

Value Contest Results

In the July/August issue, *Intercom* invited readers to explain the value of technical communication in 100 words or less. For a greater challenge, readers had to imagine themselves in the following situation:

You're on a plane and your row-mate has introduced himself as a product line manager for a large technical product manufacturing company. He tells you he is going to a meeting he is dreading because customers are complaining they can't use the product. Returns are up. Sales are down. New product launches are being delayed. His job is on the line. And the pressure is on to turn this around fast.

You tell him that it sounds like he needs to hire a technical communicator.

He replies, "No. That's not it. I've already got some really talented engineers on staff who know how to write. Besides, they have been with the company for years, so they really know the product inside out. They can handle the technical documents."

At that moment, the pilot announces final approach. You have less than two minutes before the plane touches down to set this guy straight. What do you say?

Intercom received thirty entries, from which the STC communication staff selected the following three as the most persuasive. Following each entry is a brief explanation of what the staff liked about that entry.

Congratulations to John Humpert, Paul Lockwood, and Rich Maggiani, and thanks to all who entered.

"Unless you *really like* trips like this, hire me! As products and services grow more complex, top companies hire me so people *can use* the product and *get* all the benefits *faster*. After I interview and gather information, I *match* the message to the audience, *fit* the materials to adult learning patterns, and *make* it all flow *intuitively* for your customer. Your R&D talent can keep its focus on the company's next big winner. Satisfied customers will buy from you with confidence. And just maybe you can get a little more time for yourself."

John Humpert
Senior Member

Staff response: This entry expresses the total value of technical communicators by mentioning or alluding to usability testing, audience analysis, and knowledge of user needs in addition to writing. The argument is entirely positive—it doesn't seek to criticize engineers' abilities, and therefore doesn't fall into the trap of discussing the technical communicator's competition.

"Think of this plane. The pilot doesn't need to know every individual part of the jet. He or she needs to know how to: take off, ascend, stay airborne, deal with mechanical or weather problems, communicate with airport and airline personnel, keep passengers informed, and land the plane. The airplane's engineers, however, are focused on how every part works, not on the information the pilot—the end user—really wants. Our customers are like the pilot; they want procedures, CBTs, and online help that they can easily follow. A good technical communicator gleans that information and translates it into usable materials."

Paul Lockwood
Senior Member

Staff response: The airplane metaphor is very effective because of its visual impact. Comparing the pilot to the end user is especially powerful. This entry emphasizes the benefits of technical communicators by focusing on satisfied customers using the client's product to best effect.

"There's a big difference between knowing how something works and knowing how to use it. You wouldn't hire the guy who built this airplane's engine to fly it, so why are you having your engineers explain how to use something they built? They only know how it works, not how to use it. You need a professional technical communicator. They'll tell people how to use your widget, and even suggest design changes to make it easier to use. Find the right one, and they'll even write marketing copy that'll

boost sales. Here's my card—I'm the right one."

Rich Maggiani
Associate Fellow

Staff response: Again, the airplane metaphor is effective, and the entry does a fine job of explaining the value of technical communicators in terms the manager in the next seat would understand.

STC Member Becomes Product Manager at MadCap

Sharon Burton, an STC senior member from Riverside, California, recently joined MadCap Software as the product manager for *Blaze*, MadCap's new tool for producing long documents.

In a news release published on *CNN Money.com*, MadCap CEO Anthony Olivier praised Sharon as "a successful consultant, practitioner, and educator on technical communication best practices . . . Sharon continues MadCap's tradition of attracting the best talent in the technical communication community."

Sharon has been involved in STC since 1994 and is currently a member of the Inland Empire, India, and Puget Sound chapters, as well as the Academic, Management, and Usability & User Experience special interest groups. She is also a past president of the Inland Empire chapter.

Prior to joining MadCap, Sharon was technical publication manager at Wonderware, a provider of industrial automation software, and owner of Anthrobytes Consulting for ten years. She is currently an adjunct professor in the engineering department at the University of California, Riverside.

For more information, visit money.cnn.com/news/newsfeeds/articles/prnewswire/LATU02918092007-1.htm.

Congratulations and best wishes, Sharon!

Farewell, Don

Don Bush, whose column “The Friendly Editor” has appeared in STC publications for twenty-six years, is retiring as an *Intercom* columnist. You’ll find Don’s final column on page 38 of this issue.

Don published his first “Friendly Editor” column in *Technical Communication* in 1981. When *Intercom*, originally a newsletter, became a monthly magazine in 1996, “The Friendly Editor” and a few other columns moved to the new publication. Don is the last of the original *Intercom* columnists.

“The Friendly Editor” has been an editor’s dream: engagingly written, full of dry humor and practical wisdom about language. Don’s column *sounds* different than anything else in technical communication publications, in print or online—an impressive feat of writing in an age saturated with opinionated writers and bloggers. The *Intercom* editors are grateful for Don’s contributions, and wish him and his wife, Ramona, all the best as they settle into their retirement years.

Coming Soon in Technical Communication

If you’re concerned about reducing your company’s environmental footprint, make a note to read the cover article of the February 2008 *Technical Communication*. In “Green Printing: A Guide to Environmentally Responsible Printing,” Roger Munger describes some of the business benefits of going green and outlines the choices that you can make when you print documents, from choosing an environmentally responsible print company to selecting vegetable-based inks and recycled or alternative paper. Even if your organization rarely produces paper-based documents for its customers, you likely can still reduce your office’s paper consumption—this tutorial tells you how.

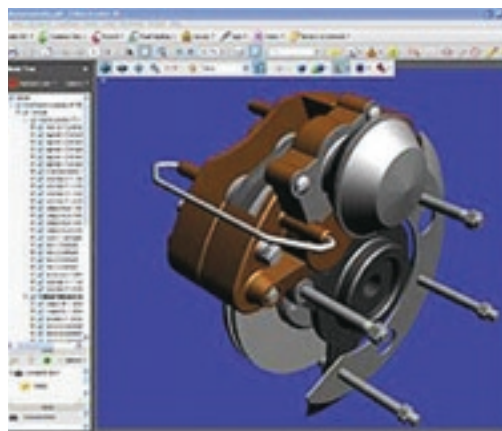
Other articles featured in the February issue of *Technical Communication* include:

- “The Use of Playing Cards to Communicate Technical and Scientific Information,” by Edward Malone
- “Rethinking Plagiarism for Technical Communication,” by Jessica Reyman
- “Lightweight Literate Programming: A Documentation Practice,” by Lynda Walsh, Allan Stavely, and John Shipman
- “The Role for Technical Communicators in Open-source Software Development,” by David Yeats

Adobe Acrobat 3D Contest

Show off your talent in graphics and technical communication by entering Adobe’s Acrobat 3D PDF Contest. According to www.acrobatusers.com/contests/a3d, Adobe is accepting contest submissions in two categories: Collaboration, Visualization, and CAD Data Interoperability; and Technical Publishing.


Entries in the Technical Publishing category will be judged



in part on how well the 3D graphics are integrated into technical documentation. You can submit existing 3D PDF files or use a free trial version of *Acrobat 3D* available from

www.acrobatusers.com/contests/a3d to create new files.

The top winner in the Technical Publishing category will receive prizes valued at nearly US\$2,500, including copies of *Adobe Photoshop CS3 Extended* and the *Adobe Technical Communication Suite*, which includes *FrameMaker 8*, *RoboHelp 7*, *Captivate 3*, and *Acrobat 3D Version 8*. Second- and third-place prizes include an Apple iPhone and an Apple Video iPod.

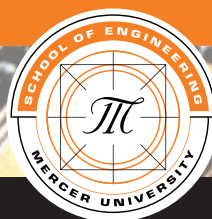
The deadline for submissions is January 31, 2008. For more information, see www.acrobatusers.com/contests/a3d. 

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Nicole Derr
MSTCO Candidate
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