



Mapping Information in the Real World

by Gregory Cooper, Information Developer and Team Leader, Kitba Consulting Services, Inc.

(This article assumes that the reader knows the basic concepts of Information Mapping®. For more details, see: www.infomap.com/resources/faq.htm and www.infomap.com/method/index.htm.)

A great deal has been written about Information Mapping—what it is and how to do it. When it comes to applying the methodology in the real world, however, the writer faces several challenges. This article examines issues my company faced on two recent writing projects and discusses how we applied Information Mapping techniques in two different ways to meet these challenges.

Project A

Project A entailed rewriting approximately 70 operating manuals for an oil company’s European production facilities. The writers on the team used Information Mapping methods to satisfy two primary requirements of the documentation project:

- All manual content and layout had to be consistent so that a user could review any manual from any facility and immediately know where to locate specific information.
- The information layout had to be organized so that a user could locate critical information quickly in an emergency.

Because much of the documentation was new, the writers and editors had a chance to incorporate the methods of Information Mapping from the start of the writing process. In addition to the new documentation, the project’s scope included reformatting all existing documentation so that we could ensure that existing and new material were consistent.

Such an extensive and strict application of Information Mapping required substantial time and effort. Before project work could begin, the authors and editors received Information Mapping training. During the writing process, the editors worked closely with the authors (who were subject matter experts, not professional writers). An

extensive editorial review process was needed to verify correct and consistent use of Information Mapping. To provide training and guide the development and review process, the client hired a licensed vendor of Information Mapping. This was an invaluable resource throughout the process but also substantially increased the project cost.

Despite the labor and cost involved, the end product was a uniform, clear, and concise documentation set appropriate for successful worldwide use.

continued on page 4

In This Issue

From the Editor	2
From the President	3
Forum 2000 Review	5
Members Give Presentations	6
2001 Region 5 Conference Update ...	6
Contractor’s Corner	7
Success After College	8
Volunteers of the Month	9
From the Members	9
Director-Sponsor Report	10
Calendar	11
October Meeting Details	12

Dateline Houston

Dateline Houston is the newsletter of the Houston Chapter of the Society for Technical Communication, a nonprofit organization. Ten issues are published each year (September through June).

Newsletter Staff

Managing Editor: Donna Marcotte
Coordinating

Editor: Meredith Montgomery
Editors: Melanie Boston, Jamie
Diamandopoulos, Jim
Hunt

Distribution
Coordinator: Gregory Van Pelt
Staff Writers: Heather Shelly
Lisetta Lavy

Submissions

Submit newsletter contributions by the first of each month for the coming month's issue. Submissions in ASCII, Microsoft Word 97, or FrameMaker 5.x format are appreciated. Send submissions to Donna Marcotte:

e-mail: donnamarcotte@earthlink.net

phone: 281-679-5843

All submissions are subject to editing.

Reprints

Articles published by *Dateline Houston* may be reprinted in other STC publications provided credit is given and a copy is sent to the managing editor for *Dateline Houston*.

Address Changes

Send address changes to the database and directory manager:

John Reynolds
P.O. Box 130873
Houston, Texas 77219-0873
jreynold@compassnet.com

Production

Dateline Houston is produced with FrameMaker 6.0 on a PC, using clip art from CorelDraw 4.0, Microsoft Word 97, and other sources.

Printing

Some of the costs associated with printing *Dateline Houston* are donated by IKON Office Solutions.

Cover

The cover is based on an original photograph by Catherine Bendig. The graphic design is by Ruth Metcalf.

The membership directory password is homer+wagner.

From the Editor . . . Mastering Document Design

by Donna Marcotte, Independent Consultant

Last month Bill Gearhart and I wrote an article about document design. After it went to press, we continued to come up with other points that we wish we had made.

The main thesis of the article was that our real value as technical communicators is the ability to design documents that meet the needs of our audiences. Yet our profession has become very tools-focused.

Who are the real beneficiaries of our skills, employers or users? The answer is, of course, both, but each in different ways and to varying degrees.

In that article Bill and I discussed how document design was of real value for the audience, but it can also benefit the employer. For example, if a document is designed with redundant information located in multiple places, it will be difficult to maintain. To paraphrase a wise colleague: it is virtually impossible to maintain the truth in more than one place. If you manage to pull it off, the process will be very time-consuming, expensive, and error prone. You must also ask yourself, if you don't pull it off, what is the cost—to users and your own credibility—if you publish documents with conflicting information?

New tools let us produce documents faster, cheaper, and more consistently. The truth is, you could use a typewriter to produce documentation that meets users' needs—it might take you forever to produce it, and you might not be able to reproduce it easily, but you could create usable documents.

Employers benefit from our proficiency with tools because use of these tools reduces the costs of production, reproduction, and distribution. However, the power these tools give us to easily update and redistribute new versions of documents also benefit the end users. We can ensure them the most current version of information, in a timely manner and at a reasonable cost.

Ultimately, the most value we provide is designing documents that help the audiences for which they were intended—that is the bottom-line objective of what we do as technical communicators. There are also plenty of other opportunities in the process to add value for our employers. When it comes down to it, in our profession we must serve two masters.

Important Corrections and Reminders for Region 5 Conference in 2001!

The correct dates for the 2001 Region 5 conference which we will host here in Houston are:

October 11, 12, and 13 (Thursday, Friday, and Saturday) 2001

(The dates published in the September *Dateline Houston* were incorrect. We apologize.)

If you have not yet responded to the survey regarding the program for this conference, there's still time. Mail in the survey form that was enclosed in the September *Dateline Houston*, or e-mail your responses and comments to answersforall@pobox.com.

For more information, contact paul.mueller@netIQ.com.

From the President . . . Contemplating the Competition

by Deborah Long, Strategic Communications, Enron Net Works

This is the month that entries are due for the STC 2000-2001 Technical Publications, Art, and Online competitions. As a three-time winner, I would like to share my thoughts and experiences with you regarding what I consider to be the most rewarding aspects of such an event.

It begins with deciding upon which items you want to submit for judging, then writing a description to accompany your entry, and mailing it in by the designated date. But that is just the start . . . your submission will journey to the Twin Cities chapter (with whom we are swapping this year), where a team of judges will review your work. Receiving feedback from fellow writers has always been my favorite and most valued part of the process. Whether you win an award or not, you will benefit from being scrutinized against a common set of industry standards through the eyes of professionals in an entirely different part of the country. Talk about an objective evaluation!

Then, should you be one of the lucky winners, your award certificate will be bestowed on the night of our Annual Awards Banquet, scheduled for January 26, 2001. That moment of your career is truly one which you will never forget.

We are looking for local members to act as judges to review the entries from the Twin Cities chapter during the month of November. In fact, a judges workshop is planned for November 4 to kick off this process and familiarize you with the criteria to look for when judging a particular type of entry. This is another experience that I highly recommend to all of you at some point in your career. It is a tremendous opportunity to learn and grow professionally. For more information about becoming a judge, please contact: Heather Shelly (heather_shelly@bmc.com) or Jeanne O'Meara (jrom@dynegy.com).

Thanks for participating!



Deborah Long

Recognition and Honor Could be Yours! Enter the 2000-2001 STC Technical Publications, Art, and Online Competitions

The competitions feature awards in many categories including technical reports, books, user guides, reference manuals, packaging, brochures, posters, marketing materials, online information products, and more!

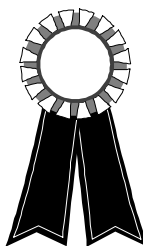
Top winners in each category of the local Houston competition are automatically entered in the STC's international competition.

Deadline for Entry:

- Postmarked by midnight October 17, 2000
- Delivered by end of business on October 20, 2000 to:

Jeanne O'Meara
c/o Dynegy
1000 Louisiana, Ste. 4819-A
Houston, TX 77002

For details, contact Heather Shelly at 713-918-5216.



Chapter Contacts

Administrative Council

President, Deborah Long
713-853-7087 deborah.long@enron.com

Vice President, Jocelyn Williams
713-918-2489 jocelyn_williams@bmc.com

Treasurer, Zach Moring
281-856-0315 zmoring@hotmail.com

Secretary, Carolyn Kelly
713-963-1774 ccksam@juno.com

Past President, Janette Sexton-Shahout
281-479-0934 jsexton19@aol.com

Director of Satellites, Pat Bishop
713-260-1718 patbish@earthlink.net

Director of Programs, Dorothy Murray
713-688-1890 dorothea_murray@email.msn.net

Director of Planning, Jim Hunt
713-918-4640 jim_hunt@bmc.com

Director of Memberhip, Lisetta Lavy
281-584-1852 lisetta.lavy@aspen.com

Director of Volunteer Resources,
John Reynolds
713-861-3334 jreynold@compassnet.com

Director of Communications,
George Slaughter
713-830-0000 gslaughter@flex.net

Director of Competitions, Heather Shelly
713-918-2489 heather_shelly@bmc.com

Chapter Resources

Employment, Chris G. Smith
713-588-3024 chrissmi@is.netcom.com

Membership, Ron Hartberger
713-784-9286 ronhmath@pdq.net

Information line: 713-796-3303

Web site: www.stc-houston.org

Special Interest Groups

Consultants/Independent Contractors
Gaynell Doehne
713-524-5401 gdoehne@words-work.com

Kim Shaw
281-367-1202 kim@twowriters.com

Information Mapping
Helen Shoup
713-728-4316 shoup@flash.net

Online Documentation
Larry Dybala
713-215-4259 lwd@hal-pc.org

Satellite Groups

Bryan/College Station
Karen Graber
409-845-7924 karen_graber@odp.tamu.edu

Louisiana/Gulf Coast
Jim Brown jim@xentech.com

Mapping Information in the Real World

by Gregory Cooper

continued from page 1

Project B

Project B presented substantially different challenges. This project involved rewriting end-user documentation for a company that produces computer hardware components. The editorial team had very little daily contact with the contributing authors and did not have the time or the resources to work with the authors during the writing process. The goal of Project B was to produce documentation that

- reduced an upward-spiraling technical support budget
- addressed specific customer complaints about not being able to find or understand information in the existing documentation

Several members of the client company's internal documentation team were familiar with the basic concepts of modularizing and mapping information but had never had the opportunity or resources to implement those concepts. The ongoing customer support issue drove the company's senior management to mandate a large-scale revision of the documentation. The documentation team took advantage of this opportunity to recommend the use of modularized information structure in the documentation revision process.

The extensive format change worked well for Project A, in which the company's entire documentation set could be reformatted over a short period of time.

For Project B, however, the format change presented more of a liability. Company B's resources did not permit the reformatting of all existing documentation within the scope of one project. Therefore the company

adopted the modularized information model for new documentation but decided to gradually revise existing documentation.

In addition, Project B's target audience was the company's external customer base, and many were long-term users of the existing documentation set who likely would object to major changes in the appearance and organization of the documentation. As a result, Company B had to produce new documentation that incorporated information mapping principles but that still resembled the existing documentation as much as possible.

These limitations meant foregoing the strict application of the Information Mapping format. Information Mapping is, of course, much more than just a format; it is a comprehensive method of structuring, arranging, and presenting information. The editorial team was able to reorganize the existing material successfully according to this method.

Early in the project, we realized that the existing documentation in most cases contained all the information customers needed to implement the hardware devices; the problem was in the *arrangement* of the information. Much of the source material was generated by engineers who wrote the information around the design and development of hardware devices. The company's customers, however, needed documentation that followed the logical order of hardware configuration and use—in other words, task-oriented rather than equipment-oriented documentation.

To address these issues, we focused on one of the basic techniques of mapping information: present

information in a step-by-step format wherever possible. We began by identifying the primary tasks an end user would perform with each device, then described these tasks in a step-by-step format. Background information was incorporated in the step descriptions so that users had ready access to all the information necessary to successfully complete each step. In many cases, simply reformatting the existing text sequentially was sufficient to eliminate the difficulty customers encountered in locating information and understanding what to do.

The resulting documentation closely resembled the existing documentation in layout and writing style, but the information was substantially restructured. Early customer reviews indicated a favorable response to the new format.

The first manuals produced in this new format provided a template and model for the production of all future documentation, as well as the gradual conversion of Company B's legacy documentation. Although the end product does not meet the standards of *pure* Information Mapping, it resolved the specific needs of the client company in a way that strict Information Mapping application would not.

While these two projects were in many ways widely divergent in scope, goals, and target audience, applying the fundamental principles of mapping information provided a successful solution to both challenges. Even if an editor must adapt these principles to specific projects, the general concept of mapping information stands firm as a useful guide and tool for information structure and presentation.

Forum 2000: Technical Communicators—Leading the Way

by Alan Breacher, Technical Writer, Schlumberger

This summer I attended the Forum 2000 conference for technical communicators in London on June 13 and 14, 2000. The conference venue was the Commonwealth Institute in Kensington. The conference was jointly organized by the International Council for Technical Communication (INTECOM) and the Institute of Scientific and Technical Communicators (ISTC) of the U.K. Forum conferences are unique in that they occur only once every five years—each time in a different country—and they encourage participation from technical communicators from around the world. Forum 2000 was the sixth such conference.

Forum 2000 was attended by approximately 300 technical communicators from about 20 different countries. The majority of those who attended seemed to be from the USA, the U.K., the Scandinavian countries, and Germany, although participants were also from as far away as Australia and New Zealand. There were also about 15 companies exhibiting their products and services in the exhibition hall.

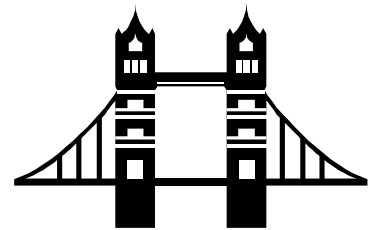


This was my first major STC-related conference so I cannot say how Forum compared with similar conferences, but I have been told by co-workers that the various formats for presenting information, such as Idea Market (IM) and Information Session (IS), are quite common at these types of conferences.

Some key highlights or impressions I got from the conference are as follows:

- The XML sessions attracted by far the largest crowds. Based on the amount of interest in XML, I would say that many companies throughout the world are researching the possibilities provided by this technology or are actively developing products using XML.
- The majority of presenters of IM sessions or IS sessions were from the USA. In fact, I was told that about 75 percent of the presenters were based in the USA. This would seem to suggest that the practice and value of technical communication is much more advanced in the USA than elsewhere. At least one exception to this was that the majority of the presenters on XML topics seemed to be from Germany, so German companies may be at the forefront of this technology.
- There was quite a lot of interest in single-source document production for developing content for paper-based information products and

online help. Communicators attending the conference seemed to be looking for ways of developing products for different delivery mediums in the fastest and most effective ways.



Forum 2000 provided a focus for sharing knowledge and presenting ideas from around the world that affect the work of technical communicators. The conference showed that single-sourcing and structured methods for developing information products continue to be popular throughout the industry. The conference also demonstrated the growing interest in XML technology and the need to learn more about how this will affect documentation development and distribution in the near future.

For a full listing of topics presented during the conference, visit the Forum 2000 web site at www.istc.org.uk and click on the link to Forum 2000. This is a good site and includes photographs of the event and a PDF file of the full program. Later in the year, the ISTC plans to publish a PostHarvest document containing the results of the conference sessions.

Members Give Presentations at Region 5 Conference in Albuquerque

Houston chapter members Maria Ellul and Wayne Schmadeka, both of Houston-based Kitba Consulting Services, will give presentations at the Region 5 conference, “Navigating the New Century,” in Albuquerque, New Mexico, October 13 and 14.

Maria Ellul will present *Moving Mountains from the 60s to 2000*. Maria will discuss the year-long process of helping a major manufacturing company bring its documentation from technospeak to plain English—from the 1960s to 2000.

Wayne Schmadeka, with Ivor Ellul of Knowledge Reservoir, will present *Enlivening Hardcopy Documents for Web Deployment*. To assist corporations in converting hardcopy documents and deploying them on the Internet and corporate intranets/extranets, Kitba has developed a process that makes documents easy to understand and navigate. The presenters will use actual projects to examine various aspects of the document conversion process, including format, organization, navigation, and the use of multimedia.

2001 Region 5 Conference: Committee Work can be Fun and Play

by Nicole Smart-Wycislo, Co-manager, 2001 Region 5 Conference

Planning a successful conference is a major undertaking. Everything from snacks to audiovisual equipment to envelopes is accounted for and budgeted. Being a kid at heart, I find that the “funnest” part of planning a conference is “playing with others.” We have the following committees that play together to create our conference:

Arrangements Committee

Manager: Dorothy Murray,
dorothy_murray@email.msn.com

The Arrangements committee supports our conference team by helping us research hotel accommodations for the conference and by negotiating great rates for meeting and sleeping rooms. Committee members plan the scrumptious meals and breaks, plan awesome social events, and arrange for audiovisual equipment.

Hospitality Committee

Manager: Cindy Pao,
cynthia.pao@weatherford.com

Members of the Hospitality committee welcome attendees and act as contacts for their comfort. This committee is the official “conference concierge.” Members answer questions, provide information about local restaurants, and arrange for tours of local attractions.

Finance Committee

Manager: Deborah Silvi,
deborah_silvi@bmc.com

The Finance committee tracks our funds by working with committees to create and manage budgets and by publishing and managing an overall conference budget. Thrifty committee members help keep our conference in the black.

Program Committee

Co-managers: Paul Mueller,
paul.mueller@netIQ.com and Linda Oestreich,
linda_oestreich@bmc.com

The Program committee plans the topics and recruits the great speakers who will present at the conference. The members do this by evaluating input from the member survey, reviewing all presentation proposals, then selecting and scheduling all speakers. Committee members also plan our preconference workshops.

Publications Committee

Manager: Rebecca Ideus,
rideus@email.com

The Publications committee creates and publishes all types of printed materials required for a conference, such as brochures, forms, programs, and conference proceedings. Committee members use their fine writing and information design skills to create our communication pieces.

Publicity Committee

Manager: George Slaughter,
gslaughter@flex.net

The Publicity committee promotes our conference by planning and executing a captivating publicity program, using online and print media. This committee works closely with the other committees, such as the Publications committee, to produce and distribute information.

Registration Committee

Manager: Nicole Smart-Wycislo,
nicole@verb1.com

The Registration committee handles all aspects of registering conference attendees, from helping to create, assemble, and mail the registration packets, to processing incoming registrations and payments. During the conference, committee members greet attendees with name tags, conference goodies, and a warm Texas welcome.

Wanna come out and play with us? There’s plenty of room on the playground. Choose a committee and contact the respective committee manager. Need more info? Contact one of the conference co-managers, Nicole Smart-Wycislo at 713-956-0367 or at nicole@verb1.com or contact Melanie Flanders at Melanie_Flanders@hotmail.com.

Contractor's Corner: Increasing Your Value (and Your Pay), Part I

by Kent Drummond, Senior Member

There are no guarantees of job security for permanent employees or contractors. Today, personnel turnover and job loss of full-time employees in commerce and industry may be as frequent as the change in jobs and out-of-work situations for a contractor.

One advantage of full-time employment may be that you can choose your boss when you look for a permanent position. As a prospective employee, when you like the person for whom you'll work, you can make the choice. With contracting, the choice may be work or starve.

Some contractors find temporary employment is a survival option. *Temping* doesn't mean taking a pay cut, however. If you won't be receiving full benefits, you should negotiate for as much as 15% more to cover this expense¹.

Some basic reasons for a writer to move from contracting work at \$40 to \$65 per hour to a full-time position that pays 20% to 30% less might be:

- a sense of job security
- a potentially more stable environment
- insurance benefits
- paid holidays and vacations
- potential annual bonus, salary increase, and promotion
- paid education benefits

Personal marketing is about packaging yourself effectively as a product to use in a presentation, interview, or review. These tips can help you create a personal marketing plan²:

- *Network.* Network with other STC members and professionals with whom you've worked. Are you learning about your organization?

Are you looking ahead and anticipating changes in the work place? Do you talk with people in other parts of the company? Buy a key person lunch (including your boss or boss's boss, not their administrators).

- *Adjust your attitude.* If you don't blow your own horn and market yourself, who will? If you ask successful professionals whether or not they always feel confident, most will say no. They have to push themselves. Try these suggestions to develop a confident attitude:
 - Get rid of the notion that good things come to those who wait, the meek shall inherit the earth, or it's not nice to talk about yourself.
 - Accept that self-marketing is a survival skill.
 - Change negative "self-talk," such as "Who would want to talk to me?" and "What do I have to offer?" to "Darn, I'm good" and "Others need to know what I have to offer."
- *Prepare.* Planning and practice prevent poor performance. Prepare a 30-second "commercial" or introduction to use when meeting new people. Have another one for fellow employees at your company. Write these introductions from the perspective of someone who uses your product
- *Practice your handshake.* It should be a firm grasp with three quick pumps, not a limp palm or a bone crusher. Make eye contact, smile, and listen. If you're short on small talk, draw on books or newspaper articles you've read and ask others

about themselves. Pay attention to common courtesies such as saying thank you and valuing other people's time. Don't forget to follow up with a fax, an e-mail, or a lunch invitation, and send thank-you notes to those who help you.

- *Invest your time.* At work, you can volunteer to head committees or fund drives and attend picnics, parties, and other corporate events. Keep up to date on promotions, and write notes of congratulations.
- *Promote yourself.* Don't be afraid to talk about the projects you work on. Write or speak about your area of expertise or a technique that helped you. Submit articles or notices of awards and other achievements to a company, or to the editors of association newsletters, local newspapers, or professional journals³.

No matter what your profession, you can develop the skills you need to advance your career.

Next month: How to assess your skill values.

Sources:

1. Woods, Saralee Terry, *Wall Street Journal*, Careerjournal.com, "How to Succeed as a White-Collar Temp."
2. Brody, Majorie, *Wall Street Journal*, Career journal.com "Use Personal Marketing to Help You Get Ahead."
3. Sandler, Mel and Gray, Muriel, *Wall Street Journal*, Careerjournal.com "Increase Your Value to Boost Your Career."



Success After College from an Intern's Perspective

by Marie Nguyen, Intern, Dynegy Inc.

Perhaps one of the biggest steps in one's lifetime is the transition between classes in college to a professional job in the "real world." This was the exact situation I found myself in, and to make matters even more challenging, I was moving from a small college town in eastern Washington to a large, bustling city in Texas, where the change in climate was the least of my initial worries. My internship at Dynegy was scheduled to start on August 7, and the closer that date came, the more trepidation I felt. Not knowing what to expect, I worried miserably over whether I would be able to make it without embarrassing myself while simultaneously giving Eastern Washington University a bad name.

Having changed my major three times because I wanted something that would bring in money as well as something that would keep me interested, I ended up choosing technical writing because English was the one subject I was always exceptional in.

It wasn't until the last quarter, when I took Software Documentation with Dr. Anthony Flinn, an English professor and advisor at Eastern, that I began getting interested in my field. I had heard many horror stories about how demanding and challenging his classes were, but I soon learned that Dr. Flinn had a unique way of mixing fun, humor, education, and hard work. I learned more in one hour with him

than in a whole quarter with other professors in previous years.

I had several misconceptions prior to my internship, the first being that I probably wouldn't be welcomed and/or respected by everyone, because I was merely an inexperienced college student just starting out. Upon talking to Jeanne O'Meara, Dynegy's Technical Writing Supervisor, about my objectives, I felt very inadequate and realized that I still had a lot to learn. I was worried that I would not be trusted enough to do "real" work that I could learn from. Although I love software documentation, I had a hard time imagining what an energy company had to do with that kind of technical writing. Lastly, I wondered whether the group would be willing to set aside time in their busy and pressing schedule to teach me what I had come to learn.

Since the very first day at Dynegy, my misconceptions became just that. I found everyone in the department to be sincere, kind, friendly, humorous, and a most experienced and professional group. In addition to Jeanne, the group consisted of Bill Akers, Terri Gross, Ann Liggio, Sean McFerren, Timothy Notzon, Leora Salo, Janette Sexton-Shahout, Kevin Southwick, Gina Waterman, and Joanne Wheeler.

I found the atmosphere to be one in which fun and laughter did not mean sacrificing the quality of work delivered. Although I was the "intern," I never felt as if anyone were looking down on me, and I always felt

that my opinions and work were met with respect and appreciation.

Although everyone was very open and shared a great amount of knowledge with me, I would have to give the greatest credit to Ann Liggio, for whom I am an understudy. It goes without saying how great a technical writer/editor she is because she is so deeply rooted within the technical writing community. In the last three and a half weeks I have been able to sharpen my editing and writing skills while learning a lot about Dynegy as a company and the inner workings of documenting a software application.

Perhaps the best thing that Ann has given me so far is her trust and confidence in my work; I look forward to learning much more from her.

My overall experience as an intern was very positive, fun, rewarding, and educational, to say the least. It gave me the opportunity and courage to strive for my best without feeling as if I could get fired at any moment. Every intern would be fortunate to have the opportunity that I had with a company and group as great as this.

Marie Nguyen is finishing her degree in English with an emphasis in Technical Communication at Eastern Washington University, located in Cheney, Washington. She is completing her last requirements by working as an intern at Dynegy Inc.

Many thanks to Marie for taking the time to write this article about her experience and sharing it with our members.

Web Site Committee, October Volunteers of the Month

by Patrick Rockecharlie, BMC Software

April Cooper, Kate Gilvary, Steve Cunningham, and Robin Scott, members of the Web Site committee, are STC Houston's volunteers of the month for October.

April, Kate, Steve, and Robin are all new STC members, and they have made a big splash within months of joining STC by completing the redesign of the chapter's web site and launching it under a new URL, www.stc-houston.org.

"We wanted to change our URL so that people could more easily remember us," George Slaughter, STC Houston director of communications, said. "In the past, STC has hosted our chapter web site. To use this new, easy-to-remember URL, we had to switch servers. Kate and April took charge of the situation and got us set up rather quickly."

September's web site redesign and launch is the first major overhaul the STC Houston web site has received since its original creation and launch

some years ago. This task was a major undertaking in time and effort, and the team did an outstanding job of carrying out the web site redesign plan approved by the STC Houston administrative council earlier this year.

"We have this vision that our site be what we call 'the definitive chapter resource,'" Slaughter said. "To accomplish that, we needed people who could approach the subject matter experts in our chapter and get the facts. It's more difficult when you're new to the chapter and don't really know your way around. But Robin and Steve were proactive from the beginning and they've really contributed to the site."

April and Kate are the committee leaders. April is a student in the professional writing program at UH-Downtown and has been active in the graphic design of the site. Kate works at Aesbus Knowledge Solutions. She has coordinated content for a number of pages and will be the lead person in



developing the Region 5 Conference page that is hosted on the site.

Robin works at Management Controls, Inc. Steve works at Compaq. Robin and Steve have been active in developing content for the site and sharing their insights on how the web site can better serve STC Houston members.

"This has been a difficult project; it's been time- and labor-intensive," Slaughter said. "Kate, April, Robin, and Steve went to work and created something of which all STC Houston can be proud. STC members will love the new site, and non-members can see what STC Houston is all about."

STC Houston congratulates and salutes its Web Site committee for a job well and nobly done!

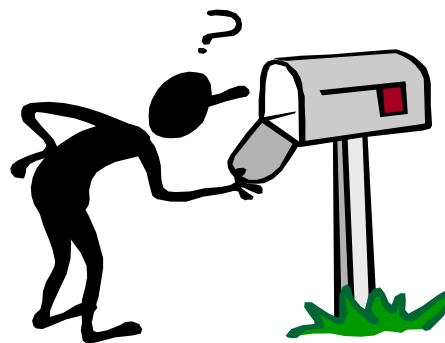
From the Members . . .

Should We Continue to Publish a Printed Newsletter?

by Donna Marcotte

Well, my intention for this column was to provide a quick and easy way to get feedback and input from members on issues and topics that they want to discuss. However, since the initial two positive responses to the announcement of the column, I have heard nothing. I even prompted (okay, begged) people for contributions via the chapter e-mail list. Still nothing. Surely you have *something* on your mind you want to share?

So I will give this column one more shot by posing a question. If there are no responses, you won't hear from me



again on this. Given this lack of response, the question is even more meaningful:

Should our chapter continue to publish a printed newsletter?

Chapter leaders have debated this question for some time. Many believe we should eliminate the paper and associated costs and simply publish the information on our web site. Others recognize that not everyone is online and that the printed newsletter is the only benefit that every member receives (when the Post Office cooperates).

I, for one, look forward to receiving my newsletter in the mail. It's a good excuse to sit down for a few minutes and see what's happening.

What do you think? Let me hear from you at donnamarcotte@earthlink.net.



Region 5 Director-Sponsor Report

Leaders Light the Way

by Suzanna Laurent, Region 5 Director-Sponsor

I have decided to call my monthly column

“Leaders Light the Way” because I know how often great leaders are developed through their participation in STC chapters. You are the “leaders who light the way”—those in roles such as mentors, officers, and committee or project managers. You make a tremendous difference to the Society and its members, and I enthusiastically thank you for these contributions to STC!

The most successful leaders are the ones who recognize the creative potential of the people on their teams and use that potential wisely. The reward for good leaders is personal and professional growth, self-satisfaction, and a chance to make a difference in the technical communication field.

As a Society-level leader, I know the same thing about STC chapters that Baskin-Robbins knows about ice cream—there are many different flavors. None of STC’s chapters are just plain vanilla. The chapters don’t operate exactly the same, have the same goals, or need the same things from us. STC chapters are as varied as the people who make up their membership, and this is true of their resources as well. You probably know what is available within your chapter, but good leaders must use all of their resources, so I want to review a few that are available to you from the Society.

The number one benefit that members say they receive from their STC membership is *access to the chapter and the Society web sites*.

The Society web site is at www.stc-va.org, and the amount of information stored on this award-winning site is awesome. The web site also provides guidelines for competitions, grant and loan programs, recognition programs, and so much more. Take time now to review this web site, because it is a valuable resource that should answer many questions about STC.

The Chapter Handbook on the web site provides information about chapter finances, programs, public relations, newsletters, and employment. It also gives advice on leading a volunteer board, finding and retaining members, and nurturing volunteers.

The *STC Administrative Directory* identifies members in key positions within the Society. It is published three times a year and mailed to all those listed in the directory, which includes the board of directors, assistants to the president, committee managers, editors of *Technical Communication*, *Intercom*, and *Tieline*, faculty advisors, and the chapter presidents, newsletter editors, employment managers, and membership managers.

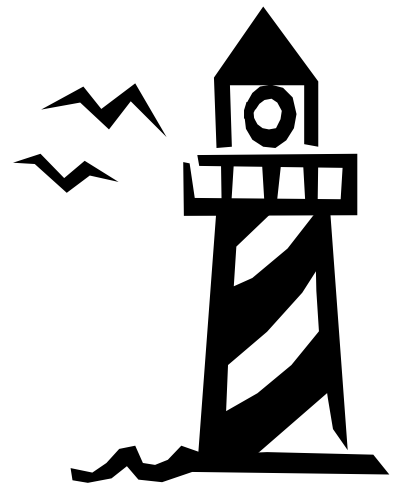
Tieline is the monthly publication mailed to STC leaders that has articles and hints for running successful chapters. You can even search the web site for past articles in

this and the Society’s other award-winning publications.

To gather ideas for activities, refer to the new *Chapter Achievement Award guidelines* on the web site; they reveal the basic requirements for successful chapters.

Leadership workshops are always available at our annual and Region 5 conferences. Many chapters even host their own leadership workshops.

Don’t forget that I am also a resource. My job as *director-sponsor* is to serve as a liaison between the members and the board of directors. When you have a concern that cannot be solved with information from any of these resources, please contact me at suzanna.laurent@mciworld.com. Resolve now to become a better leader and take advantage of STC and the opportunities it offers to do just that!



Calendar of Upcoming Events

Date	Time	Event/Topic	Location	Contact
Oct 1	EBD*	deadline for Nov. newsletter		donnamarcotte@earthlink.net
Oct 10	5:30 p.m.	general meeting “Designing for the Web Using Information Mapping®”	Westchase Hilton 9999 Westheimer	see article on page 12
Oct 10	8:00 p.m.	STC Houston admin. council meeting	Westchase Hilton 9999 Westheimer	Deborah Long (see “Chapter Contacts” on page 3)
Oct 13–14	all day	Region 5 Conference “Navigating the New Century”	Sheraton Old Town Albuquerque, NM	tlwilkins@oes.com
Oct 17	12:00 a.m.	deadline (postmark) for competition entries mailed	see notice on page 3	heather_shelly@bmc.com
Oct 20	EBD*	deadline for competition entries submitted/delivered	see notice on page 3	heather_shelly@bmc.com
Oct 29	12:00 a.m.	deadline for survey for 2001 Region 5 Conference	see notice on page 2	paul.mueller@netIQ.com
Nov 1	EBD*	deadline for Dec. newsletter		donnamarcotte@earthlink.net
Nov 14	5:30 p.m.	general meeting	Westchase Hilton 9999 Westheimer	Deborah Long (see “Chapter Contacts” on page 3)
Nov 14	8:00 p.m.	STC Houston admin. council meeting	Westchase Hilton 9999 Westheimer	Deborah Long (see “Chapter Contacts” on page 3)

* end of business day

October 10, 2000 Program

Designing for the Web Using Information Mapping®

presented by
Noel McDonagh

Information Mapping Inc. (IMI) will present their approach to the design and development of web sites and online documentation. These methods provide

- an analytical approach to developing web sites and online documentation based on users' needs
- a standardized approach that ensures consistency in how information is communicated (e.g., level of detail and presentation)
- modular structure that makes information easy to access, update, and maintain

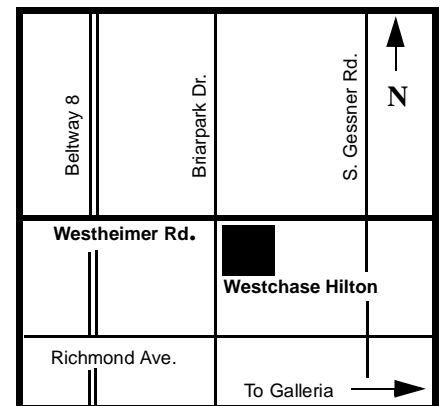
Information Mapping is the only ISO 9000 approved methodology for technical communication. Use of the method provides many advantages over traditional writing techniques, such as better up-front analysis, simplified information retrieval, easier document updating, and improved comprehension and performance.

McDonagh is Business Unit Manager of IMI's New England branch in Waltham, Massachusetts where he has managed the design and production of web sites, web-based training, multimedia, and video-based training. He has an extensive background in the design and development of custom documentation and training solutions for ERP (enterprise resource planning) systems and in the development of technology-based training materials.

Information Mapping is a registered service mark of Information Mapping Inc.

Meeting Basics

Place: Westchase Hilton Hotel
9999 Westheimer Road
(at Briarpark, between
S. Gessner and Beltway 8)



Date: Tuesday, October 10, 2000

Time: 5:30 p.m. networking
(hors d'oeuvres)
6:20 p.m. announcements
6:30 p.m. program

Cost: \$10 (members)
\$13 (non-members)
\$3 (student and unemployed
members)
\$6 (student non-members)

Monthly Drawing

A drawing for various prizes is held at the end of each general meeting. Tickets for the drawing can be purchased at the registration desk. Proceeds benefit the Marx Isaacs Student Scholarship Fund.