



[.pdf version](#)

[masthead](#)

[archives](#)

[◀ Back](#) [Next ▶](#)

[Technicalities home](#)

[Chapter news](#)

[From our Director-Sponsor](#)

[President's corner](#)

[Message from the editor](#)

[Tips from the trenches](#)

[Twenty-Ninth STC RMC Technical Communications Competition](#)

[Looking back](#)

[The good, the bad, and the reality of being a technical communicator](#)

[Creativity and the technical communicator](#)

[Web hosting demystified](#)

[Student view: Summertime tech writing](#)

[My not-so-gentle reminder](#)

[Understanding the design change control process](#)

In this issue...

[From our Director-Sponsor:](#) Future-proofing your career as strategic partner instead of pointless space-taker.

[From our president:](#) At ease with unease.

[From the editor:](#) Speak up, stand out: Who speaks for our profession? We do.

[Tips from the trenches:](#) From paving ways to parting waves (and all the steps in between): ideas for successful project managing.

[Twenty-Ninth STC RMC Technical Communications Competition:](#) Got pride in your guide? Submit your work in the 29th Annual STC-RMC Technical Communications Competition.

[Looking back:](#) A President's term and chapter achievements affirmed: Martha Sippel looks back.

[The good, the bad, and the reality of being a technical communicator:](#) As different as aye and nay: writers weigh in on techcomm career advice.

[Creativity and the technical communicator:](#) Calling all muses: inspired ways to nurture your creativity.

[Web hosting demystified:](#) Unfurl your URL: a writer's guide to launching your Web site.

[Student view: Summertime tech writing:](#) Horse caretaker, researcher, paper co-author: one student's summer adventures in technical writing.

[My not-so-gentle reminder:](#) One writer's not-so-gentle reminder about no excuses for not networking.

[Understanding the design change control process:](#) Change by design, control as result: Understanding the design change control process.

Chapter news

In the spotlight...Mary Jo Stark

[STC RMC home](#)

[STC International home](#)



Mary Jo is a senior member of the Rocky Mountain Chapter and has been re-elected as treasurer of STC International. Mary Jo served as chapter treasurer for many years before being elected to the board of the society leaders. Our congratulations go out to Mary Jo!

Mary Jo Stark

Welcome our chapter's new members!

New members for the months of July and August, 2003:

July 2003	August 2003
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Bonnie J. Biafore• Kristine L. Bittner• Robert E. Cherryhomes• Catherine L. DeGraaf• Melissa K. Graham-Morris• Stacey W. Lenny• Karen Chris McGroder	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Don Campbell• Dietmar W. Kuehn• Glenn J. Wallace

If you would like to make contact with anyone on the above list, please email [Helen Tuttle](#), Membership Manager.

[◀ Back](#)

[Technicalities home](#)

[Next ▶](#)

© Copyright 2003
Rocky Mountain Chapter, Society for Technical Communication; all rights reserved.
Standard [disclaimers](#) apply.



[.pdf version](#)

[masthead](#)

[archives](#)

[◀ Back](#) [Next ▶](#)

[Technicalities home](#)

[Chapter news](#)

[From our Director-
Sponsor](#)

[President's corner](#)

[Message from the editor](#)

[Tips from the trenches](#)

[Twenty-Ninth STC RMC
Technical
Communications
Competition](#)

[Looking back](#)

[The good, the bad, and
the reality of being a
technical communicator](#)

[Creativity and the
technical communicator](#)

[Web hosting demystified](#)

[Student view:
Summertime tech writing](#)

[My not-so-gentle
reminder](#)

[Understanding the design
change control process](#)

Technicalities

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

Editorial

Managing Editor: Ron Arner

Article Editors: Kristy Lantz Astry, Bridget Julian, Jay Mead, Lynnette Reveling

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 303.405.8122 and by e-mail at news@stcrmc.org. 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 2002-2003 Officers

President: [Frank Tagader](#)

Vice President: [Marc Lee](#)

[STC RMC home](#)

[STC International home](#)

Treasurer: [Angela Estes-Rank](#)

Secretary: [Joel Meier](#)

Nominating Committee: [Mike Livsey](#), [Gail Bernstein](#)

Region 7 Director-Sponsor: [Rahel Anne Bailie](#)

Past President: [Martha Sippel](#)

A complete listing of all chapter officers and SIG Coordinators can be found at: http://www.stcrmc.org/chapter/officers_managers_2003-2004.htm.

[◀ Back](#)

[Technicalities home](#)

[Next ▶](#)

© Copyright 2003

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

[.pdf version](#)[masthead](#)[archives](#)[◀ Back](#) [Next ▶](#)[Technicalities home](#)[Chapter news](#)[From our Director-
Sponsor](#)[President's corner](#)[Message from the editor](#)[Tips from the trenches](#)[Twenty-Ninth STC RMC
Technical
Communications
Competition](#)[Looking back](#)[The good, the bad, and
the reality of being a
technical communicator](#)[Creativity and the
technical communicator](#)[Web hosting demystified](#)[Student view:
Summertime tech writing](#)[My not-so-gentle
reminder](#)[Understanding the design
change control process](#)

What color is your future job: commodity writer or strategic communicator?

by [Rahel Baillie](#), Region 7 Director-Sponsor

This month, I found myself in Portland, Oregon, for the STC board meeting and the Willamette Valley's season kick-off meeting, which the chapter organized to coincide with the board meeting. The topic was the future of technical communication, a panel discussion that included a workforce analyst, two STC board members, and two local technical communicators who weathered the turndown in the economy and embody the characteristics of career survivors.

As context for the panel discussion, it happens to be that Oregon is the hardest hit state of all the US. Many software development jobs have been sent offshore, and the technical communication jobs that accompanied those jobs dried up, as well. Even in companies retaining their North American-based staff, the continual effort to trim "waste" continues to erode jobs in departments seen as cost centers.

"Commodity writing" is the type of technical communication characterized as the creation of formulaic documentation on demand, and is closely tied to writing code. Companies are increasingly comfortable outsourcing both of these tasks. Those are the jobs being sent offshore, as evidenced by the surge in job openings on STC job boards in the Asia-Pacific countries.

Increasingly, the jobs that remain are for "strategic communicators," technical writers who can be entrusted to look beyond the pages of their manuals, beyond the screens of documentation, beyond the department of documentation, and even beyond the GUI. These strategic communicators look at the product from a business point of view and ensure they contribute to the bottom line through their contributions to the company's product. The actual contribution may be content, user-centered design, or specific communications products, but the content arises from a perspective of problem-solving. The successful strategic contributor is recognized by management as a valuable part of the team, and may be part of the management team. (See Andrea Ames' presentation slides at www.stcwvc.org.)

What impressed me were the remaining panelists who embodied the principles of strategic communication. Sheila Reitz, a contractor for an Oregon power company, made a conscious choice to move from commodity work to strategic communication. Using a performance-based résumé—coincidentally, I discuss these techniques in "Using a Résumé to Showcase Your Talents" in the September/October 2003 issue of *Intercom*—Reitz demonstrated her ability to contribute her analytical and communication skills documenting work flow processes. As a result, her first phone call to user-test the new résumé format resulted in a landing a dream contract, when her tester exclaimed, "We need you!"

The landscape for technical communications has changed, and will continue to change.

[STC RMC home](#)

[STC International home](#)

Whether you are a technical communicator outside of North America who is benefiting from the windfall of technical writing jobs coming to your area, or a technical communicator called upon to stretch your imagination, the quest is the same one posed by Dick Bolles, author of *What Color Is Your Parachute?*: Which of my skills fills the changing needs in the local market, and how can I market myself to meet those needs?

[◀ Back](#)

[Technicalities home](#)

[Next ▶](#)

© Copyright 2003

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

Standard [disclaimers](#) apply.

[.pdf version](#)[masthead](#)[archives](#)[◀ Back](#) [Next ▶](#)[Technicalities home](#)[Chapter news](#)[From our Director-
Sponsor](#)[President's corner](#)[Message from the editor](#)[Tips from the trenches](#)[Twenty-Ninth STC RMC
Technical
Communications
Competition](#)[Looking back](#)[The good, the bad, and
the reality of being a
technical communicator](#)[Creativity and the
technical communicator](#)[Web hosting demystified](#)[Student view:
Summertime tech writing](#)[My not-so-gentle
reminder](#)[Understanding the design
change control process](#)

That certain uncertainty

by [Frank Tagader](#), Rocky Mountain Chapter President

I've been at my job for nearly 10 years, and while I love my work, there is no comfort of knowing that I could continue on here for the next 22 years or so to get to retirement. And, even if there were that cushion of comfort, would I be inclined to see myself here 20+ years from today? The world has changed from my parents' time. It could even be claimed that a decade's worth of world changes have taken place in the last two years.

In some cases it is probably too convenient to use September 11, 2001, as a turning point. It is true that many of the political, business, and cultural changes we have seen in the last two years were shaped by September 11, or by the world's reaction to September 11. However, plenty of other changes that were blossoming or germinating prior to that time are now affecting us.

The national economic downturn started well before the events of September 11, and we certainly are still feeling that aftermath in many respects.

I think we are seeing more uncertainty in our daily lives than ever before. That big collective sigh of relief that we felt when the Berlin Wall came down and the end of the Cold War has been replaced by a new nervousness. Maybe at some point in the future we can relax a bit, even with the threat of terrorism, new diseases, and more and more pockets of political unrest worldwide.

Living a life of uncertainty, I have adapted a principle of quantum mechanics into a bit of homespun philosophy that gets me through the rough patches.

I take comfort in Werner Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle. In 1927, Heisenberg stated "The more precisely the position is determined, the less precisely the momentum is known in this instant, and vice-versa." Twenty years ago, as a college student, a lecture by a college dean spun this bit of scientific observation into something reaching beyond the boundaries of physical science into everyday life. I can't recall the exact wording, but it was akin to "the only certainty is that there is a certain uncertainty."

If there is an uncertain relation between the position and the momentum (mass times velocity) of a subatomic particle such as an electron, then when you pull away from the microscope, what does that mean for objects much larger such as people and events? To me this is both frightening and awe-inspiring. Nothing is certain. There are endless possibilities.

What does this have to do with my day-to-day life? Well, currently I'm in the midst of a corporate acquisition at work. There are lots of fried nerves as people worry and postulate about the future of their jobs and what they can do to affect that future.

[STC RMC home](#)

[STC International home](#)

Sure, this can be scary, and there are no guarantees that the corporate powers that be won't eliminate this position or that (and "that" could easily be my own position).

Another of Heisenberg's statements is, "I believe that the existence of the classical 'path' can be pregnantly formulated as follows: The 'path' comes into existence only when we observe it." Over the years, I've heard this combined with other parts of the principle to intimate that the very act of observation changes the event.

It may be a stretch, but I sometimes think of this in terms of the ostrich hiding its head in a hole. You can change things by merely observing and taking stock. But I am trying to do more. I'm trying to do the best I can with my job, not just waiting it out. Maybe this will pay off, with continued work within the new organization, or maybe I will be forced to take a new path. Whatever happens, it will be an adventure. Of that point, I **am** certain.

[◀ Back](#)

[Technicalities home](#)

[Next ▶](#)

© Copyright 2003

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

Standard [disclaimers](#) apply.

[.pdf version](#)[masthead](#)[archives](#)[◀ Back](#) [Next ▶](#)[Technicalities home](#)[Chapter news](#)[From our Director-
Sponsor](#)[President's corner](#)[Message from the editor](#)[Tips from the trenches](#)[Twenty-Ninth STC RMC
Technical
Communications
Competition](#)[Looking back](#)[The good, the bad, and
the reality of being a
technical communicator](#)[Creativity and the
technical communicator](#)[Web hosting demystified](#)[Student view:
Summertime tech writing](#)[My not-so-gentle
reminder](#)[Understanding the design
change control process](#)

Who speaks for our profession? We do.

by [Ron Arner](#)

I applaud George Hayhoe's editorial *Who Speaks for our Profession?* (*Technical Communication*, August 2003). I agree that ours is a highly unnoticed profession in the business world today. Hayhoe suggests that STC is the logical choice to be the voice of technical communicators, and also offers a few "target audiences" we should try to impact (high school guidance counselors, executive managers, and readers of science and technology periodicals). I would like to offer a few more suggestions of ways we can improve our visibility.

It never ceases to amaze me when people ask, "Technical communication, what is that?" I calmly explain, while trying not to smirk at the blank expression on their faces, that technical communication usually involves technical writing or Web design, some combination of the two, or can be a related field such as multimedia, grant writing, etc. They usually respond that tech comm sounds very important, interesting, or difficult, and drop the subject altogether. Like Mr. Hayhoe, I'm a little bit upset and a little bit puzzled as to how and why Technical Communication has earned such obscurity.

I think part of the problem is due to the meteoric rise of the personal computer (PC). Before every home had its own computer, TVs, VCRs, answering machines, electric typewriters, and calculators were probably the most complicated gadgets in any home. Sure you had to skim the instruction manual to set the clock on the VCR or record a program while you weren't home, but once this task was successfully completed, there was never any need to consult the owner's manual again. The manufacturer and the consumer both were spoiled by these predecessors to the PC and the quick reference user guide, and subsequently couldn't understand that the PC *required* familiarity with the owner's manual before one would be able to use it properly.

With earlier technologies like calculators, once you mastered a skill, it could be performed the same way time and again. Even if you had to manipulate different data, the memory buttons always worked the same way, multiply always multiplied, etc. Not so in the modern computer world. Consider Microsoft Excel as an example. My job often requires the manipulation of data in Microsoft Excel. One vendor I deal with allows me to download information from their Web site, but it cannot be manipulated in Excel just by cutting and pasting. It has to do with the way the data is formatted from the other end. Instead, I must first cut and paste the information into Notepad, save it as a .txt file, and then import it into Excel by setting the delimiters, etc. Try figuring that one out just from skimming an owner's manual.

Modern technologies require advanced forms of communication for people to be able to learn how to use them. Unfortunately, businesses won't admit this fact until they realize that's why their customers are unhappy. We'll be waiting another decade for that to happen, so we have to make it happen ourselves.

[STC RMC home](#)

[STC International home](#)

I couldn't help but wonder how the Wizard of Oz would have solved our invisibility problem. What would have happened if, in addition to the Scarecrow, the Tin Man, the Cowardly Lion, and Toto, Dorothy had a technical communicator accompany her through Oz? What would the Wizard have given him or her at the end of the journey? How about a megaphone with kind words like, "You don't need any better documentation or layout skills—you just need to be heard."

And how can we be heard? It seems to me that the best way would be to improve our negotiating skills. From the very first interview, we need to be aware that our potential employer or client may not realize how important we are unless they look at things from their customers' point of view. We need to somehow guide them into understanding that our contributions may not be seen as easily as those of the marketing or sales departments. One way we might do this is to request that our job review be related to statistics like a decrease in the number of complaints received, or a decrease in the number of calls to customer service for FAQs we've added to the company Web site.

Our negotiating job doesn't stop once we get hired or receive a new contract—in fact, it's just beginning. Anytime our contributions have resulted in increased profits or efficiency, we need to log our successes and bring them to our superiors' attention. By repeatedly pointing out how valuable we are, we are much more likely to retain our positions in a tight economy, and be considered for promotions and raises.

The next best way for our profession to become more popular would be some sort of national PR campaign, perhaps by STC International. Hayhoe points out that STC has been working towards this goal increasingly over the last decade, but that launching an expensive campaign in today's economic climate wouldn't be feasible. The Rocky Mountain Chapter has been doing a wonderful job of increasing our visibility locally thanks to Carla Mead and the Publicity Committee.

The final suggestion I have to increase the popularity of technical communicators is to volunteer, and for just this once, I don't mean with the STC. Volunteering your services as a technical communicator with your favorite charity is a wonderful way to get some exposure in communities that don't require large amounts of technical writing or Web design, but do need small documents created like brochures, newsletters, logos, etc. Volunteering will increase your networking contacts as well; you never know who you might meet, and sometime later, when they need the services of a technical communicator, they will call on you before they consider giving the job to a total stranger.

Hayhoe concludes that if we don't find a way to make our profession more popular in the business world, "We'll continue to be voiceless, invisible, ignored." I think this will hold true even if the economy does get better, and we start to see more tech comm jobs become available. After all, if we can prove our worth in a down economy, we'll be much better off once things do get better, and we'll be no worse off if they don't!

If you have further suggestions of how we can make our profession more well-known, please email them to: news@stcrmc.org, and I'll be happy to compile them or include them in a *Letters to the Editor* column in the next issue of *Technicalities*.

[◀ Back](#)

[Technicalities home](#)

[Next ▶](#)

© Copyright 2003

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

[.pdf version](#)[masthead](#)[archives](#)[◀ Back](#) [Next ▶](#)[Technicalities home](#)[Chapter news](#)[From our Director-
Sponsor](#)[President's corner](#)[Message from the editor](#)[Tips from the trenches](#)[Twenty-Ninth STC RMC
Technical
Communications
Competition](#)[Looking back](#)[The good, the bad, and
the reality of being a
technical communicator](#)[Creativity and the
technical communicator](#)[Web hosting demystified](#)[Student view:
Summertime tech writing](#)[My not-so-gentle
reminder](#)[Understanding the design
change control process](#)

Tips from the trenches

by [Deb Lockwood](#)

Project manager

What meaning do you assign to that term? In my employer's software development environment, a project manager is a job title for someone who manages a cross-organizational project team. These teams consist of a software designer, software developers, a writer, a trainer, and staff from the conversions, implementations, and product organizations. This project manager creates a project plan using Microsoft's Project software application, monitors progress, and keeps everybody marching toward the goal, slaying dragons and removing obstacles along the way.

As content developers, writers, and editors, one element of our job is to manage projects. But how do we go about juggling multiple projects for multiple people, and still keep everything in balance? (There is also another entire issue of trying to balance home and work life, but I'm only going to address work life in this article.)

I've gleaned the information for this article from different sources over the years, and have added my own spin to them. The two sources that have influenced me most are as follows: *Managing Your Documentation Projects* by Joann T. Hackos, and *Standards for Online Communication* by Joann T. Hackos and Dawn M. Stevens, (See <http://www.infomanagementcenter.com> for information about Joann and the Center for Information Development Management.)

Also, remember to check out the STC's national Web site at http://www.stc.org/member_pubs.asp where you'll find a list of books that STC members have written and published.

Most authors that I've read handle this subject by listing the different phases of managing projects. In general, you'll usually see the following phases:

- Planning
- Outlining
- Writing
- Communicating
- Evaluating

Planning

During the planning phase, you should pay attention to the following tasks:

- Determine the project's deadline.

[STC RMC home](#)

[STC International home](#)

- Define the project requirements.
- Identify the audience.
- Establish the objectives.
- Estimate resources.

Outlining

During the outlining phase, you should do the following:

- Gather the source information.
- Review all available information and get a big picture view of this project.
- Outline the project - literally.
- Define manual specifications.
- Establish page and text formats.

During the writing phase, you do exactly what this phases' title suggests: write the content. To begin, review the project's requirements again and make sure you understand the deliverables, the time frame, and the project's scope. Then start fleshing out the document using the outline as your road map. Remember to follow your style guide of choice for consistency.

Communicating

Throughout all phases of the project, effective, clear communication is the key to effective project management. Communication takes place with:

- Your manager
- The project requestor
- Subject matter experts
- The editor
- Other publication staff members

Evaluating

Finally, the evaluating phase asks us to analyze how well we followed the project plan. We would ask the following questions:

- Did we write to our identified audience?
- Did we meet our objective?
- Did we deliver on schedule?
- Did we target the correct audience?
- Did we use our style guide?
- Did we organize the document effectively?

One aspect of this phase is the project wrap-up. Here's a couple of things you can do to gather evaluation information:

Write a Style Sheet for the project that contains basic project information and identifies any style decisions specific to this project. This is a very handy thing to have if someone else is going to write the next version of a guide.

Conduct a wrap-up meeting with the person who requested the project, or with the project team after the document has been delivered. Come prepared with questions like these:

- What communication technique worked well during our project?
- What didn't work well?
- What can I do better next time?

Tips

Here are some tips that may help you more effectively manage your documentation projects:

Assume nothing

There are times, especially when I am writing a first draft, when I will write the words "Assume Nothing" on a 3M note and put it on my computer monitor. Did the project requestor let the subject matter experts know what they are expected to do? Maybe not. Don't assume the trainer knows to contact you if he or she has changes to a document. When it comes time for the revision, ask. Do other writers or content developers know where the most current files are kept? Do you and your manager agree on what the most pressing priority is that's on your plate?

Make lists

We are writers, hence we are drawn to the written language. Use that knowledge to drive yourself to success. Make lists in your daily planner or in a notebook:

- To do lists
- "Don't forget to look for this stuff on the last pass through a draft" lists
- Project number lists
- SME lists

For instance, when I'm working on the final changes to a document, I keep a hand-written, running list of things that pop into my mind that I need to remember to check for when I'm doing the final page by page flip through before the document goes to final edit. Things like footer, headers, pagination, table breaks, updated TOC, and index.

End each day by spending five minutes organizing your tasks for the next day. Flip that daily planner page to the next day and note the major tasks you need to get done.

If you are anything like me, when I leave the office, I purposely leave work behind - both physically and mentally. So, when I come back in the next day, it takes me a couple of minutes to figure out where I was and what I was doing. I've found a way to minimize that time, however.

The last thing I do before I leave work is to stack up my work I'm to do the next day - in priority order - and place a paperweight on top. When I get in the office the next day, I have a visual jumpstart when I see my paperweight that says to me "Oh yes, that's what I need to do this morning." It's a visual clue as to where I was yesterday when I left.

Because I usually have multiple, concurrent projects, I've created a one-page spreadsheet that lists my current projects. This spreadsheet includes only the project's dates and a note about its current status. I always keep this form current, and I keep a hard-copy on my desk. Using this form, I can tell at a glance where I stand with a project and when the next draft is due. On Friday, I will usually highlight the next week's dates and leave this document on my desk so that I see it first thing on

Monday morning and can jump right in to my next most important project.

Model Effective Communication

We need to be champions of effective writing. As such, we should constantly challenge ourselves to write cleanly, clearly, and to follow standard grammar rules.

Also, we should try to follow our style guide in all of our written communication. Modeling effective communication not only sets an example for others. It reinforces good habits for each of us.

Contributors: Leslie Bateman, Kit Brown, and Martha Sippel.

[◀ Back](#)

[Technicalities home](#)

[Next ▶](#)

© Copyright 2003

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

Standard [disclaimers](#) apply.

[.pdf version](#)[masthead](#)[archives](#)[◀ Back](#) [Next ▶](#)[Technicalities home](#)[Chapter news](#)[From our Director-
Sponsor](#)[President's corner](#)[Message from the editor](#)[Tips from the trenches](#)[Twenty-Ninth STC RMC
Technical
Communications
Competition](#)[Looking back](#)[The good, the bad, and
the reality of being a
technical communicator](#)[Creativity and the
technical communicator](#)[Web hosting demystified](#)[Student view:
Summertime tech writing](#)[My not-so-gentle
reminder](#)[Understanding the design
change control process](#)

Twenty-Ninth STC RMC Technical Communications Competition

by [Marella Colyvas](#)

Come one, come all! For the twenty-ninth consecutive year, the Rocky Mountain Chapter is sponsoring a variety of technical communication competitions. These competitions perform a variety of services for the membership and technical communicators at large. They:

- Recognize the excellent work that local technical communicators produce
- Provide these communicators with valuable feedback from their peers
- Offer a chance for these communicators to educate their management and clients on the elements that constitute excellence in technical communication

The goal of the competitions is to exemplify and encourage professionalism and excellence in the technical communication profession. We have traditionally offered multiple competitions so that all media can be evaluated, recognized, and shared. If you want to produce great technical communication that shows your skills, enter the competition. You will receive valuable feedback, see winning entries at the year-end awards reception, and maybe even learn how to improve your already terrific work!

If you are a technical communicator, you are eligible to submit entries. Entrants do not have to be members of STC, so encourage tell colleagues and freelancers who produce quality work to enter the competition. And of course, we encourage as many members as possible to enter.

This year, we are offering Technical Publications, Technical Art, and Technical Online Communications competitions.

The deadline for entering is October 17, 2003. All details and instructions can be found on the Call for Entries on our Web site, stcrmc.org.

We look forward to receiving and judging your entries!

[STC RMC home](#)

[STC International home](#)

[◀ Back](#)

[Technicalities home](#)

[Next ▶](#)

© Copyright 2003

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

Standard [disclaimers](#) apply.



[.pdf version](#)

[masthead](#)

[archives](#)

[◀ Back](#) [Next ▶](#)

[Technicalities home](#)

[Chapter news](#)

[From our Director-Sponsor](#)

[President's corner](#)

[Message from the editor](#)

[Tips from the trenches](#)

[Twenty-Ninth STC RMC Technical Communications Competition](#)

[Looking back](#)

[The good, the bad, and the reality of being a technical communicator](#)

[Creativity and the technical communicator](#)

[Web hosting demystified](#)

[Student view: Summertime tech writing](#)

[My not-so-gentle reminder](#)

[Understanding the design change control process](#)

Looking back

by [Martha Sippel](#)

I enjoyed my year as president of the Rocky Mountain chapter. I am writing this to say thanks to all our members, mention our chapter's accomplishments and awards, and thank some people who were instrumental in guiding our chapter in 2002 and 2003.

Major accomplishments

This year, the Rocky Mountain Chapter received a Chapter Achievement Award of Excellence at the international level during the Awards Banquet at the STC Annual Conference. I accepted the award on our behalf.

The chapter won this award through the contributions and efforts of our officers, committee managers, committee members, judges, speakers, and everyone else who helped with a Chapter activity. Thanks to everyone's hard work, the STC RMC is maintaining high standards by continuing to receive international awards for our activities and efforts. This award reflects all of the great things we have accomplished for members in the past year.

We moved our newsletter, *Technicalities*, online in November 2002. Ron Arner took over as the new editor of the newsletter shortly thereafter and he is doing a great job. We hope to continue improving the newsletter online after winning another award of excellence for the newsletter last year. The STC RMC estimates this move will save us about \$10,000, which we can use in other ways to publicize the chapter, the profession, and our activities.

In March we held a special senior member celebration that honored our Fellows, Associate Fellows, and Senior Members. We rescheduled the event due to the March blizzard, but we still had good attendance the week after the storm. Art Elser, an STC Fellow, talked about what volunteering in STC, and the contacts he has met through STC, have meant to his career. It was a successful celebration that we plan to continue next year.

Our Nominating Committee, Molly Malsam and Marella Colyvas, held our first election using online voting. Your vote was completely anonymous for the first time this year (and you could only vote once!).

We had a successful competition again with several local and international awards. The details are available at www.stcrmc.org/technicalities/april_may_2003/feature6.htm in the April/May Technicalities. Out of 56 entries, 44 received awards. Some of these entries won awards at the international level. You can see the international award winners at http://stc.org/pro_competitions.asp.

[STC RMC home](#)

[STC International home](#)

Also, thanks again to our competition managers, Deb Braun, Beth Buonanno, Marella Colyvas, Kathy Ramsey, and Mary Jo Stark. In addition, the competition would not be successful without the help of all the judges who volunteer their time to carefully review and provide constructive criticism to the entrants. If you would like to participate as a judge for this year's competition, please contact Marella Colyvas at marella.colyvas@eds.com or 303-763-3700.

Those who attended know that we had a wonderful awards reception with an excellent speaker, John Hedtke. If you didn't attend, you can read the gist of John's remarks at www.stcrmc.org/technicalities/aug_sept_2003/feature3.htm. Thanks to Frank Tagader, Kim Bell, Jeanie Fogwell, Michael Livsey, and Mary Jo Stark for arranging the logistics. If I forgot anyone, I sincerely apologize.

Accomplishments helping us win the Chapter Achievement Award

We held a strategic planning meeting at the president's home in August 2002 to formulate strategic short-term goals and objectives for 2002-2003. We used this meeting to begin a long-term strategic planning effort to carry us through the next few years. This will help us improve the continuity of our initiatives each year.

Carla Mead, our Publicity Manager, began a larger-scale publicity endeavor by renewing efforts to publicize our meetings in local newspapers and technical publications. In addition, she sends meeting announcement postcards before each meeting to attract more members to our meetings.

We revamped our "Why Hire a Technical Communicator" brochure and plan to begin distributing it to employers who have hired technical communicators in our area. We will compile our list of employers from companies who post jobs on our Web site.

Our webmaster, Anne Halsey, created a Web page with links to all STC Web sites with job lists, and a page with links to all STC Web sites with newsletters. We shared these two pages with the Region 7 Presidents listserv.

The new Usability and Information Design SIG has been very successful in helping members learn more about usability. Laurence Hoess and Laurie Lamar, the SIG co-managers, held two UID SIG meetings this year.

Helen Tuttle and the membership committee held a membership drive at our November Chapter meeting and asked members and students to bring a friend. We raffled software, books, and STC memorabilia.

We updated our new member orientation and chapter guide documents, Angela Estes Rank and Julie Welander held two seminars that provided reasonably priced training for members and nonmembers, and Ron Arner reinstated the honoring of new senior members in our newsletter.

Kathy Ramsey, Marella Colyvas, Linda Gallagher, and Marc Lee started an initiative to move our stand-alone competition database to a web-based database that will permit competition managers to enter and extract data whenever needed. Formerly, competition managers had to pass the stand-alone database from person to person and only one manager could access the "live" database at a time. This new web-based database will also provide a template for additional database initiatives.

Joel Meier and Anne Halsey worked on an initiative to archive chapter information on our Web site in a password-protected area for Council members. This will help our transition to new officers and committee managers at the end of the year.

Chapter leaders attended and presented at STC Conference Leadership Day. Kathy Ramsey and Marella Colyvas showed the competition database we use to manage competitions and demonstrated how it makes their work more efficient.

Distinguished Chapter Service Award

Linda Gallagher received the Distinguished Chapter Service Award, which acknowledges the work of chapter members who provide exemplary service to the Society through their dedication to the chapter and its activities. I mentioned this in a previous article (www.stcrmc.org/technicalities/june_july_2003/current.htm). Linda has contributed a lot to our chapter over the years and we appreciate her contributions.

President's Awards

The chapter President's Award honors chapter members for their service during the past year. The following people earned President's Awards, and the notations for each award are presented here:

Ron Arner

Ron Arner stepped into the role of newsletter editor last fall. Or should I say Ron was baptized by fire? Ron has done an excellent job gathering articles, writing his editor articles, and creating the HTML and PDF versions of the newsletter. In addition, Ron was an instrumental volunteer for the chapter's annual online, print, and art competition, sending most of the correspondence to participants and assisting in printing the award certificates. I am proud to have Ron as one of our tireless volunteers and hope he continues to help the chapter in the future.

Gail Bernstein

Gail is the co-manager of the Consulting and Independent Contracting SIG, with Linda Gallagher. In this role, Gail and Linda initiated two separate CIC SIG meetings to help independents in addition to the two CIC SIG meetings scheduled before our regular monthly meetings. She also managed the SIG last year and has handled updating the Web site meeting pages for the last few years. Gail is always willing to volunteer and is an incoming member of the Nominating Committee next year. Congratulations, Gail.

Jeanie Fogwell

Jeanie has been the Program co-manager for two years. During this time, she has scheduled speakers, coordinated transportation and housing for them, and ordered, transported, and set up food for regular meetings. In fact, Jeanie coordinated John Hedtke's trip and brought him here tonight. In addition, Jeanie coordinated between our management company and STC RMC for two years. Jeanie has always been willing to help and follows through with whatever is asked of her. It is with great pleasure that I give Jeanie this President's Award.

Anne Halsey

Anne has been managing the Web team that maintains our chapter Web site for over three years. What I have appreciated most during the last year is Anne's responsiveness. Whenever anyone sends her information for the site, she acknowledges receipt immediately and posts the information or passes it on to the proper team member promptly. I've enjoyed working with Anne and know that I can

count on her to update the site in a timely manner. In addition, Anne manages the job bank, and she created a page with links to all other STC job banks. These are but a few things that Anne provides our chapter. It is with great pleasure that I congratulate Anne.

Mike Livsey

Mike has also been the Program Co-Manager for two years. Mike has scheduled speakers, introduced speakers, and ordered, transported, and set up food for regular meetings. While many of you might think this is trivial, it requires considerable planning that demands a lot of time. Because we have been holding meetings at companies to save money over the last few years, Mike or Jeanie have to leave work early, pick up and transport the food, and stay until everything is packed away and cleaned up. This takes a lot of perseverance and we all appreciate Mike's hard work. Mike is an incoming member of the Nominating Committee next year. I am proud to present Mike with this President's Award.

Molly Malsam

Molly Malsam is on the Nominating Committee this year. In this role, she initiated our first official online voting survey and continued her efforts by sending a volunteer appreciation survey to our volunteers. Molly has also been instrumental in our salary surveys over the past 5 years. In addition, Molly was the STC RMC secretary for two years and has helped out on many other events, publications, and efforts. Molly is always willing to provide excellent editing for our chapter and consistently contributes original ideas. Thanks, Molly, for your innovative ideas, excellent editing, and tireless efforts.

Carla Mead

Carla has unselfishly provided her expertise in publicity and marketing to our chapter. Not only has she stepped in as a new member, but she also took on the role of managing the Publicity Committee. She successfully guided this committee to finalize the chapter brochure "Why Hire a Technical Communicator," finalized slip sheets and covers for our media kit, and provided monthly meeting notices to the media in the form of newspaper submissions and press releases. In addition, Carla was instrumental in creating the awards reception brochure, program, press releases, and other information related to the event. She has provided excellent leadership to the Publicity Committee. It is with great pleasure that I introduce Carla Mead as a winner of this year's President's Award.

Helen Tuttle

Helen Tuttle is our Membership Manager. In this role, Helen has provided new member orientations at each monthly meeting and contacted new members by letter or telephone to welcome them. She is always a great source of information and is willing to help in many ways. For the last two years, Helen was our volunteer coordinator and helped us match volunteer needs with interested members to fill volunteer positions. Helen took on this role as a relatively new member and has continued her efforts with enthusiasm. I heartily congratulate Helen on a job well done and welcome her as a winner of this year's President's Award.

Looking to the future

Thanks for allowing me to serve you this past year. I hope it was as enjoyable for you as it was for me. Maybe these accomplishments and awards will inspire those of you who aren't currently active to become involved with your chapter—it is only as good as

you make it!

Frank Tagader deserves your full support as he takes the helm for his second STC RMC presidency. Thanks again for the wild ride!

[◀ Back](#)

[Technicalities home](#)

[Next ▶](#)

© Copyright 2003

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

Standard [disclaimers](#) apply.

[.pdf version](#)[masthead](#)[archives](#)[◀ Back](#) [Next ▶](#)[Technicalities home](#)[Chapter news](#)[From our Director-
Sponsor](#)[President's corner](#)[Message from the editor](#)[Tips from the trenches](#)[Twenty-Ninth STC RMC
Technical
Communications
Competition](#)[Looking back](#)[The good, the bad, and
the reality of being a
technical communicator](#)[Creativity and the
technical communicator](#)[Web hosting demystified](#)[Student view:
Summertime tech writing](#)[My not-so-gentle
reminder](#)[Understanding the design
change control process](#)

The good, the bad, and the reality of being a technical communicator

by [Edward Ellis](#)

I have heard a lot of negative comments and opinions concerning our profession recently from our STC Chapter techcomm-discussion group. Some recent examples have focused on the lack of job opportunities, layoffs, technical communications positions being sent to India, decline in pay, and that some co-workers do not view us as value-added contributors.

These discussions on the list-serve prompted me to ask the question: "Would you encourage or discourage someone you know who was considering a career as a technical communicator?" I asked for candid and honest opinions and in return promised anonymity to those who responded. The responses were insightful and evenly divided between the Good, the Bad, and the Ugly.

The good

"I would without question encourage someone to join this field if that is their area of interest and expertise," one member responded. "I think much of the negative going around is due to the current Colorado job market. I think people are tending to accept jobs or contracts that they aren't especially thrilled with because they don't see much alternative. This naturally results in general dissatisfaction with their career."

"I would bet that if we were to listen in on discussion groups among almost any other aspect of information technology right now, we would hear very similar stories. It is fairly basic human nature to grouse about our lot in life and about our jobs. When we feel trapped in positions that we might not have chosen in a boom economy, we tend to need more outlets for venting our frustration."

"I'm of "that age" where I've experienced many economic cycles, changing trends in hiring, changing business practices, pay, and differing attitudes toward technical communications. I find that I've lived through them all and am still in the biz, I still find it rewarding and challenging, and I wouldn't trade a day of it!"

Another member responded that they would recommend technical writing as a profession if the person entering the field can get passionate about information, accurately and appropriately presented. "The world is noise and technical communicators are the "thin blue line" between chaos and clarity. While the world, including journalists, dance with chaos, technical communicators pine only for clarity," he said.

The lengthiest response came from a woman who was laid off and started her own business. She said that technical communications is a good profession, and it is

[STC RMC home](#)

[STC International home](#)

possible to make money in the current economy, even though the recent economy has placed a damper on the job market. She goes on to say that it is human nature to grouse about our less than ideal situation and offers the following advice:

- Stop whining and start problem solving. If you are having trouble finding a job, broaden your search and expand your geographic area (by industry and location), develop new skills, advertise existing skills, and look for opportunities that may not be titled as technical writer/editor.
- Attitude is everything. You can have the best technical skills in the world, but if you go into an interview with a schlep rock cloud over your head, no one is going to hire you. If you've been laid off, try to look at this as an opportunity to try something new, to renew yourself.
- Be proactive and professional. Don't expect potential employers to come to you; seek them out--assertively and professionally.
- Educate folks about what you do and are capable of. If people get a glazed look in their eye when you tell them what you do, don't retreat--educate them.
- Look at the industry trends and figure out how to apply your existing skills in new ways. Don't wait for someone to tell you that you need to move to XML.
- Learn how what you do impacts your company's bottom line and then educate your managers.
- Look at the big picture. Don't get so caught up in the day-to-day minutiae of your job that you lose sight of the big picture.
- If you are currently between jobs, use the time to take classes and build skills, volunteer, try something completely new and teach. Regroup and be kind to yourself. Make this a time of gainful unemployment. Above all, get off the pity pot and do something--it doesn't matter what--any decision (even if you fail) is better than no decision.

The bad

"I have been in the technical writing field for 25 years," wrote one member. "Up until two years ago, I would have recommended the field to others who have an interest in technology and also an interest and ability in writing. I learned many tools over the years and do not consider the tools to be a major part of the job. For the past two years, there have been almost no jobs in the field in the metro area. At first, I thought this situation was short-term and, surely, the jobs would return. At this time, I think other factors are at work and do not expect the jobs to return in the numbers that always seemed to exist in the past. I just completed a contract recently at a large company that was beginning to send tech writing jobs offshore. They expect this trend to pick up next year. Personally, I will start looking, and retraining if need be, for another career. It's nice to tell people to get into the field if that's where there interests are, but most people also need to eat and pay the mortgage."

Another member responded, "I would not encourage a young person to seek technical communications for a career if he or she desires to work in the software industry. Also, I would discourage them to enter the profession if they thought that technical communication offers a high salary."

This member said that within two years, more than 50 percent of her company's software development will be done in India where they can hire four writers for the cost of one here. All software projects are being shortened to be four-month cycles and if the team cannot make the deadline established by management than the entire team is fired.

"I just completed a product delivery in which I worked some horrific hours. I had no holidays since Easter and worked all but two weekends during the project. I do not think I could encourage someone to enter a workforce in which they will work extremely hard with significant personal sacrifice and, yet, have no job security. In

talking with several senior writers (50+ age group who span from the East Coast to the West Coast), everyone is trying to position themselves to retire, to transition into another profession, or to open a small business within the next two years."

The reality

"From a personal standpoint," wrote a member, "I think I would feel honor-bound at least to warn them that tech writer jobs are a little thin on the ground at the moment. I have been looking for a tech writer position since I got laid off two years ago, and haven't found one yet. I wouldn't necessarily want to put them off, if that's what they really want to do, but they should have realistic expectations of the job market and the difficulty in finding a position."

[◀ Back](#)

[Technicalities home](#)

[Next ▶](#)

© Copyright 2003

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

[Technicalities home](#)[Chapter news](#)[From our Director-
Sponsor](#)[President's corner](#)[Message from the editor](#)[Tips from the trenches](#)[Twenty-Ninth STC RMC
Technical
Communications
Competition](#)[Looking back](#)[The good, the bad, and
the reality of being a
technical communicator](#)[Creativity and the
technical communicator](#)[Web hosting demystified](#)[Student view:
Summertime tech writing](#)[My not-so-gentle
reminder](#)[Understanding the design
change control process](#)

Creativity and the technical communicator

by [Marella Colyvas](#)

What is it that draws us to be technical communicators? I know there are as many answers as there are technical communicators, and hearing your stories over the years has piqued my interest in this question even more. Many of you fell into the profession through a circuitous route, trying different professions along the way; others went so far as to get a degree in Technical Communication. What stands out among myriad answers is, though, a love for and commitment to the communication of ideas using language, pictures, and other media, so the result is a clear and precise rendition of the matter at hand. Most of us also love language for its quirkiness as well as clarity, no matter what genre we work with—online help, user manuals, web content to sell products or services, or marketing communications. And most of us would say that given everything we need to do, often our writing, which is what we love to do, gets the least attention.

So, when we're facing the next deadline or attending endless meetings with subject matter experts, all the while juggling practice to improve our technical skills in the latest tool, how do we manage to keep our writing fresh, clear, and precise? In other words, how do we enhance our own creativity?

A few years ago I attended a fabulous workshop at an STC conference that addressed this very subject, and a lesson from it stuck: if you want to assist your muse, you must call it. In a nutshell, if you want to improve your writing, you must write. This does not mean that you spend more hours editing your own work or taking on more assignments. It means that you must engage a part of the brain that many of us forget we have: the creative right side. It means honoring that part of you that is a writer.

The best way to do this is to free-write: take about 25 minutes (longer, if you can) and just write. It is easier if you break up the 25 minutes into two sessions, one right after the other, for 10 minutes and 15 minutes respectively. The rule is, your hand never leaves the paper or keyboard—you keep writing for the full allotted time. "But what do I write about?" you ask. That's easy. Pick something on your desk, in your home, or some word you saw in an article, and just write about it. No editing, crossing out, or re-writing allowed. You will be amazed at what you come up with.

If you're tempted to try this, here is a prompt for you: *pickle*. That's right, just *pickle*. Write about that word. Write anything, for 10 minutes. That's free-writing. There is a web site devoted to this sort of writing, too, although these authors allow only one minute to write: <http://oneword.invisibleland.tv/>.

OK, I can still sense that you're skeptical. "What does this have to do with technical writing?" you ask. A lot. First, it engages the part of your brain that is the opposite of the analytical side, the side we exercise when composing precise instructions,

[STC RMC home](#)

[STC International home](#)

descriptions, or cost-benefit studies, and allows you to play with language in a different way. Playing with language in turn allows you to improve your command of the written language, and an increased command of language makes difficult writing assignments easier. After all, turning out a good piece of technical writing, even if it consists solely of ISO 2000-driven requirements, isn't just the compilation of what Joe Subject Matter Expert gave you as a brain dump. A good piece of technical writing is a synthesis of ideas and language that you put together in your own unique way, even if there are specific style requirements.

Second, this exercise honors that part of you that is a writer. What you write about in your sessions is yours alone. It is unique, and is not for anyone to criticize. This can make you feel better about yourself as a writer, because we rarely get accolades for what we have done; we get criticism instead. One of the best things I've done for myself lately is to join a writing group that does the exercise that I've discussed, though for a longer period of time. An added step is that we read what we've written, and everyone else in the group can give only positive feedback. It is not the place to give any criticism.

I hope all technical communicators try this exercise to enhance their creativity. What I've described is not the only exercise, but it is the easiest to start with. I have found that writing this way has helped me mostly in ways that may be intangible, but there have also been measurable benefits: it has been easier to write some seriously technical information about telephony—I write it faster and better, and have received commendations from the project team.

I invite you to try free-writing to enhance your creativity. I am also willing to start an online writing group for people to practice, if there is sufficient interest. If you are interested, please contact me directly: marella.colyvas@eds.com. I look forward to hearing from you.

[◀ Back](#)

[Technicalities home](#)

[Next ▶](#)

© Copyright 2003

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

Standard [disclaimers](#) apply.

[.pdf version](#)[masthead](#)[archives](#)[◀ Back](#) [Next ▶](#)[Technicalities home](#)[Chapter news](#)[From our Director-
Sponsor](#)[President's corner](#)[Message from the editor](#)[Tips from the trenches](#)[Twenty-Ninth STC RMC
Technical
Communications
Competition](#)[Looking back](#)[The good, the bad, and
the reality of being a
technical communicator](#)[Creativity and the
technical communicator](#)[Web hosting demystified](#)[Student view:
Summertime tech writing](#)[My not-so-gentle
reminder](#)[Understanding the design
change control process](#)

Web hosting demystified

by [Guy Ball](#), Senior STC Member

(Reprinted from Techniscribe, the newsletter of the Orange County, CA chapter of STC.)

Many of us first search for product or service information on the Web. These days, Web sites are important tools to help communicate to the widest possible audience. If not posted out there, even the best product or service can get overlooked. In technical-communicator terms, this could mean online samples of our work, businesses that we are starting or helping, or organizations where we volunteer.

But if you've never set up a Web site, you probably could use some help getting started. This article is designed to assist with a couple of the early steps in the creation of a site. (I'm not going to teach you how to create the HTML pages. There are plenty of books and tutorials to do that.) I'm going to show you how to choose and obtain your domain name and then where to host your site.

I've been creating Web sites for about eight years now. I am the first to admit that I'm a graphically impaired writer. My sites won't compete design-wise with those from my more visually creative brethren. However, I've been able to leverage my strength as an information engineer/designer (a.k.a. technical writer) to create Web sites that have strong content and, as a result, are widely respected. And you, my fellow professional, can do the same—or better.

Choosing a domain name

Your first step is choosing the domain name—that's the URL (Uniform Resource Locator) address people will type in their browser to go to your site. The name you choose needs a bit of thought, and you may not get the first name that strikes your fancy—a lot of other people have done this before you. The best way to handle this is to find a domain name registry site and, using the name search tool, start entering names that seem to be good ideas. My personal favorite registry is www.directnic.com. I previously used one of the bigger companies that charged me \$35 a year with a two-year minimum contract. But Directnic is fully accredited and charges only \$15 a year with no minimum contract. While there are a couple of companies that claim to be even cheaper, Directnic also gives you a few other benefits for no extra charge—and that keeps me a loyal customer. More on those benefits in a minute.

Now, about choosing a name. What's the site for? Personal use? Then an obvious choice might be JohnDoe.com or JohnDoeDesigner.com. Business? If you have a company name, you'll probably want to start with that. If the name is too long, you may consider a shorter version or even initials. A unique catch phrase is a good idea, but try not to get too cute. Think of how people might remember the site by name. For

[STC RMC home](#)

[STC International home](#)

a new site for the Santa Ana Historical Preservation Society, I chose [www.SantaAnaHistory.com](#). Using the full organization name as our domain might have had people forgetting words or misspelling the URL. Also, I'm not a fan of initials—sahps.com—so that didn't work for me either. [www.SantaAnaHistory.com](#) is much more memorable and was available. (Side note: Although we promote the site by capitalizing certain letters, the URL is not case sensitive.)

Com, .net, or .org

You may ask in the example above, why do I use ".com" when the society is an organization? You might remember when commercial Web sites tended to be .com, organizations were .org, and networks were .net. In reality, you can pick and choose whatever domain extension you want (except for .gov and .edu). I usually pick .com because that's what most people think of in a URL.

However, I also buy the .net and .org versions of the name, just to protect it from people trying to capitalize on my creative domain names. (I now pick up the new .us and .info extensions too, for the same reason.) Since the price is only \$15 a year per name and extension, it ends up being a cheap price to protect your domain name.

URL Redirection

One nice benefit with Directnic is that it allows you to forward Web visitors who type in one URL that you've bought to another (they call it URL redirection). For instance, those who click [www.SantaAnaHistory.org](#) will go to the actual site at [www.SantaAnaHistory.com](#). While we promote the .com address, should someone type in the wrong extension, he or she still ends up at the right place.

Now, URL redirection works even better if you have already set up a Web site at your "home" Internet service provider (ISP); for example, [www.aol.com/users/mommas-boy1234](#) with AOL being your ISP. The URL doesn't exactly scream "professional" on your business card, does it? However, if you now buy the domain name [www.SuperProTechWriter.com](#), your Directnic account can be set to forward the visitor who types in this URL to your existing site. Using an additional Directnic feature called frames, your pages will all show [www.SuperProTechWriter.com](#) in the browser window and your visitors won't have a clue that they're on your home ISP site.

More on the side

Another benefit of the Directnic account is that you get a few e-mail addresses to use such as [myname@superprotechwriter.com](#). E-mail to this address is forwarded to your personal e-mail address (such as [mommas-boy1234@aol.com](#)) at no extra charge. However, your reply to that original e-mail would be through your regular e-mail account. So if you have a dorky e-mail name, correspondents would know it. For an extra fee, Directnic also offers POP3 e-mail accounts where you can receive and send e-mail using your domain name.

Of course, there may be other domain registration companies that do all this. I get no financial gain from my recommendation of Directnic. If you prefer, you can search around to find other companies. But I'm obviously happy with Directnic and its services. To activate the features I've mentioned, you do have to click a couple of buttons in the right places, but contact me if you can't figure out the online directions and you need some help.

Hosting your site

The next step in setting up your Web site is determining where to host it. If you already have a personal site on your home ISP, then you may not want to move it, which will save you a bit of money. Have Directnic set your domain name for URL forwarding to this site and you'll be fine.

If you're doing this for an organization or business—or you need more space than your home ISP allows—you will want to pay for a hosting service. The service gives you a certain amount of space for a set fee. Right now, I'm the volunteer webmaster for a few sites, two of them for nonprofit organizations. Both of these groups have small budgets to host the sites. When we first started, we were paying \$25 a month. I soon found less expensive hosting services for what we needed (including www.omnis.com for \$7 a month and www.fatcow.com for \$99 a year). Both services have FrontPage extensions in case you use Microsoft FrontPage for HTML creation. While the \$25 a month hosting service had 24-hour customer support, I've always been able to get through to the less expensive companies or use their effective e-mail support. Both Omnis and FatCow offer plenty of space (50 MB) to feature our files, and they handle all the traffic we get.

Well, I hope that takes a bit of the mystery out of setting up your domain and hosting your Web site. Let me know if you still have any questions on site setup (not on HTML, please).

Guy Ball is a technical writer with Unisys Corporation and lives in Tustin, CA. He's currently working on his fourth book, Images of America: Santa Ana, to be published by Arcadia Publishing in Spring 2004. Guy recently received the President's Outstanding Achievement Award from the Conference of California Historical Societies for developing and maintaining their www.CaliforniaHistorian.com Web site. You can contact him at guyball@pacbell.net.

◀ Back

[Technicalities home](#)

Next ▶

© Copyright 2003

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

Standard [disclaimers](#) apply.

[.pdf version](#)[masthead](#)[archives](#)[◀ Back](#) [Next ▶](#)[Technicalities home](#)[Chapter news](#)[From our Director-
Sponsor](#)[President's corner](#)[Message from the editor](#)[Tips from the trenches](#)[Twenty-Ninth STC RMC
Technical
Communications
Competition](#)[Looking back](#)[The good, the bad, and
the reality of being a
technical communicator](#)[Creativity and the
technical communicator](#)[Web hosting demystified](#)[Student view:
Summertime tech writing](#)[My not-so-gentle
reminder](#)[Understanding the design
change control process](#)

Student view: Summertime tech writing

by [Tiffany Deking](#)

My summer job was not your typical technical writer's position, but it certainly fit my experience and interests. I worked at The People-Pet Partnership at Washington State University in Pullman, Washington.

The program, which falls within the College of Veterinary Medicine, is researching ways to make the practice of small animal euthanasia easier for pet owners and medical facility workers. I was selected for the job based on my writing and research experience, as well as my interest in the human-animal bond. This position was a great way to combine what I was skilled in with what I liked to do, and it offered me a chance to be published as a coauthor on a major academic paper.

My job wasn't all hard work in the library. I was in charge of feeding the program's four therapy horses while my boss was on vacation. I was also asked to fill in as a lead walker for a horse camp sponsored by the college, which was a lot of fun. But most of my summer was spent designing and distributing a survey, analyzing results, and writing the bulk of an academic article. Since I was the only person working on this research project for much of the time, I learned about every part of the process from start to finish. I now know exactly what is involved in such an undertaking, and will definitely use the skills I've learned as I write my thesis. I am very excited to see our article in its final form; we've submitted it to a major veterinary medicine journal, and hope to see it published soon. Technical writing, I've discovered, doesn't inevitably involve computer manuals—except, of course, when I'm trying to figure out how to run the software.

Tiffany Deking is a master's student in the department of Journalism and Technical Communication at Colorado State University.

Learn more about the People-Pet Partnership at www.vetmed.wsu.edu/depts-pppp.

[STC RMC home](#)

[STC International home](#)

[◀ Back](#)

[Technicalities home](#)

[Next ▶](#)

© Copyright 2003

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

Standard [disclaimers](#) apply.

[.pdf version](#)[masthead](#)[archives](#)[◀ Back](#) [Next ▶](#)[Technicalities home](#)[Chapter news](#)[From our Director-
Sponsor](#)[President's corner](#)[Message from the editor](#)[Tips from the trenches](#)[Twenty-Ninth STC RMC
Technical
Communications
Competition](#)[Looking back](#)[The good, the bad, and
the reality of being a
technical communicator](#)[Creativity and the
technical communicator](#)[Web hosting demystified](#)[Student view:
Summertime tech writing](#)[My not-so-gentle
reminder](#)[Understanding the design
change control process](#)

My not-so-gentle reminder

by [Carol Zollinger](#)

Each time I go to the annual conference, I go with expectations. I'll learn a lot. I'll find at least one fabulous session that, by itself, was worth coming for. I'll stay up nearly all night, at least once, talking to friends that I only see once a year. (Which of course makes it exceedingly difficult to get up for the following morning's session, but is definitely worth it. I can even justify this professionally—read on.) I've never been disappointed in the past, and I wasn't this year, either.

This year, however, is the first year I noticed a theme that seemed to be directed specifically at me. Either all of the presenters have been spying on me and decided to teach me a lesson, or I was feeling guilty about something, because I got nailed to the wall. The guilt thing seems more likely, but it's just so much easier to maintain righteous indignation if it's someone else's fault, so I have decided that they were spying on me.

I went to a session about estimating time for projects. They talked about metrics, and project management techniques, and networking within client companies. Then I went to a session where a panel of experienced technical communicators dispensed advice, told us funny stories, and answered any nosy questions we came up with about their careers. And told us to network. Then I went to a progression for independent contractors and consultants. They talked about job boards and marketing and networking and contracts and networking. Oh, and networking. Then I looked at my schedule and I saw that I myself had conspired against me and scheduled me for a networking luncheon. What was I thinking?

Besides, I said to myself, I know I have to network! Everybody knows you have to network. This is not a new concept. And after I chewed on this for a while, I sat myself down and gave myself a good talking to. (If only my mother knew that I do this for myself, she could stop intervening. But I digress.)

Young lady, I said, you have not attended one chapter meeting since you relocated from the Hoosier chapter in September. That's eight months! I don't care that it takes awhile to get to the meetings, or that you were too busy, that you were too tired, or that you just didn't feel like facing a crowd of people that night. There is just no excuse! No, don't even try to argue with me. No excuse! (Do you see how my mother is with me even when she's not? I'm digressing again, aren't I?)

And ultimately, there is no excuse. We all know why. You build relationships. Those relationships lead to more relationships. These relationships lead to new ideas, new jobs, new ways to handle the stressors of your job, and new information about software and other tools. The list goes on and on.

My new resolve after the annual conference got me to the May meeting of the

[STC RMC home](#)

[STC International home](#)

Northeast Ohio Chapter, though the gentle reminders from some very excellent chapter leaders may have helped. And do you know, networking isn't even so bad? I actually enjoyed myself! It's kind of like exercising. Takes me forever to drag my lazy self out to do it, and when I'm doing it I think, "Well, you know, this is kind of nice. Why did I wait so long?" (Please note that running is an exception to this rule. Running has always been at least as bad as I thought it would be.)

The problem, of course, is that the metaphor keeps working. Like exercising, no one can do your networking for you. STC can help by provide great program meetings, networking luncheons, an annual conference every year, and, if you are very lucky, your own personal reminder system via friends in the chapter. But nobody can actually show up for you. We all have to show up ourselves. And again, like exercising, it's not enough to just show up. We have to talk to people, listen, and share information. We all have to make new acquaintances, and stay up all night talking to the ones we already have. (See? I told you I could justify that. I can justify anything. Next time you are explaining an expensive new kitchen gadget or another power tool to your significant other, you call me. I can help.) We all have experiences or information that somebody else can use. Chances are, somebody else at this very moment has the information that you could use.

I don't really like to think of myself as thick, but I had to be hit over the head with the intellectual equivalent of a two by four to remember what I needed to be doing. Hopefully, by sharing my own reminder, I'll prevent some of you from needing your own. So, I hope to be meeting all of you, or seeing you again, at chapter events in the upcoming months. And if I myself am not there like I said I would be, you have my permission to drag out the two by four again, and apply it liberally.

See you soon!

[◀ Back](#)

[Technicalities home](#)

[Next ▶](#)

© Copyright 2003

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

Standard [disclaimers](#) apply.



[.pdf version](#)

[masthead](#)

[archives](#)

[◀ Back](#) [Next ▶](#)

[Technicalities home](#)

[Chapter news](#)

[From our Director-Sponsor](#)

[President's corner](#)

[Message from the editor](#)

[Tips from the trenches](#)

[Twenty-Ninth STC RMC Technical Communications Competition](#)

[Looking back](#)

[The good, the bad, and the reality of being a technical communicator](#)

[Creativity and the technical communicator](#)

[Web hosting demystified](#)

[Student view: Summertime tech writing](#)

[My not-so-gentle reminder](#)

[Understanding the design change control process](#)

Understanding the design change control process

by [David Dick](#)

Are you frustrated because it seems that a project will never end? Are you working longer hours, weekends, and holidays to compensate for schedule slippage due to an avalanche of design changes? Is the project manager unaware of how changing the design affects schedules, resourcing, and budgets?

There is a solution and it's called Design Change Control.

This article is intended for documentation managers and technical writers who want to understand how changes to product design affect documentation projects. It does not cover the design and development process, or responsibilities and authority for design and development activities.

Purpose of design change control

This is certain: design changes occur at every stage of the design process, from the stage at which the customer requirements are defined, to when the design is proven fit for delivery to the customer. How design changes are documented, communicated, planned, and implemented makes design change control important.

Benefits of design change control include:

- Assurance that the design adheres to the objectives and goals.
- Better accountability and scheduling of design changes.
- Creativity allowed in a controlled and structured way.
- Stakeholders awareness of what changed, why, and how changes affect product design.
- Less tension and conflict among teams and individuals.

Without design change control:

- The design deviates from the objectives.
- There is no accountability for design changes, and scheduling is chaotic.
- Design changes may be implemented without the knowledge and approval of the project manager, stakeholders, or customers.
- Costs escalate because changes are implemented without considering the impact on development time and budget.
- Documentation may be inaccurate and incomplete.

With no control of usability and quality assurance testing the product may operate in unsuspected and undesired ways. Never deliver a product to the customer until it has been tested and proven fit for use.

[STC RMC home](#)[STC International home](#)

Methods to identify and record design changes

There are three steps in identifying and recording design changes:

Step	Purpose
Change Request	Describes the reasons for the change and the results of evaluation. It is used to initiate the change and obtain approval before being implemented.
Change Notice	Provides instructions for defining what must be changed. It is issued following approval of the change request as instructions to the owners of the various documents affected by the change. This ensures that the necessary changes are made in the documentation.
Change Record	Describes how the changes were implemented and the test results, and how documentation was updated.

Managing Design Change Requests

Change requests are reviewed by a Change Review Board, which evaluates the requests to determine:

- Whether the changes are feasible by time, resources, costs, and time constraints.
- The requirements necessary to satisfy the change.
- The impact of the changes on other products with which they interface and in which they are used.
- Depending on the severity of the changes, the schedule to implement them in the current release or a future release.

The Change Review Board consists of the following members:

Board member	Responsibility
Project Manager/Product Manager	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presents change requests to the Change Review Board. • Assesses the feasibility and practicality of implementing the changes, and impact to other systems. • Identifies time, resources, and cost to implement the change requests with customers. • Informs top management of time and cost to implement change requests. • Informs external customer, if any, of time and cost to implement change requests. • Approves change notice.

Project Team (i.e., designers, developers, programmers, technical writers, trainers, and programmers)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advises Change Review Board of feasibility and practicality of implementing the changes, and impact to other systems. • Issues change notice. • Updates change records.
Acceptance Testing (Quality Assurance) and Usability Testing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tests functionality and usability of changes • Updates change records.
Top Management and External Customers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is advised on the status of the product. • Proposes design changes. • Is informed of design changes.
Facilitator	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Convenes meetings. • Keeps a record of discussions and decisions. • Moderates meetings.

How the design control process affects documentation

Product design changes affect customer requirements, functional requirements, use cases, test plans, design specifications, overall design documents (optionally high-level design and detailed design), user guides, system administrator guides, installation guides, and training manuals, press releases, marketing brochures, service descriptions, and release letters.

If project management and designers are unaware of how changes to product design, no matter how small or cosmetic, affect documentation, you need to educate them.

Here are some suggestions:

- Publish a documentation development process. Educate stakeholders on how the process contributes to quality documentation.
- Participate in project meetings. Keep stakeholders informed, by publishing your own progress report, of the status (budget, schedule, and resource allocation) of documentation projects. For projects experiencing frequent and numerous changes, provide periodic progress reports to ensure that you communicate your concerns about design changes.
- Ensure that you or your department is represented on the Change Review Board.
- Create your own change request form to identify the impact of product design changes to documentation.
- If you manage a documentation department, stress the importance of design change control to your team.

Summary

The design control process will not assure quality. However, if everybody follows the process, it will result in better control of design changes, better scheduling to implement changes, documentation that accurately reflects the changes made, and products that satisfy customer expectations—all of which contribute to a better

business-to-customer relationship and greater harmony in your workplace.

References

Hoyle, David, (2001). *ISO 9000 Quality Systems Handbook* (fourth edition), Butterworth-Heinemann.

ISO 9001:2000, *Quality systems model for quality assurance in design, development, production, installation and servicing.*

Hackos, JoAnn T. (1994). *Managing Your Documentation Projects*, Wiley & Sons, Inc.

About the Author

David Dick (david.dick@swift.com) is a technical writer for the Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunication (SWIFT) in LaHulpe, Belgium.

[◀ Back](#)

[Technicalities home](#)

[Next ▶](#)

© Copyright 2003

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