day at 303.405.8122, by e-mail at 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).

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Job Postings

Send job postings to jobs@stcrmc.org

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

Chapter website

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Chapter News

January Chapter Meeting: Alternate Markets for Technical Communicators Progressive

Don't miss the [January chapter meeting](#), which will be held on January 20th at the Mile High Inn and Suites. January's meeting will be a progressive featuring representatives from six alternate markets for technical communicators. Make your reservations *now* by emailing: reservations@stcrmc.org.

Welcome Our New and Returning Members

New and returning members for the months of September and October, 2004:

September 2004

- C. David Kosakowski
- Connie LaGoy
- Michael McCandless
- Gary Null
- Robert Reed
- Dana Trancoso
- Todd Williams

October 2004

- Matthew Fiore
- Jed Rosenburg
- Andrea Spikes
- Angela Woods

STC National Election Is Approaching

STC elections will be held soon, and only members who have paid their dues by February 28, 2005, will be eligible to vote. In March, members who select to receive their election materials via email on their dues renewal form will receive the slate, candidate biographies, and voting instructions. Members who did not select this option will receive these materials by first-class mail. You can renew your STC membership at: <https://www.stc.org/onlinerenewal/stcLogin.aspx>.

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Solutions, Inc.

by [Ron Arner](#)

Some recent tips, how-to's, and advice from the Rocky Mountain Chapter Listserve:

Thread #1: Free Web Tools

I ran across a couple of very useful free Web tools that I wanted to share with you.

The Internet Archive (<http://www.archive.org/>) is an amazing place where you can find cached Web pages from many, many years ago. Useful if those cherished links in your favorites list are suddenly broken and you need one more chance to capture the content. (Also proves that simply removing a Web page does not make it go away. Can be very embarrassing to see old copies of stuff you trashed years ago.)

If you've ever wondered if someone copied your Web site content and is calling it their own, now you can quickly find out at Copyscape Online Plagiarism (<http://www.copyscape.com/>). After you've played around with the search features, spend a few moments learning more about global web rights--the bottom button on the home page takes you to <http://www.copyscape.com/campaign.php>. There you will find a Guide to Responding To Plagiarism, a public forum about plagiarism and copyright, and links to many useful resources.

Hope you find these sites useful.

Thread #2: Using/Developing Applications in Flash

(Original posting) I would appreciate any input you may have on the following questions:

1. What do you create in Flash?
2. How did you get up to speed?
3. Can you recommend any good resources (pre-built templates,

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- consultants, trainers, training products, user groups, etc.)
4. If any of you create software demos, do you use Flash or another package?
 5. If another package which one and why?

I have some experience with Flash. And there are many expert Flash developers in the area, plus excellent training resources...many world-wide resources in books, sites, etc. Your post was not clear on one point—the term 'demo (prototype)' suggests two different things—one of which Flash is good for and one of which isn't. If it's demoing existing software, then your tool of choice should be RoboDemo—now re-christened as Captivate. If it's to create fast prototypes of software that doesn't exist then Flash ***might*** be a good choice—however, there are others. In and of itself, Flash is a wonderful tool for creation of animations and presentations. However, it has a steep learning curve, and in today's Flash (with ActionScript) you really need some significant programming experience to use it efficiently. Incidentally, RoboDemo/Captivate is in itself a 'Flash Generator'—meaning that, while not requiring Flash expertise to operate, it generates Flash output (SWF) files, which play on recent Flash players.

I took a web development course (104 hrs) here at the University of Minnesota of which Flash was one subsection. It's a great tool but a steep learning curve...

RE: Software Demos

We recently started using RoboDemo and we plan to use it more often because of the success we've had. Here are the benefits for us:

- Easily create Flash demos of our software without knowing Flash. It captures the screens and automatically inserts captions based on your mouse clicks. Editing captions and mouse movements is easy too.
- Can incorporate the same demo in our Help files or embed them in FAQ pages on our customer portal.
- In some cases, creating a quick visual is faster than writing the actual description. See attached sample. It demonstrates a utility our customers use outside the software to merge older information. It doesn't have audio but you can incorporate that as well (sound increases file size and download time though). Note: The splash screen and closing screen were templates - all I did was select a template and enter the text.

I use RoboDemo (now called Captivate) to create training movies that can be viewed using Flash. (You can export the movies into a few different formats.)

The best place that I found for help was the RoboDemo community (<http://www.macromedia.com/cfusion/webforums/forum/indexcfm?forumid=67>). I

spent a lot of time just reading the postings and making notes. You'll notice a lot of expert advice from a guy named Larry, who also has a separate site on RoboDemo tips and tricks (<http://www.pcabcs.com/robo/>).

See Item #2 in this e-zine—I think you will find it very interesting, given your recent experience with Flash.

2. ANOTHER LOTUS SCREENCAM?

A reader asks: Does anyone know of a product similar to Lotus ScreenCam that will create a simple CD demo of a product that needs to be played across all PC operating systems? "It would be great if it could cross over to a Mac, but that is not totally necessary."

Responses:

<http://www.macromedia.com/software/captivate/> Michael Harris

(MHarris@international.edu) used Lotus ScreenCam extensively from 1999 to 2000 to create product demos but then became frustrated with having to start from the beginning when anything went wrong. "Also, the resulting files were so large, they really were only usable on CDs; they weren't practical for attaching to e-mails or displaying on Web sites," Harris says.

In 2001, he started using a product called FlashCam, "which was easy to edit and saved as fairly small Flash swf files." The software, he notes, was later renamed RoboDemo when eHelp Corporation bought it, and now that Macromedia owns eHelp, they call the software Captivate.

According to Harris, Captivate can record product demos and create product training. It also can export into several formats—even as a Word document with thumbnails and captions. "You can add captions, narration, clickable areas, and much more."

<http://www.qarbon.com>

Jo MacDonald (macdonald.jo@idsi.com)"highly" recommends ViewletBuilder by Qarbon in San Jose, Calif. "It is far more versatile than ScreenCam and creates far smaller files, she says. "It has a variety of output formats, including Flash files and executable files for Windows, Mac and Linux." She notes that presentations can be scaled to run on PDAs, and users also can create viewlets (animations) as automated presentations or as tutorials with user input and feedback. "The program functionality is very intuitive, and free online tutorials help new users over the rough spots."



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Tips from the Trenches

by [Deb Lockwood](#)

A technical-guru friend asked me recently whether I would like to use some of his material in this column. Being the ever-practical person that I am, my response was: "Uh, yeah!" So, my next few articles will contain tips that I have gleaned from practical experience and mostly from my guru friend (thanks, Rick). Each article will cover tips about various software applications. In this issue, we will look at some tips for Adobe FrameMaker.

Shortcuts

Following is a list of shortcuts you can use to perform common functions in FrameMaker:

To Do this	Press This key
Apply a paragraph tag	F9
Apply a character tag	F8
Add a new table row below the current row	CTRL+ENTER
Zoom to 100%	ESC z z
Open the Cross-Reference dialog box	ESC s c
Open the Variables dialog box "As is"	ESC s v
Use tabs within a table window	ESC+TAB
Shrink wrap a graphic	ESC m p
Select the next character	ESC h c
Select the next word	ESC h w
Select the current line	ESC h l
Select the current sentence	ESC h s
Select the current paragraph	ESC h p
Change dialog box settings to "As Is"	CTRL+F8

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Switch to the next open window

CTRL+TAB

Open the Hypertext dialog box

ESC s h

Copy Special

Use the **Copy Special** commands on the **Edit** menu to speed up your work. The **Copy Special** command has the following options:

- Paragraph Format
- Character Format
- Conditional Text Settings
- Table Column Width

After you use **Copy Special**, do a regular paste to paste the settings you want.

Paste Special

You can also use the **Paste Special** commands on the **Edit** menu to speed up your work. Use the **Paste Special** command to paste special items in different formats. For example, use **Paste Special** to paste paragraphs you have copied from Microsoft Word. You can then edit the paragraphs in FrameMaker, which you can't do if you did a regular paste with the paragraph.

1. Copy text in Word.
2. In FrameMaker, select **Edit | Paste Special**.
3. Select **Rich Text Format** or **Text**.
4. Click **Ok**.

Advanced Find/Change

You can use the **Find/Change** dialog box to find and replace more than text. Try using it for the following items:

- Text
- Character Format
- Paragraph Tag
- Character Tag
- Any Marker
- Marker of Type
- Marker Text
- Any Cross-Reference
- Cross-Reference of Format
- Unresolved Cross-Reference
- Any Text Inset
- Unresolved Text Inset
- Any Publisher
- Any Variable
- Variable of Name
- Anchored Frame
- Footnote

- Any Table
- Table Tag
- Conditional Text
- Automatic Hyphen
- Text & Character Formats on Clipboard

In the Find/Change dialog box, you can use the **Change** pull-down menu to change items in the following ways:

- To Text
- To Character Format
- By Pasting

Bold/Italics

Always use character tags for bold and italics. When you use the bold and italics buttons on the toolbar, the character settings aren't always visible in the PDF files.

Contributor: Rick A. Henkel, <http://frameuser.blogspot.com/>.



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New Year's Resolutions for Technical Communicators

 by [Marc Lee](#), President, Rocky Mountain Chapter

As we begin a New Year, it's traditional—and useful—to resolve to improve and do better in all we do: the New Year's Resolution. Let me propose 10 resolutions as technical communicators we should all consider for the coming year:

1. Strive For Excellence In Our Work Products

Technical communication as an industry does not always enjoy the best reputation for communicating clearly and concisely the information our readers/users need or want at a given moment. Information relevant to a problem is hard to find, and when found, not easy to understand. We all know the story.

Folks, this is *our problem!* Let's own up to it. Nothing short of excellence in communicating must be our goal.

Let us resolve to attain excellence in anticipating our readers'/users' needs, to organize for the user's mental framework, and to be clear and simple in all we produce. This may mean soliciting feedback, extra edits, trials and usability tests—because no communication product—whether manual, curriculum design, marketing brochure, or spec—is really done until the reader or user finds or understands the information.

Also, excellence really requires perfection (or near-perfection) in all the mechanical aspects of our manuals, CBTs, specifications, brochures, or other work output. Resolve: no spelling, grammatical, pagination, reference, consistency or other production errors in anything we work on. None. Nada.

2. Understand the Big Picture; Then Fit In

Unless you're Isaac Asimov, your technical communication product probably does not exist in a vacuum or as a standalone artifact. We're

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all part of a big picture, whether we're employees in a big organization or independent consultants brought in from the outside. In either case, very likely you're part of a commercial/technical process that may include software or hardware products, product manufacturing, engineering, marketing, product sales, distribution, retail sales, and finance. It may involve creating procedures for people halfway around the world with expectations that are hard to anticipate. Figure out how your piece of the puzzle fits with the other pieces. Don't compete; complete...find an approach that works for the big picture as well as fitting your immediate agenda. Strategic thinking by technical communicators will—at times find resonance, maybe even appreciation, elsewhere in your organization.

3. **Strive for Professional Development**

Perhaps you know of a professional in your company, in STC or other organization, whom you admire. Perhaps you admire their professionalism, the quality of their work, their ability to lead others, or their knowledge of some aspect of the business. Emulate them. Talk to them. Find out what they do to stay excellent in all they do. Then attempt to follow the model. Learn a new tool, take classes, volunteer as a member (or leader) of a team. Always align yourself with those most excellent in our business.

4. **Develop a Specialty**

Being a 'generalist' may sound cool at times, but as you grow in the business, you'll learn that it can be divided into dozens, if not hundreds, of highly specialized skill sets. People like to work with experts. Resolve to become one.

It needn't be that esoteric. Look around you. What aspect of the work really interests you? Maybe it's web page development for Linux browsers, maybe it's editing specifically for on-line text, maybe it's organizing useful databases, and maybe it's working with cross-functional teams whose members have conflicting agendas or mind-sets. Resolve to become an expert in that niche or aspect. Sure, there is a risk involved in picking a niche. Realize, however, that the bigger risk is in not picking one. Then, start reading up on that aspect of the business; go to lectures, take a class. Volunteer in this area around the office. You'll start developing a reputation as an expert.

5. **Resolve to be a Business Person**

Technical communication is either a business or part of one. Recognize the business drivers of technical communication where you work or with your clients. Maybe it's speed of production: 'We need a new release of the docs every quarter.' Maybe it's length: 'Our customers won't read a 400 page manual with our software.' Maybe you don't know. That would be a clue. Think big; find out. Try to meet with or interview the business managers in your business. Find out what's on their mind. That's the business you're in.

6. **Market Yourself**

Own up to the fact that you and you alone are responsible for advancement in your career. If you don't figure out a way to promote yourself, probably no one is going to do it for you. What are the best ways to market yourself? Of course, that will depend on your situation. Certainly getting out of your cube or home office and meeting people, networking, joining organizations such as STC, and attending the meetings should be part of your strategy. Also, don't forget about the real importance of nailing each and every assignment you're given. One of the best marketing tools you are likely to have is a great example of your previous work. Treat every project as a potential advertisement for the next project.

7. **Read Good Technical Writing**

He or she who would write (communicate) well, must read. If you're not reading good technical writing, you're probably not communicating effectively either. No, I don't mean sitting down with the 'Operation Guide for the 490XZ Digital Refractor' (or whatever)—though I can think of worse ideas. Seriously, there is great technical writing out there for you to read...think Isaac Asimov, Rudy Rucker (the mathematician), or Steven Jay Gould. See how effortlessly the world-class technical writers pull off explaining really difficult material. Then, emulate it in your own work. You say your 'User's Guide to the Enterprise System Software' isn't the same as writing about the big bang, evolution, or Hilbert spaces? Well, you can at least apply some of the principles.

8. **Be Passionate**

Technical communication may not sound all that exciting, but it is and can be. *You* have to bring the passion to it. Find a way to become passionate about what you do. Get excited. Strive to make it the best you can. It's your profession; get into it.

9. **Tell a Story**

Yes, it's only the user's guide to the new software product, or the new system specification for a network protocol, but there's a storyline in there somewhere. Resolve to find it and bring it out. We're technical communicators; it's our job to find the 'inner game' of the technical subject we're assigned to and tell its story.

10. **Finally, Enjoy Yourself**

This is a rich world. There's plenty to get involved in and learn about. That's the best fun there is. Liberally apply this principle to your work. If you're not having fun and learning, maybe you need a new plan. If you're enjoying writing the manual, (and that doesn't mean it's not hard work), the reader will be able to tell.

OK, that's my Top Ten for '05. For each resolution that appeals to you, you

can be sure there are chapter members who have been successful following that particular one. Come to the meetings and get in touch with them; ask them how they approached it. You may become inspired to try it too. I hope each of you enjoys the fruits of these resolutions—and those of your own—in 2005. See you at the [chapter meetings](#) in the coming months.



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Mindfulness

 by [Ron Arner](#), Managing Editor

I will never trust another pop-up window again.

The reason? One caused me to make a mistake recently. Actually, it was more of a technical blunder, and it was one that many of you can probably relate to. I was setting up the LCD projector in our training lab at work, and thought I'd improve the display by changing the screen resolution on the laptop it was connected to. After all, the little pop-up window that appeared when I connected the LCD suggested that I do this, and I'd done it before with positive results.

Unfortunately, this time something went wrong. In fact, the display disappeared altogether, and try as I might, I couldn't get it back. People were already coming into the lab, and I began to panic. I tried rebooting with the cables disconnected, pressed the Function-F8 key combination over and over, and made sure the LCD was in computer mode, but the only thing I ever got to project was the startup screen, and then the display would just disappear.

I could no longer concentrate or think rationally, and decided to ask our network admin if he had any suggestions. (He's been in our department a lot longer than I.) It turns out that because we have an older LCD, it actually *doesn't* help to change the screen resolution as Windows XP suggested, because the LCD *can't handle* that high a resolution. I didn't know all of this at the time, but that's beside the point; if I hadn't been so overwhelmed by the situation, I would have considered the possibility that returning the screen resolution to its original setting would fix the problem. Instead, I was stuck in some kind of "I've broken it forever" mode.

In yoga, the practice of being more present in the moment is called mindfulness. As the word implies, mindfulness means being able to think calmly and rationally, even in difficult situations. While this ideal is not always possible, when faced with a stressful situation at work, a difficult interview, or a tight deadline, trying to maintain a positive, optimistic outlook on the situation can help you get through it easier, faster, and more efficiently. There are many ways to practice mindfulness, from meditation to just plain living right, and since the purpose of this column is not to deeply explore them, I will refer you to the [Yoga Journal](#) Website if you want to explore the

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subject further. You can find a searchable database of excellent articles on any mind-body topic there.

Even though I practice yoga regularly and am taking a class to be certified to teach it, I can't practice mindfulness all the time. The LCD scenario is an excellent example. But, practice does make perfect, so no matter what situation the stress revolves around, (another difficult one for me is speaking in public to a group of total strangers), mindfulness helps make the situation flow more freely, thus reducing the stress I feel the next time I find myself in the same spot.

Another important thing to keep in mind is to try to learn from your mistakes. It was really embarrassing and painful when it became obvious that I couldn't get the LCD to work. But in the long run, everything worked out, so rather than dwell on the negative aspects of the situation, and in so doing lose any possibility of gaining from it, I tried to laugh it off, think about what I did wrong, and forget the self-defeating messages that such a situation can create. This requires a great deal of honesty with one's self. I mean after all, the pop-up window didn't cause the LCD problem, my treating the pop-up window like it was the word of God did.

So, after all, what did I learn from the whole LCD episode? The most intelligent, computer-savvy, technical lesson there is; one I want to share with you to help you the next time you deal with a highly advanced technical issue: *If it isn't broke, don't fix it!*



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Client Usability Testing Opportunity at CU Denver, Spring 2005

by [James F. Stratman, Ph.D.](#)

This coming semester (beginning January 2005) the M.S. in Technical Communication Program at the University of Colorado at Denver will again offer a semester-length course in Usability Testing (at the graduate level).

For the Spring 2005 course we are inviting both public and private sector organizations to participate. We invite such organizations to provide actual documents, software, and/or other technology for which they would like user-testing and related comprehensibility evaluations to be performed in our usability testing lab or at client sites.

In past offerings we have provided valuable usability testing for diverse clients, including (among others) TargetSmart, Inc. (specializing in marketing software), General Electric (EMS software), National Renewable Energy Laboratories (NREL) Website, BioStar (manufacturers of human virus detection equipment), DigitalMed, the Colorado Water Board, and J. D. Edwards Company (specializing in accounting software), among others.

One of the areas we emphasize in our M.S. curriculum, and that we particularly focus in this course, is the testing and improvement of a broad range of online/interactive and hard copy documentation and instructional material, including (but not limited to) such things as:

- web sites
- software documentation (including interfaces & help systems), tutorials & instructions
- documentation for consumer electronics, appliances (VCRs, stereos, voice messaging answering machines, etc.)
- health hazard/risk disclosures and documentation
- government, employee, and consumer legal documentation
- tax documentation
- real estate documentation/forms
- securities prospecti
- banking/loan transactions
- insurance policies/forms

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Note that we are interested both in consumer-type documents as well as documents for more specialized audiences/technicians. We are equally interested in online and traditional hard-copy documents, and in electro-mechanical as well as computer technology documentation.

All experimental participants that we recruit must sign client non-disclosure agreements as well as participation consent forms for the university. Organizations who participate are also required to sign a written letter of agreement with the department and students at CU-Denver. Organizations must provide monetary support for securing and paying user-test participants and for transcribing audio and/or video data (if such data is produced). There is also a one-time nominal participation contribution of US \$1,000.00, which helps support upgrades in our usability test lab facilities and provides scholarships for students enrolled our technical communication program. While it is difficult to provide an exact estimate of your total costs, you should know that historically, it has been far lower than the minimum costs for professional usability services in the Denver, Colorado and Front Range area. Past clients have also been impressed with the professional-level quality of testing done by our students and the opportunity to work with a university community committed to researching the latest methods in usability testing.

If you or your organization thinks you might be interested in participating, please contact me, Dr. James Stratman, at the email address or telephone phone number below. I am happy to provide pertinent details and answer questions.

Sincerely,
James F. Stratman, Ph.D.
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STC Costs: the Cash You Save May Be Your Own

by [Gloria McConnell](#), [Sherry Michaels](#), and [Kathy Graden](#), STC Phoenix Chapter

(Reprinted by permission from *Rough Draft*, the newsletter of the Phoenix Chapter of the STC.)

Even if you know all of the career benefits you can realize by being an STC member or attending STC conferences, you may still wonder whether the costs are reasonable and how they compare to the fees that other professional societies charge. Well, guess what? Other professional associations don't match the value that STC offers.

Recently we compared STC membership fees to membership fees charged by other professional associations that attract people in our profession. We also looked at registration fees for STC's Annual Conference versus fees for eight other technical communication or training development conferences. And we found that in both cases, STC offers the best deals.

Here's how STC's new range of membership fees fares when compared to fees for other organizations:

Association	Membership Fees
American Society for Training and Development (ASTD)	\$255 (\$180 for national membership and \$75 for local chapter membership)
Institute of Electrical and Electronic Engineers Communications (IEEE Communications)	\$191 , with a potential of about 30 special interest groups. Membership in each SIG costs an additional \$10 to \$40 per year. Publications, such as <i>Women in Engineering</i> , cost an additional \$25 per year.
International Society for Performance Improvement (ISPI)	\$145

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Association of Computing Machinery Special Interest Group for Documentation (ACM SIGDOC)	\$134 plus separate charges for print materials.
Society for Technical Communication (STC)	\$145 for full membership including publications; \$72.50 for retired members; \$125 for limited membership (publications only); \$135 for E-membership; \$50 for student membership

Professional Conference Costs

So, you can afford to attend only one professional conference within the next year? Which one offers the best deal? Ultimately, you choose. But here's some information to help guide your decision.

Conference	Duration	Place Held	Registration Fee
Doctrain	2 days	Tyngsboro, Ma	\$399
SSPA (Service and Support Professionals Association)	4 days	San Diego, CA and New Orleans, La	\$1,395 for members or \$1,795 for non-members
CSTD Knowledge Exchange	4 days	Toronto, Canada (in November)	\$660 for members, early bird discount; \$795 on site; as high as \$1,040 for non-members
Techlearn	4 days	New York City (in November)	\$1,195 early bird; \$1,395 after deadline
CLO (Chief Learning Officer) Symposium	3 days	Tucson (in April)	\$1,695 ; \$1,995 after deadline
GlobeCom (IEEE special interest communications group)	3 days	Dallas, TX (in November)	\$655 for early bird members; \$755 after deadline; \$875 early bird non-members; \$1,005 after deadline

IEEE Consumer Communications and Networking	4 days	Las Vegas, NV (in January)	\$555 for early bird members; \$655 after deadline; \$720 early bird non-members; \$830 after deadline
WritersUA Conference (formerly WinWriters)	4 days	Las Vegas, NV (in March)	\$995 for early bird members; \$1,095 for registration by deadline; \$1,195 for late registration; cheapest discount is \$895
STC Annual Conference	4 days	Seattle, WA (in May)	\$495 for early bird members; \$570 on site; \$650 for non-member early birds; \$725 for non-members on site

The fees listed in the preceding table cover only registration fees for the conferences; don't forget that you need to allocate additional funds for airfare, lodging, meals, etc. In many cases, your travel expenses may be two or even three times as much as the conference fee.

When compared to fees that other professional associations charge, STC's fees are comparable or less expensive. Think about that when deciding how to spend your professional association dollars this year!



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Jobs...or the Lack Thereof

 by [Jonathan W. Baker](#), Director-Sponsor Region 1

Over the years, I've asked and been asked, "Why doesn't STC do more for its members who need jobs?" To which the usual answer has been, "Well, we have chapter and Society job banks, plus chapters often put on resume writing programs, job search programs, and so on." And these are all true. STC provides, through the chapters and SIGs, places to network and to develop leadership skills. And people really do find jobs through STC. I'm certainly one who has.

But I think that this answer misses the point. So try this, "STC is an educational/professional organization. STC is not in the placement business." Still, that doesn't really answer the question either. I think that the real question is, "Can you help me find companies that will buy my services?" And the answer to that question is, probably not. But I am not sure I understand why not.

I talked at length with a recruiter once, when times were good, asking how recruiters found technical communications positions. In those days, it was easy. The jobs found them, like the jobs found many of us. After further poking and questioning, I did come to understand that most of the placement people had people on staff who did nothing but call the companies asking if the company had any openings. Basic cold calling stuff. Over time, the placement firms would develop contacts inside companies, who could provide them with meaningful information about any openings.

I was also informed that, because companies come and go so quickly in high tech, that the contact information gets stale quite quickly. In fact, the contact information could go stale in as little as three months. And remember that most placement firms are local, not national or international. If the local placement companies couldn't keep up even with full-time staff, imagine the difficulty of trying to do this at a national level.

Now, mix in the bad times and the downsizing of most HR departments. All those contacts disappear into the woodwork. People who could be counted on for good information about a company's hiring plans are gone and the company doesn't want to let on that it won't be hiring anyone in the foreseeable future. This scenario makes finding work doubly difficult.

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So, now that I have framed the pain, let me ask, because I am trying to help, how can STC support you in your job searches? Do you need lists of local companies who might be potential customers? Would access to online business directories through STC's web site be of value? Do you need training that STC could provide, beyond the type a chapter might provide? Would skills development, like marketing and selling skills, help? Do you see some other ways in which STC can add value? Please let me, or any of the other Director/Sponsors, know what we can do in this area that would add value.



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Improving Your Net(working) Worth: October Chapter Meeting Review

 by [Lynnette Reveling](#)

The October 21, 2004, STC RMC chapter meeting was held at a great new location, the Four Points Sheraton, in the Skyline Ballroom with a gorgeous view of downtown Denver. Thirty-five members and visitors enjoyed the wonderful hors d'oeuvres and mingled while playing Networking Bingo. That scrumptious chocolate cake energized many into filling their bingo cards. A student was the first to shout "Bingo" and won the \$25 Barnes & Noble gift certificate.

Our program panel for "Networking with the Networkers" included Marella Colyvas, Anne Halsey, Lynnette Reveling, Martha Sippel, and Frank Tagader.

- Lynnette Reveling kicked it off talking about the basics of networking within a large corporation. She suggested just saying "Good Morning" to everyone and eventually you get to know these people. Another great leveler is to volunteer and help with employee functions; you often rub elbows with that V.P. who might be your next boss.
- Marella Colyvas followed with another model within a large corporation where you need to bid for the job on each project, which makes networking vitally important.
- Martha Sippel discussed how to sell yourself and your skills to prospective clients. She emphasized that you should focus on what is important and provide solutions to problems. By seeking ideal clients, selling your integrity, and finding your market niche, selling yourself is easier. Network and find people to collaborate with you to achieve success. Plan ahead by anticipating questions or areas of concern and prepare good questions to ask your prospective clients.
- Frank Tagader provided pointers on using STC and specifically this chapter as a resource. Here you can find people to work for, find people to work for you, and find people to work with you on projects.
- Anne Halsey wrapped it all up by talking to us about being a "node" (i. e., the connecting point) and describing herself as the shy type who networked herself into a wonderful job referral resource.

The entire evening highlighted and promoted the importance of building and using a network within our Rocky Mountain Chapter.

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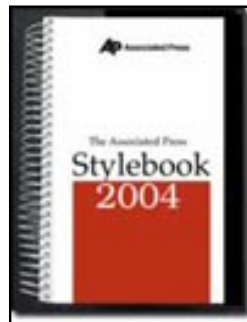
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Stylistically Speaking: Book Reviews on Style Guides

by [Deb Lockwood](#)



The Chicago Manual of Style: The Essential Guide for Writers, Editors, and Publishers 15th Edition
 University of Chicago Press Staff, editor. 2004. 15th ed. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press. [ISBN: 0-226-10389-7. 984 pages. \$55.00 (cloth cover), \$95.00 (cloth with CD), \$55.00 (CD-ROM).] http://www.press.uchicago.edu/Misc/Chicago/_cmosfaq/about.html



The Associated Press Stylebook and Briefing on Media Law
 Norm Goldstein, editor. 2004. 39th ed. Redmond: Microsoft Press. New York: Basic Books. [ISBN. 0.465.00488-1 378 pages. \$17.95] <http://www.apbookstore.com/>

I began using *The Chicago Manual of Style* when I was in college, and have been using it ever since to answer all matter of style questions including citations, punctuation, legal references, and editing marks. Although some of my colleagues use the AP version (see review below), I will stick with *The Chicago Manual of Style* to answer my burning style questions. However, I recently found out that my 14th edition is out-of-date.

The 15th edition contains the following chapters:

1. The Parts of a Published Work
2. Manuscript Preparation and Manuscript Editing
3. Proofs
4. Rights and Permissions by William S. Strong
5. Grammar and Usage by Bryan A. Garner

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6. Punctuation
7. Spelling, Distinctive Treatment of Words, and Compounds
8. Names and Terms
9. Numbers
10. Foreign Languages
11. Quotations and Dialogue
12. Illustrations and Captions
13. Tables
14. Mathematics in Type
15. Abbreviations
16. Documentation I: Basic Patterns
17. Documentation II: Specific Content
18. Indexes

The Associated Press Stylebook and Briefing on Media Law is also known as the Associated Press stylebook, or just the AP stylebook. This book is the quintessential guide for writers who are writing for newspapers, periodicals, journals, and other news media. When I was in college at the University of Denver, the nursing school students as well as the journalism majors were using the Associated Press (AP) styles exclusively. The AP updates this guide annually.

When researching this topic, I came across an on-line subscription service to which you can subscribe (individually or corporately). Using the on-line version, you can make notes to yourself as you use the guide, and add specific style examples from your organization. This information is then stored on the Web. See <http://www.apstylebook.com/> for more information about this subscription service.

The 2004 version of *The Associated Press Stylebook and Briefing on Media Law* contains the following chapters:

1. Foreword
2. What's New
3. Bibliography
4. Stylebook
5. Sports Guidelines and Style
6. Business Guidelines and Style
7. A Guide to Punctuation
8. Briefing on Media Law
9. Proofreader's Marks
10. About the AP

In the Final Analysis:

There are substantive differences between these two style guides, but the difference that is most often noted is the serial comma. The crux of this issue is that the AP stylebook doesn't recommend a serial comma, but *The Chicago Manual of Style* does. In other words, you would not include a comma before the last item in a list. For example, the phrase "low, medium, and high" would appear as "low, medium and high" in the AP stylebook.

I will admit that I am biased and lean toward following the styles in the

Chicago Press version, and the primary reason is that I am - by repetition of use - comfortable with the content and the rules. If you lean in a similar direction, I would strongly recommend that you pick up a copy of the AP stylebook if for nothing else than to read the media law briefing information. This section of the guide contains a critical reminder telling you how to guard against libel and copyright infringement.



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A Dozen Great Myths About New Technology

 by [John Hedtke](#)

Even if we don't write about new technology for our jobs, we still have to use it to get our jobs done. New technology is frequently surrounded by hype, misperceptions, and outright lies that make it harder for us to use it effortlessly. This article discusses some of the most pervasive myths of new technology.

We'll look at a cluster of general concepts first:

- 1. New technology is easier to use than old technology.**
 This one's pure marketing hype. While it may actually be true occasionally, it's important to factor in the cost of learning the new technology and becoming proficient in it. Perhaps the best example of this is that we all have, at one time or another, chosen to delay switching from one product or technology to another simply because it was going to take time to install/learn/get the new finger rhythms in place. In addition, some old technology is worth keeping indefinitely: I still type 30 wpm faster on keyboards that have the CTRL key next to the "A" and the function keys on the right than on the newer keyboards that have the CapsLock key there. You can still buy keyboards that work the way they used to, but they're a little more expensive. But for me, who learned to use computers when men were men and 640K was enough for anybody, it's worth the money to stay with the older technology.
- 2. New technology is more difficult to use than old technology.**
 Hey, there's no reason that technomyths can't be mutually exclusive! One of the things that people often expect, as a result of being burned too often, is that new technology is always going to be more difficult to use than what it replaces. But this one is no truer than the previous technomyth. The driving reason for creating and selling new technology is usually a perceived need for something that works better than any existing technology. While the manufacturers may fail in their delivery, they're going to try to do something that works well and actually has a reason for selling.
- 3. New technology is better/faster/cheaper than old technology.**
 "Ending is better than mending," some say. But just because something is new does not mean it's better, although we do live in hope. The cost of installing and supporting a new technology can be far greater than

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the cost of the new technology itself. Moreover, many new technologies simply miss the mark: they aren't well designed, they don't solve the real problem, or they don't work as advertised. Some ideas speak for themselves in this regard: consider car alarms.

The key to these three technomyths is the idea that we can do things better and faster without changing anything. All improvements will result in some measure of change, no matter what we do. It may actually be worth our time to make the change to a new technology and it may be an improvement when we do, but each change should be evaluated in its own right.

With these basic myths out of the way, there are some specific misconceptions you should consider:

- 1. New tools will help you get the project out more quickly.**
Most new technology will give you only a very slight increase in productivity. (There are wonderful counter-examples to this, however, such as online help tools like RoboHelp or web development tools versus doing things by hand.) Something else to think about: Fred Brooks, in *The Mythical Man-Month*, identified Brooks' Law, which states "Adding more people to a late project will only make it later." Sadly, this can be true of technology as well. Timesaving is a desirable effect of new technology, but it's not to be expected. A technology that bills itself as being a major time-saver may deliver far less than it promises.
- 2. New technology will work seamlessly with the older technology.**
Hahahahahohohoheehheehheeh! No matter what the new technology, it won't always work as predicted. One of the best examples of this is "Plug-n'-Play" technology for Windows. Supposedly when you install a new video card, hard disk, or whatever, the operating system will recognize the card and load the right driver—and life is seamless. This is a lovely idea and actually works perhaps half the time, but owing to the vagaries of both software and hardware you frequently must hack on the system to make it all work right. This has a corollary technomyth—"It's a system problem." They're all human problems, but sometimes it's just hard to track down the human responsible for the problem.
- 3. New technology will reduce or eliminate paperwork.**
It's possible that the Palm Pilot has reduced paperwork, but that's probably the first time a new technology has actually done so. Every other technology has actually increased the amount of paper you need to deal with. Want proof? We have spent about a trillion dollars on computers and technology in the US in the last 25 years, but paper use has steadily increased despite the continual incorporation of new technology. (And, yes, there was a paperless toilet invented by the Japanese in the late 80s, so the old canard about paperless offices did come true.)
- 4. Buying the latest thing is a good idea.**
Generally speaking, it is not a good idea to rush out and buy the latest, greatest version of technology. Only a fool would install a brand-new version of, say, Windows or Word or even FrameMaker on a mission-critical computer, if for no other reason than it hasn't been tested by the public ("the slow gazelles in the herd"). It's a good idea to wait as long as possible before installing the newest software version—a year is usually about right in my experience—by which time there will have

been a couple of service packs that will probably fix the most heinous bugs.

This sense of caution doesn't apply just to software. Buying the latest and greatest hardware is going to cost you as much as twice what the next older version costs for only an incremental increase in performance. There are dozens of examples of this, including the latest CPUs, DVD writers, large screen monitors, wide-screen TVs, and microwave ovens. If you can afford to wait or you don't need the hottest version, you'll save money and get something more mature. You'll also avoid a lot of compatibility problems (for example, not all DVDs play on all DVD players).

What distinguishes these technomyths is that they're primarily extensions of marketing hype. They may actually be true, but there's a good chance that they're mere canards. New technology isn't going to be seamless, but it may well be worth it if you keep an eye on what's real.

This article wouldn't be complete without a few of the great corporate technomyths:

1. **With the new support system in place, our support volumes will decrease 50%.**

Just as your productivity won't go up by leaps and bounds when you add a new technology, the call load in support isn't going to drop by massive amounts, no matter what technology you implement. You may cause gradual decreases in the support call volume by improving the product, the documentation, or the marketing, but it's not going to happen overnight. (You can also *increase* the call load by messing up any or all of these things, but there's probably no value to you in doing so...)

2. **All artists use Macs.**

There used to be a significant difference between Macs and Windows-based computers in their capabilities. Some of this was definitely real—Macs really did do graphics better and they were certainly lower maintenance and friendlier than DOS or Windows—and some of this was marketing hype. While a case could be made that Macs are still friendlier and more stable, Windows computers are what 94% of the market uses. (For the record, I have always thought that Macs are better computers in general but I can't stand 'em personally.) Nevertheless, the technomyth remains that creative types use Macs by preference. The bottom line for this technomyth is that you should use whatever computer suits you best.

3. **Everything is intuitively obvious.**

Also: "Oh, our users don't need that—they'll know exactly what to do" or "It's so easy anyone can do it." This is one of the best corporate technomyths of all. In college we learned about hubris as the driving force behind ancient Greek tragedies, but most of us thought we'd never actually see it for ourselves. But then we got jobs in high technology. New technology is almost never "intuitively obvious." The fact that new technology will involve learning new concepts and possibly a new way of thinking about something is in direct opposition to "intuitively obvious." More likely, this just means that the developer or engineer has a clear idea of how he (it always seems to be a guy who says this) thinks the product will be used and he doesn't want to hear anything that counters that.

4. **Microsoft did it that way, so we should/should not do it that way, too.**

Unless your company is also a multi-billion dollar company with more marketing muscle than anyone else, it's probably a bad idea to use Microsoft as a primary justification for pursuing (or *not* pursuing) a course of action. Microsoft can command economies of scale and marketing budgets that the rest of us only dream about, but that also makes them farsighted: it's simply not worth their time to pursue a product that won't generate at least \$20 million in revenue. The rest of us are usually quite willing to work very hard for even a couple million bucks and should plan our actions accordingly. Microsoft is Microsoft, you are you: the twain shall not meet.

These technomyths demonstrate that companies are prone to falling for classic lies, too. While you may not have great luck in convincing the powers that be that they're making a mistake in their reasoning, you can be prepared for the outcomes and avoid the fallout.

This brings us to the greatest technomyth of all:

1. **Computers are easy to use.**

My all-time favorite technomyth, this one probably causes more frustration than any other. Regardless of our skill levels, we are *all* frustrated by our computers, frequently quite audibly. This is because, even if we've never used a computer ourselves before, we already *know* what computers are like: they're just like they are on Star Trek. You can talk to them, they understand whatever garbled, inexact, ambiguous questions you ask, they keep track of where everyone is and where to find their socks, and they never, ever crash. Unfortunately, we come to using computers with this picture in our heads and the reality is a good deal less pleasant: our computers don't respond well when we talk to them (even if we've got voice-recognition software), they're clunky, and you constantly have to mess with installing new software and doing nitty little maintenance tasks. For the record, I'd love to have a computer that was smart enough to understand what I said and could also tell me where I last left my car keys, but they're not available yet.

Summary

Despite all the comments to the contrary, technomyths are occasionally true. New technology sometimes *will* work as advertised and be cheaper, faster, and better. Our laundry and teeth will be cleaner and brighter and we'll save money and resources doing it, too. We'll fall for technomyths occasionally no matter what we do, but if we keep our eyes open, we won't do it often. Furthermore, by looking for the technomyths, we'll be able to adopt the new technologies that will really help us and can avoid the dead-ends that can only waste our time.

John Hedtke is the award-winning author of 23 books, including *Robohelp for the Web* (with Brenda Huettner; Wordware Publishing, 2002). He is a Fellow

of the Society and a candidate for Region 7 Director-Sponsor.

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