



Technicalities



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

June/July 2006

Volume 46, Number 6

[.pdf Version](#)

[Masthead](#)

[Archives](#)

[◀ Back](#) [Next ▶](#)

[Technicalities Home](#)

Columns:

[Message from the Editor](#)

[President's Corner](#)

[Tips from the Trenches](#)

[Chapter News](#)

[STC RMC Home](#)

[STC International Home](#)

Features...

[Don't Gamble with Your Career:](#) STC's 53rd Annual Conference in Las Vegas

[April Chapter Meeting Review:](#) Lessons Learned from Web Site Usability Testing

[Can You Hear Me Now?:](#) Northern Colorado Satellite Group

[Blog on Until Your Dreams Come True:](#) The pros and cons of adding a Blog to Your Chapter Website



SOCIETY FOR
TECHNICAL
COMMUNICATION

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

[◀ Back](#)

[Technicalities Home](#)

[Next ▶](#)

© Copyright 2006
Rocky Mountain Chapter, Society for Technical Communication; all rights reserved.
Standard [disclaimers](#) apply.



Technicalities

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

June/July 2006

Volume 46, Number 6

[.pdf Version](#)

[Masthead](#)

[Archives](#)

[◀ Back](#) [Next ▶](#)

[Technicalities Home](#)

Columns:

[Message from the Editor](#)

[President's Corner](#)

[Tips from the Trenches](#)

[Chapter News](#)

Features:

[STC's 53rd Annual
Conference](#)

[April Chapter Meeting
Review](#)

[Northern Colorado
Satellite Group](#)

[Adding a Blog to Your
Chapter Website](#)

[STC RMC Home](#)

[STC International Home](#)

Technicalities

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

Editorial Staff

Managing Editor: Ron Arner

Assistant Editor: Kristy Lantz Astry

Article Editors: Bridget Julian, Jay Mead, Lynnette Reveling

Contributing Editor: Sam Omatseye

Newsletter Staff: Deb Lockwood

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.

Note: *By submitting an article, you implicitly grant a license to this newsletter to run the article and for other STC publications to reprint it without permission. Copyright is held by the writer. In your cover letter, please let the editor know if this article has run elsewhere, and if it has been submitted for consideration to other publications.*

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 303.956.1906, 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).

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.

STC RMC 2005-2006 Officers

Administrative Council

President: [Marella Colyvas](#)

Vice President: [Deb Lockwood](#)

Secretary: [Kathy Ramsey](#)

Treasurer: [Jessica Betterly](#)

Past President: [Marc Lee](#)

Region 7 Director-Sponsor:

[John Hedtke](#)

STC RMC Committee Managers

Database: Karen Kraft-Miller

Education: Donald Zimmerman

Jobs/Professionalism: Anne Halsey

List Server: Currently vacant

Membership: Helen Tuttle

Mentoring: Deb Lockwood

Nominating Committee: [Ron Arner](#), [Tammy Van Boeing](#)

Programs: Martha Sippel, Frank Tagader

Publicity: Ruth Gaulke

Seminars: Julie Welander

Volunteers: Kim Bell

Web site: Anne Halsey

STC RMC SIG Managers

Contractors and Independent Consultants: Linda Gallagher

Northern Colorado: Ralph Towers

Western Slope: Victoria Thomas

Society for Technical Communication, Rocky Mountain Chapter

General Chapter Business

Rocky Mountain Chapter

Society for Technical Communication

820 S. Monaco Pkwy. #286

Denver, CO 80224

info@stcrmc.org

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

<http://www.stcrmc.org>

STC International Office

901 N. Stuart Street, Suite 904

Arlington, VA 22203-1822

703.522.4114

stc@stc.org

<http://www.stc.org>



[◀ Back](#)

[Technicalities Home](#)

[Next ▶](#)

© Copyright 2005

Rocky Mountain Chapter, Society for Technical Communication; all rights reserved.

Standard [disclaimers](#) apply.



[Technicalities Home](#)

Columns:

[Message from the Editor](#)

[President's Corner](#)

[Tips from the Trenches](#)

[Chapter News](#)

Features:

[STC's 53rd Annual
Conference](#)

[April Chapter Meeting
Review](#)

[Northern Colorado
Satellite Group](#)

[Adding a Blog to Your
Chapter Website](#)

[STC RMC Home](#)

[STC International Home](#)

Chapter News

Welcome to Our New Members

New, transferred, or returning members for the month of April, 2006:

April 2006

- Judith A. Ericksen
- Lois F. Smith
- Virginia A. Ward

Senior Members

Congratulations to the following new or returning Senior Members of the Rocky Mountain Chapter:

- Jessica Betterly
- William J. Calkins
- Patricia Downing
- Jacque L. Fryday
- Amy J. Metzger
- K. Dawn Miller
- Roberta L. Owens
- Christie Ratliff
- Shawn L. Schuldies
- Susan R. Voigt
- Julie B. Walker
- Mary G. White
- Jamie A. Wilke



◀ Back

[Technicalities Home](#)

Next ▶

© Copyright 2005
Rocky Mountain Chapter, Society for Technical Communication; all rights reserved.
Standard [disclaimers](#) apply.

[Technicalities Home](#)

Columns:

[Message from the Editor](#)[President's Corner](#)[Tips from the Trenches](#)[Chapter News](#)

Features:

[STC's 53rd Annual
Conference](#)[April Chapter Meeting
Review](#)[Northern Colorado
Satellite Group](#)[Adding a Blog to Your
Chapter Website](#)[STC RMC Home](#)[STC International Home](#)

Tips from the Trenches

by [Deb Lockwood](#)

"What's in it for me?" Don't we all think like that at times? I certainly do. The demands on our time seem to be endless, and we really have to draw the line somewhere. If it's not work, it's the family; if it's not family, it's non-profit organizations; if it's not non-profits, it's our home or yard that needs our time and attention. After family and work, one of the things we all do is to try to spend our time where it will have the greatest impact, for us and for others. One activity that has consistently allowed me to have a large impact is volunteering my time and talents for organizations in which I believe, and STC is among them.

Wikipedia describes volunteerism as "the willingness of people to work on behalf of others without the expectation of pay or other tangible gain" (<http://wikipedia.org/wiki/Volunteerism>). Now that definition is right on; volunteerism means us spending our time for no money in return. You might be asking yourself why someone would do it if there are no financial rewards. For me, it's about investing in the future; my future and other peoples' futures.

Over the past few years I have had the privilege of meeting several people who have considered technical communication as a career. Some were students at local colleges, some were business people in other professions, and one was even an officer in the Army who was looking for confirmation of some processes. In all cases, I am the better for having met these people, interacting with them, and sharing ideas with them about the field of technical communications.

Fine, you might say. So is it all about being altruistic? Not entirely. There are also tangible benefits for the person who volunteers. Elizabeth Swindle-Troell says it like this: "Through volunteerism you can beef up your resume, expand your portfolio, and gain invaluable experience even if you cannot line your pockets." (2003 STC Annual Conference proceedings paper entitled *Be able to Say, "Been There! Donate That!" Cultivate your Career Skills through Deliberate Volunteering*.)

In the May 2005 issue of *Intercom*, Rebecca S. Taylor wrote in the *Habit 2: Volunteer for Chapter Committees* article that "Your local chapter could not

exist without people like you. Foster it. Cultivate it. Care for it! I can't count the number of times fellow STC members have shared stories about how their volunteer time has benefited them. Your STC chapter is not only a means to strengthen your skill set and résumé material, it's a way for you to improve the lives of others."

During this summer hiatus, please consider your involvement in your Rocky Mountain chapter. We could sure use some more volunteers this fall, and the more volunteers we have, the more programs and value we can offer. And besides that, you can gain value as well by beefing up your resume, expanding your portfolio, increasing your name recognition among your colleagues, and helping to improve other people's experiences with STC.



◀ Back

[Technicalities Home](#)

Next ▶

© Copyright 2005
Rocky Mountain Chapter, Society for Technical Communication; all rights reserved.
Standard [disclaimers](#) apply.



Technicalities

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

June/July 2006

Volume 46, Number 6

[.pdf Version](#)

[Masthead](#)

[Archives](#)

[◀ Back](#) [Next ▶](#)

[Technicalities Home](#)

Columns:

[Message from the Editor](#)

[President's Corner](#)

[Tips from the Trenches](#)

[Chapter News](#)

Features:

[STC's 53rd Annual
Conference](#)

[April Chapter Meeting
Review](#)

[Northern Colorado
Satellite Group](#)

[Adding a Blog to Your
Chapter Website](#)

[STC RMC Home](#)

[STC International Home](#)

Summer's Call

by [Marella Colyvas](#)

Summer is upon us. It beckons, sultry, inviting. Activities abound: family reunions, picnics, swimming, hikes, classes; summer reading lists.

However, you may, like many adults, be plodding through your summer steeped in the everyday world. The heat is oppressive; at your out-of-school children's behest, you are pressed to engage in softball, theater, dance, debate camps, baseball, 10K races. The in-laws decide that Colorado is the place to visit, so you cram mountain viewing, mall shopping, and concerts-in-the park into your already too busy schedule. And, there is the ever-present work deadline, now requiring 14-hour days because three of your colleagues are on vacation.

You are convinced the universe is plotting your undoing.

Breathe. Summer is the height of activity, true. But it is also the time to revel, to bask in the sunlight, to be open to the light and the summer storms, and to laugh. It is the time of fruition, where the promise of spring's ideas flower. It is the time, as the old adage goes, to "make hay while the sun shines" because after the equinox, the earth is already starting on its path toward winter and darkness.

I invite you to take time from your myriad activities to return to a school mindset, when summer reading lists were required and personal/professional growth was encouraged. Those professors of our schooldays were not heaping useless activities on us - rather, the idea was to instill a love of learning and growth. But how can we best use our time to actually learn and grow?

Here are some suggestions:

- Revive and revise that summer reading list.
- Take a class, online or otherwise.
- Look for inexpensive workshops provided by your local STC community

But, you protest, there's no time . . .

Well, time is what you make it. Don't forget that a lot of information has already been gathered and you can improve your knowledge and your love of learning by using existing resources. Here are each of the suggestions listed above with ideas on how to actually implement them.

The Reading List

When revising your reading list, don't expect to read everything new published about say, XML. Use available resources, such as the STC RMC, to help in your search. The regular book review column in our award-winning newsletter, *Technicalities*, is one such resource. This year Sam Omatseye, Evan Lockwood, Deb Lockwood, and Ron Arner have written reviews about four very different books:

- Sam reviews a study that covers the potentially dangerous downturn in the U.S. educational system and the subsequent U.S. drop in the rank of countries that excel in science and technology; the book is *Rising Above The Gathering Storm: Energizing and Employing America for a Brighter Economic Future*: http://www.stcrmc.org/technicalities/feb_march_2006/feature4.htm.
- Evan's reviewed book, *The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference*, covers what makes for real change in organizations, and why it seems some things never change -http://www.stcrmc.org/technicalities/dec_jan_2006/feature3.htm.
- Deb writes about a new book, *Herding Chickens: Innovative Techniques for Project Management*, that likens the concepts of project management to "herding chickens." If the title doesn't make you curious, the table of contents will. The review is here: http://www.stcrmc.org/technicalities/oct_nov_2005/feature2.htm.
- Ron's book, *Don't Make Me Think: A Common Sense Approach to Web Usability*, covers web usability and dovetails nicely with the topic our last speaker of the year, Ginny Redish, presented in May on "Lessons Learned from Usability Testing Web Sites." Check out Ron's review to help you decide if you want to read this book: http://www.stcrmc.org/technicalities/aug_sept_2005/feature5.htm

Tip: If you revise your reading list to include some technical books on subjects that you will actually use at work, reading them could be done during work time if you talk to your manager about including the books in a training program. Don't forget to actually marking training time on your daily calendar so it gets done.

Classes

Of course local colleges and universities offer classes, as do many community-based programs, such as the Colorado Free University. And most, if not all, colleges and universities offer online classes. It is not within the scope of this article to argue which is better, attending online or on-campus classes, but the focus here is for online classes because they afford much more flexibility.

One little-known benefit of being an STC member is that the University of California at Los Angeles offers a discount on technical writing and business

class tuition to STC members. This particular university hosts a large variety of online classes. See <http://uclaextension.edu> - go to the Management Program, Communication Skills, Technical Communication for a list of online courses that are eligible for the discount. For complete information, call or write to the University at the numbers and email addresses listed.

Note: If anyone knows of other colleges and universities that offer discounts to STC members for technical communication classes, please let our newsletter editors know so the information can be publicized.

One good thing about online classes is that they are available 24x7, and if you get the writing bug in the middle of the night, you can put it to use. Another good thing is that you can take a variety of subjects that may not lead to a degree, but can enrich your life and enhance your skills without taking a lot of time away from your day-to-day activities. It is still wise, however, to determine just how much time you will need for the class, and budget accordingly. Online classes also force you to spend some time alone. For instance, you can send the in-laws to the pool with the kids while you finish that last writing assignment. And take that laptop outside - it's summer!

Inexpensive Workshops and Seminars

Your STC RMC just offered a workshop on Beginning FrameMaker on June 3rd. We plan to do at least one more of these workshops after our summer break, perhaps two. They are excellent venues for a) giving our members a great educational value, b) allowing our local (or sometimes imported) STC talent to shine, and c) building a strong technical communication community. Although there are no plans to have another summer seminar this year, we thought this one was a good way to kick off the summer. Feedback from participants confirm that our idea was prudent. So if you have let your STC membership lapse for whatever reason, think of the educational opportunities at a great value that abound in this community, and act accordingly.

In Conclusion

After reviewing these options, try this: replace some of your frenzied summer activities with 10 minutes a day devoted to opening your heart and mind to all the possibilities that summer brings. Turn back the clock to school days, and once again create a summer reading list or look for a class or inexpensive seminar to attend. Oh, and spend some time outdoors. It never hurts to sit by the pool (or a mountain lake) with that good book.



© Copyright 2005
Rocky Mountain Chapter, Society for Technical Communication; all rights reserved.
Standard [disclaimers](#) apply.



Technicalities

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

June/July 2006

Volume 46, Number 6

[.pdf Version](#)

[Masthead](#)

[Archives](#)

[◀ Back](#) [Next ▶](#)

[Technicalities Home](#)

Columns:

[Message from the Editor](#)

[President's Corner](#)

[Tips from the Trenches](#)

[Chapter News](#)

Features:

[STC's 53rd Annual
Conference](#)

[April Chapter Meeting
Review](#)

[Northern Colorado
Satellite Group](#)

[Adding a Blog to Your
Chapter Website](#)

[STC RMC Home](#)

[STC International Home](#)

Seems We Just Get Started...

by [Ron Arner](#)

I thought I'd be elated to finally be writing my last editorial for *Technicalities*. That didn't sound quite right; let me begin again...

Well, after three plus years at the helm, the time has finally come for me to relinquish my rule over our chapter's newsletter. I'll be turning it over to some new (and not so new) leadership. Dana Dutson, Donna Brannan, and Steve Wertzbaugher will be taking over the management of the newsletter with the next issue. I've been trying to get someone else to take over the role of editor for the last year or so, which is why I thought I'd be happy to finally be writing this, my last editorial.

Instead, the first thought that came to mind when I sat down to write was the old theme song from the Carol Burnett show. You know the one I mean: the one she used sing at the end of every show:

I'm so glad we've had this time together,
Just to have a laugh or sing a song.
Seems we just get started, and before you know it
Comes the time we have to say "so long."

A long time ago...

I remember when Martha Sippel asked me if I'd like to take over the role as Managing Editor of the newsletter. I was so flattered that STC leadership would trust me, a newcomer to the organization and technical communication, with such a tremendous task, that I couldn't say no. I soon found out that the newsletter was a lot more work than I thought it would be. (Lesson number one: stop and think about it before you volunteer for anything.)

Fortunately, I've been blessed with some great volunteers who never hesitated when asked for help with story ideas, article editing, article summaries, article writing, and general moral support. I couldn't have managed this newsletter without Jay Mead, Bridget Julian, Lynnette Reveling, Kristy Astry, and Deb Lockwood. (Lesson number two: STC RMC has some great community members.)

I hope you've enjoyed my tenure as editor as much as I have. There were times I thought for sure I'd made a horrible mistake and that someone would be sending me a letter with sharp criticism, but it never happened. I never heard anybody say "Hey, that issue was late," or "There were some serious errors in the article about..." (Lesson number three: STC RMC really is a nurturing professional development community.)

As I finish this last column, I'm almost wondering why I've been so increasingly eager to step aside as Managing Editor. Has it really been so time consuming? Maybe I'm just ready for a new challenge. Oh that's right, I forgot. Lesson number four: there are a lot more things I'd rather be doing on a Friday night than finishing up the next issue of *Technicalities*. I mean, I could be working on interactive Websites, surfing the Web to learn about the newest XML innovation, or reviewing some basic grammar and style lessons. Hmmm, you know, that's what working on *Technicalities* was letting me do all along.



[◀ Back](#)

[Technicalities Home](#)

[Next ▶](#)

© Copyright 2005

Rocky Mountain Chapter, Society for Technical Communication; all rights reserved.
Standard [disclaimers](#) apply.



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

June/July 2006

Volume 46, Number 6

[.pdf Version](#)

[Masthead](#)

[Archives](#)

[◀ Back](#) [Next ▶](#)

[Technicalities Home](#)

Columns:

[Message from the Editor](#)

[President's Corner](#)

[Tips from the Trenches](#)

[Chapter News](#)

Features:

[STC's 53rd Annual Conference](#)

[April Chapter Meeting Review](#)

[Northern Colorado Satellite Group](#)

[Adding a Blog to Your Chapter Website](#)

[STC RMC Home](#)

[STC International Home](#)

Adding a Blog to Your Chapter Website

by [Tom H. Johnson](#), Suncoast Chapter
Reprinted with permission from Tieline

I recently tried an experiment with our static, boring chapter Web site that no one seemed to visit: I turned it into a collaborative, interactive Weblog on which members could publish content, comment on others' posts, and subscribe to feeds. With high hopes, I picked the perfect design, defined engaging topic categories, and added user-friendly content about publishing. The result? Not what I expected. The site did not become a hub of interaction, as I thought it might. It has, however, provided an intriguing introduction to content management.

Evolution of Blogs

First, a brief explanation of blogs. Blogs did not start out fashionable. The idea of publishing online diaries of the mundane aspects of one's personal life clouded the initial potential of this medium. But if you left the blogging conversation back then, you have some catching up to do.

Blogs have since become topic-oriented and highly fashionable. For example, it is not uncommon for companies to have their own blogs—take a look at googleblog.blogspot.com/ or the Stonyfield Yogurt site (www.stonyfield.com/weblog/BovineBugle/index.html). Now some companies are using blogs as internal communication tools, with Sun Microsystems (www.sun.com/aboutsun/media/blogs/) at the forefront. Each Sun employee can start a blog about whatever he or she wants, and there are now 2,000 employee blogs. Blogging has morphed into group blogging—the only real way to sustain interesting and frequently updated content.

Advantages of Chapter Blogs

The many advantages of blogs make the medium too attractive to pass up. The content is XML-based and each post is formatted in an RSS feed. RSS feeds allow your content to be automatically syndicated across hundreds of sites and newsreaders. Readers can subscribe to your site's feed and receive the content in their newsreader (some examples of newsreaders are Bloglines, Google Reader, NewsGator, and

FeedDemon). This capability allows you to bring the site to your readers, rather than waiting for them to come to you.

Blogs are also interactive. They allow each member to post content and comment on others' posts. For chapters whose participation at monthly meetings is low, an online interactive medium can supplement member mingling and involvement.

Blogs also offer ease of site management. You can get your site up and running in five minutes, change its design on the fly, publish content in seconds from any computer, and delegate ownership of pages to specific members. When you need to update a page, you navigate to it and click an Edit button, which appears only to you. In literally two clicks you can update and republish the content.

Disadvantages of Chapter Blogs

Unfortunately, many people think RSS feeds are only for tech geeks, and even fewer use newsreaders. Even worse, members rarely publish content. For example, how many voluntary submissions come in each month for your newsletter? Expect the same with your blog, which can double as a newsletter. (In fact, I think traditional newsletters are on the way out—with RSS feeds, readers can get content as soon as it is published.)

Another disadvantage is that, while the skins or themes (which determine the color, layout, and style of the site) have infinite variety, you'll want to customize your theme to fit your chapter's needs. This requires some tweaking of PHP code, which is not always immediately intuitive. PHP is also unforgiving: forgetting the closing tag of a bulleted list, for example, can completely disorient your site's layout. Or, if one PHP include is out of place, the site may not appear at all.

You can get a handle on the technical issues easily enough (support forums and instruction are plentiful). What's hard is generating interesting content on a regular basis—the key factor for any successful blog. It's easy to run out of both time and ideas. Group bloggers can often sustain the site's need for continual feeding, but if you're all alone, this may be a heavy burden to bear.

What I Learned

While our Suncoast chapter blog hasn't exactly ignited, I've found the content management aspects of blogging software to be a more efficient, appealing way to maintain a chapter Web site. It's much easier to publish and update content through the blog's admin console rather than FTP-ing individual HTML pages. When it's time to change the look and feel of the site, the blog's includes, style sheets, and themes make it simple to change.

After using blogging software, traditional HTML sites seem old-fashioned to me. Blogging software provides content management systems "for the masses," as Tim Carter (see the December 2005 *Intercom*) and others have said. Now that I've converted my blog into a mini-CMS, I'm not heartbroken if no one posts. I know that I've saved myself a lot of time and made site maintenance novel. I feel that I'm on the edge of how Websites will be

created and maintained in the future.

Implementing Your Own Blog

Most likely you're not eager to drop your entire site and convert it to a CMS blog as I did. But if you want to experiment with a blog, you can add it as a link to your site. Here's a three-step process for doing that:

1. Go to Wordpress.com and click Get a WordPress Blog now. Register and get your log-in information for your site. There are other blog options—TypePad, Blogger, LiveJournal, Drupal, Pmachine—but if your Web host uses cPanel (an administrative tool), you can use the Fantastico feature to easily install WordPress's database onto your host.)
2. Add a link to your blog on your Website's home page.
3. Start posting content.

Of course, you'll want to define categories, change images, customize headings, alter colors, pick themes, create static pages, and adjust other details to customize your blog. WordPress provides copious, albeit scattered, instructions. From the home page at WordPress.org, click the Docs link to see instructions on the basics of site configuration, the Extend link to peruse different designs, and the Support link to ask questions.

I've found the Connections theme to be the easiest to work with, and I've taken a few notes on how to customize it ([see \[stc-suncoast.org/customizing-connections\]\(http://see.stc-suncoast.org/customizing-connections\)](http://see.stc-suncoast.org/customizing-connections)).

Suppose you don't want to merely link to your blog, but actually display the posts on your Web site's home page, which is written in HTML? You can do this. Just create your blog, get your feed's URL, and then follow these steps:

1. Go to www.feedException.com and sign up for a free account. This site will convert your RSS feed into a format that can appear on your Web site's HTML page.
2. In FeedDigest, generate your feed's output in HTML and copy the JavaScript code. (The site walks you through this process.)
3. Paste the JavaScript code into Notepad to strip away any hidden formatting, and then copy and paste from Notepad into your home page. The loading time of the blog may not be very fast on your site, though.

There are certainly other tools to convert RSS to HTML (such as feedforall.com), but this is a starting point. I must add that I haven't experimented much with the latter method. I used cPanel's Fantastico and installed the database directly on our host.

Future of RSS

RSS is not a passing phenomenon. It's here to stay. For

example, take a look at www.nytimes.com and click the XML button at the bottom. You can see how feeds are separated by topic. STC also offers a general news feed to which you can subscribe. And the new STC Forum (stcforum.org) allows you to subscribe to specific feed categories (click the **RSS Feeds** link at the top for details).

I plan to continue blogging on our chapter site. Sooner or later it will catch on. And as the Web transforms into a more collaborative, interactive space (the transformation known as "Web 2.0"), getting involved in a site's content will be natural, even if you're only reading it for the first time.



◀ Back

[Technicalities Home](#)

Next ▶

© Copyright 2005
Rocky Mountain Chapter, Society for Technical Communication; all rights reserved.
Standard [disclaimers](#) apply.


[Technicalities Home](#)

Columns:

[Message from the Editor](#)[President's Corner](#)[Tips from the Trenches](#)[Chapter News](#)

Features:

[STC's 53rd Annual Conference](#)[April Chapter Meeting Review](#)[Northern Colorado Satellite Group](#)[Adding a Blog to Your Chapter Website](#)[STC RMC Home](#)[STC International Home](#)

Northern Colorado Satellite Group

 by [Deb Lockwood](#)

For those of you who are not aware, the Rocky Mountain Chapter of STC sponsors an active group of technical communicators that is based out of Fort Collins, CO. Although this group has been around for years, the current level of activity is in large part due to the efforts of Carmen Carmack, senior member of STC and former president of the Heartland Chapter. Carmen currently leads the group, and is establishing a local network of technical communicators.

Carmen's main focus for the group "is to share information about technical communication and opportunities in the northern Colorado area. A number of attendees are also new to the field and are learning more about it from our STC members."

The northern Colorado group meets once a month at the Moxie Java location at 2815 Harmony Road in Fort Collins. Meetings are informal and free of charge. They are held the second Wednesday night of the month at 7:00 PM. This past year's topics have included networking for jobs, sharing technical communication books and publications suggestions, and discussing highlights of the STC annual conference. The RMC also sponsored two STC telephone seminars for the group last year.

"We are fortunate to have financial support from the chapter for telephone seminars, in addition to a great host in Advanced Energy of Fort Collins," says Carmen. "Making the trip to meetings in the Denver area is challenging and time consuming, so telephone seminars are a great way to offer the northern Colorado membership some presentations and educational opportunities."

Currently, over 80 STC members are on Carmen's Northern Colorado e-mail list. If you would like to be added to that list so that you can be notified of upcoming events in the Northern area, just send a message to Carmen at carmackc@comcast.net.

The last meeting of this STC year is scheduled for July 12 at 7:00 PM at Moxie Java. There will be no meeting in August, but the group will get started again in September. If you're in the area in July, consider dropping by Moxie Java to get acquainted with the northern Colorado technical communicator group!



◀ Back

[Technicalities Home](#)

Next ▶

© Copyright 2005
Rocky Mountain Chapter, Society for Technical Communication; all rights reserved.
Standard [disclaimers](#) apply.



June/July 2006

Volume 46, Number 6

[.pdf Version](#)[Masthead](#)[Archives](#)[◀ Back](#) [Next ▶](#)[Technicalities Home](#)

Columns:

[Message from the Editor](#)[President's Corner](#)[Tips from the Trenches](#)[Chapter News](#)

Features:

[STC's 53rd Annual
Conference](#)[April Chapter Meeting
Review](#)[Northern Colorado
Satellite Group](#)[Adding a Blog to Your
Chapter Website](#)[STC RMC Home](#)[STC International Home](#)

Lessons Learned from Web Site Usability Testing: April chapter meeting review

by [Stephen Wertzbauger](#)

We've all visited those Web sites before; whether out of necessity or curiosity, and run from our computers screaming, our hands clenched in our hair, pulling out what is left, vowing to never again return to the Internet. What were they thinking, we ask ourselves after taking a healthy dose of tranquilizers to calm our horrified and frustrated minds. All we wanted was some useful information, or worse to be able to do something, anything while visiting their Web site. Unfortunately, due to thoughtlessness, ignorance, inexperience, or just plain incompetence, many of the Web sites we visit during our daily Internet travels leave us cold and frustrated because they are not usable. Enter Janice (Ginny) Reddish, Ph.D. a principal of Reddish and Associates, Inc., a consulting company that specializes in rescuing unusable Web sites.



Ginny Reddish speaks on Usability Testing to a packed house at the April Chapter meeting.

With over 25 years experience helping others to communicate clearly, Ms. Reddish

proved to be a treasure-trove of knowledge, insight, and experience as she regaled us with the lessons she learned from Web site usability testing. One part PowerPoint show, three parts discussion, Ms. Reddish's presentation wove deftly through the eleven lessons she learned using her own data and examples as well as examples and data from those in the audience who had been left cold after failing to navigate particularly frustrating Web sites.

The lessons Ms. Reddish imparted to us were, Users are goal-oriented and topic-oriented; Users don't want to read while navigating; Users really do not want to read on pathway pages; Users will tolerate a few more clicks, if the pathway is quick and smooth; Words matter; If you don't meet user's expectations very quickly, they'll leave; Users have even less tolerance for paragraphs than on paper; Users look at links and headings-Headings help information stay in users' heads; If you think about your users, you might really help them with innovative solutions; Space matters! Too little space drives users away; Space matters! Too much space makes it hard for users to see how the page is organized.

The main lesson learned here? Web design should always be user-oriented. In other words, always focus on your users; their needs, their wants, and you will never go wrong when designing a user-friendly Web site.

Following her presentation, Ms. Reddish iced her perfectly delightful cake with a long list of references and resources for writing for the Web and usability as well as a list of useful Web sites.

As I write this, I remember feeling giddy following the conclusion of the meeting, flushed with excitement and potential as I realized that creating useful Web sites was not only possible but practical and that all you needed to do was focus on the user. Simplicity itself! Ms. Reddish was a delight to listen to and whose name should always be first on anyone's list of potential speakers. Bravo!



[◀ Back](#)

[Technicalities Home](#)

[Next ▶](#)

© Copyright 2005

Rocky Mountain Chapter, Society for Technical Communication; all rights reserved.
Standard [disclaimers](#) apply.



[Technicalities Home](#)

Columns:

[Message from the Editor](#)

[President's Corner](#)

[Tips from the Trenches](#)

[Chapter News](#)

Features:

[STC's 53rd Annual Conference](#)

[April Chapter Meeting Review](#)

[Northern Colorado Satellite Group](#)

[Adding a Blog to Your Chapter Website](#)

[STC RMC Home](#)

[STC International Home](#)

STC's 53rd Annual Conference

by [Deb Lockwood](#) and [Martha Sippel](#)

On May 7, 2006, technical communicators from around the world gathered in Las Vegas, Nevada, to attend STC's 53rd annual conference. This annual conference is one of the most educational, entertaining, and well-rounded experiences you can have as a technical communicator. It is the largest of its kind, drawing over 1,600 attendees with common goals: improving their skills, being exposed to new ideas and technologies, and meeting or reconnecting with other technical communicators from around the world.



Professional development opportunities abound

One of the most exciting aspects of recent conferences is that the program topics are evenly split between those of interest to beginners, and those that speak to experienced communicators. Plus, the programs committee makes a concentrated effort to ensure that there is a wide variety of interests represented by offering sessions in all of the following stems:

- Management
- Professional Development
- Theory, Research, Education, and Training
- Tools and Technology
- Usability and Information Design
- Writing and Editing

Besides the educational conference sessions, attendees can take advantage of pre and post conference workshops, vendor exhibits, and view the winning entries in the Society's international competitions.

This year's conference opening session featured Vinton G. Cerf and Robert E. Kahn, who are known as Fathers of the Internet for their design of the TCP/IP protocols and the basic architecture of the Internet. They jointly shared their excitement about work-related discoveries and collaborating with exceptional people on difficult problems.

Honors Banquet highlights

On Tuesday night, we both attended the Honors Banquet, where three of our chapter's own received the honor of [Associate Fellow](#). Deb Lockwood and Linda Gallagher proudly watched as Martha Sippel, Mary Jo Stark, and Hugh Templeton received their Associate Fellow awards from Mark Hanigan, Associate Fellows Nominating Committee Chair, and Paula Berger, STC's current President.



(From left to right) Mary Jo Stark, Hugh Templeton, and Martha Sippel with their Associate Fellow awards.

The 2006 Society Honors booklet states, "Those selected as Associate Fellows are exceptional individuals who have demonstrated a consistent pattern of meaningful contributions to the Society and to the profession over a period of years."

Next year's conference

It's not too early to start thinking about signing up for next year's conference, which will be held in Minneapolis, MN, on May 13-16, 2007. Or maybe next year is the time for you to submit a proposal to speak at the conference yourself! The 2007 Annual Conference Session proposal deadline is usually in early August, so since you have time to prepare, why don't you consider presenting what you've

learned to others who may benefit from your experiences?

More ways your leaders serve you

For most conference attendees the conference started on Monday, but for STC leaders, the conference began Sunday with Leadership Day in the morning and early afternoon. These sessions help us learn more about how we can improve the services we provide to you, our members. Several of our community's leaders either attended or presented these sessions that included recruiting and working with volunteers.

We have some great teams of people working on several different initiatives, so if you are interested in participating in helping to manage our STC RMC community, please let us or one of the other officers know.



[◀ Back](#)

[Technicalities Home](#)

[Next ▶](#)

© Copyright 2005

Rocky Mountain Chapter, Society for Technical Communication; all rights reserved.

Standard [disclaimers](#) apply.