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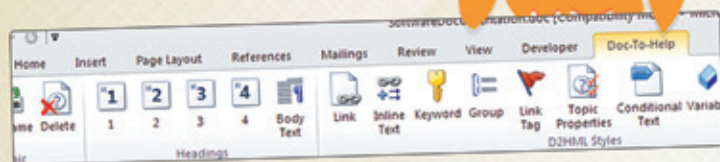
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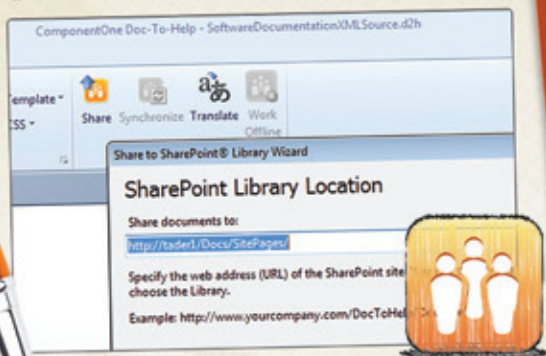
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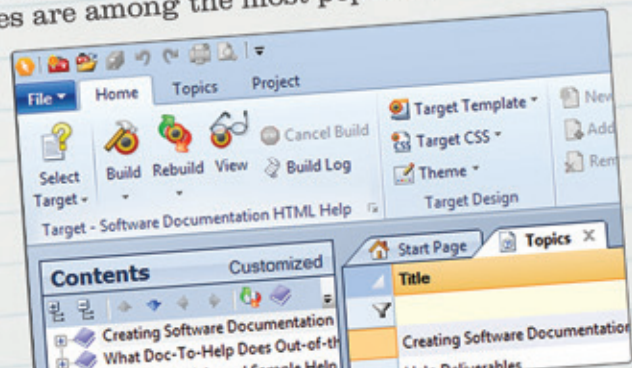
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December 2011

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FEATURES

If you've ever been a gamer, you may remember the rich documentation that accompanied the game software. Over the years, however, game documentation has changed with online interactivity and robust communities of players. Technical communication presents a powerful venue for the future of gaming documentation.

How are technical communication and gaming related? The author explains how technical communicators—as innovators, communicators, and visionaries—are ideally suited for game communication and how the discipline of technical communication has much to offer the gaming community.

What are complex and complicated information systems (CCISs) and how should technical communicators work with them? The authors recommend using rhetorical analysis, or analyzing the exigency, purpose, and audience of the different components of a CCIS, to ensure quality content.

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A Note from the Editor

THIS MONTH'S *Intercom* focuses on gaming, a subject that evokes fond memories of my youth and my current research interests. I have witnessed a resurgence in the gaming industry lately (both for entertainment or sports-based games and also for those related to training and management), which is supported in an *Economist* Special Report on video games (*www.economist.com/node/21541164*). Tim Cross predicts, "video games will be the fastest-growing and most exciting form of mass media over the coming decade," arguing that "as the newest and fastest-growing form of mass media[, games] deserve to be taken seriously."

I couldn't agree more. Like all media businesses, the games industry is changing fast and in unexpected ways. From arcades and home consoles to social and mobile apps to Internet-based games, they have become increasingly sociable by electronically linking gamers the world over. "Millions of people spend many hours each week playing and working (sometimes the distinction is not clear) in virtual places." As a result, the gaming world is a space where technical communicators could thrive.

Jeffery Greene, Laura Palmer, and Craig McKenney certainly think so. In their articles, they all emphasize the importance of technical communication in gaming documentation and development. Greene and Palmer discuss the history and future of games documentation and technical communication's role in the industry. McKenney shows how technology pioneered by games is being put to use in fields from military and police training to molecular biology and marketing. The industry has even spawned a new management technique, "gamification," that applies the psychological principles of game design to motivating workers and engaging customers.

While video games may be seen as trivial by the general public, the authors in this issue of *Intercom* argue that, as the newest and fastest-growing form of mass media, games deserve to be taken seriously, especially by technical communicators.

—LIZ POHLAND
liz.pohland@stc.org
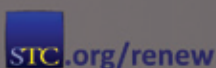
Letter to the Editor

IN THE NOVEMBER issue of *Intercom*, Neil Perlin briefly discussed the ePub standard in his article, "Tech Comm and Mobile: What You Need to Know." He mentioned in the article that the ePub standard does not currently support an index. I would like to share some news about some behind-the-scenes work that will hopefully add indexing to the ePub 3.0 standard.

Indexes have always been able to be included in ePubs, as long as they were in chapter form and used basic hyperlinks to let the reader navigate to the text. The work involved in creating the links has kept many publishers from using this method. This style of index presentation may not be the most usable, but it is available.

In April 2011, the American Society for Indexing (ASI) formed a Digital Trends Task Force (DTTF) that is looking at new and emerging technologies and how these are affecting the world of indexing. We have also become involved with leading digital publishers and organizations to ensure indexes are included in nonfiction digital documents. We are members of the International Digital Publishing Forum (IDPF), which defines the ePub standard, and the eBook SIG Working Group of NISO (National Information Standards Organization).

In October, the DTTF submitted a proposal to the IDPF to consider adding better and more usable index functionality, including quicker pop-up access and exploratory capabilities, to the ePub 3 standard. The proposal has moved forward with the publication of an Indexes Charter document. (To view the charter, go to *https://code.google.com/p/epub-revision/wiki/IndexesCharterProposal).* If the IDPF board approves this charter, a working group will move forward with writing the index specification.

For more information and updates about the DTTF's activities, visit its Web page at *www.asindexing.org/i4a/pages/index.cfm?pageid=3647.* We also have a very active open LinkedIn group, which contains a vast repository of resources about webinars and other educational opportunities related to digital indexing, news, and up-to-the minute updates on the task force's activities. To join, search for "ASI Digital Trends Task Force," and click the Join Group button.

Sincerely,
Cheryl Landes, STC Fellow
Member, ASI Digital Trends Task Force

Author Response

I don't know why the IDPF didn't add indexing in the ePub standard. I suspect that it was partly cultural (supposedly, everyone uses search now) and partly because many authors don't like indexing and don't create indexes (so why spend effort on an indexing feature?). However, I've always thought that an index is a crucial navigational feature in any medium. Because of that, I'm pleased to read Cheryl Landes' letter and look forward to the DTTF's work on getting indexing included in the ePub 3 standard. I also hope that our help authoring tool vendors add support for indexing in their ePub output after the DTTF finishes its work.

Neil Perlin

2011 APEX AWARDS FOR PUBLICATION EXCELLENCE

STC Society for Technical Communication

It's All in the Game:
Technical Communication's Role in Game Documentation

By JEFFREY GREENE and LAURA PALMER | *Senior Member*
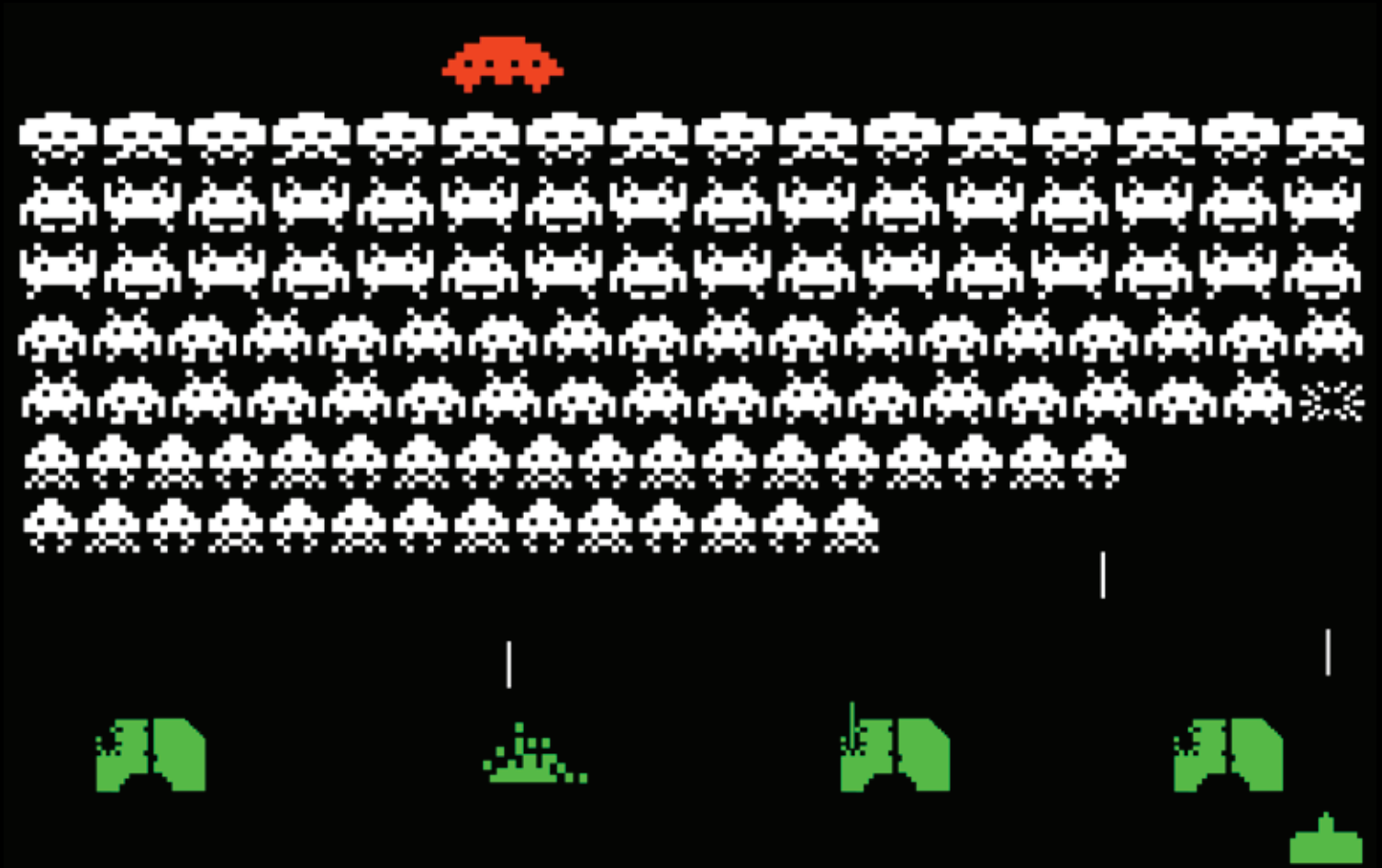
MANY GAMERS HAVE fond memories of gaming's early years of grey blips rallying across a black background. For the truly sentimental, those memories extend beyond the game itself to the simplest of artifacts: the instruction booklet that came with the cartridge. Everything about those booklets, from the feel of the paper and the smell of the ink to the cover artwork, takes gamers back to those formative years. The documentation's minimalist content resonated like no other type of instruction set; nary a single toaster manual has been revered in the same way.

Early game booklets had a zeitgeist that elevated them above ordinary user-support materials. The booklets were an entrée into the game itself. As both an *invitation to* and *immersion in* the alternate reality of the game, the booklet was invaluable. The backstory—or "flavor," as it was called—was fiction at its best, with the plot and characters coming to life on the small page. No matter who was at the joystick, the basic premise of the game became accessible through clear, compelling narrative. Whether it was a quest, competition, or battle between good and evil, players were ready to start in a matter of minutes.

Functionally, game documentation leveraged what John Carroll learned in his research with computer users and manuals: Grabbing the basics and getting started were the goal. There's no joy in reading manuals; part of the delight in the game was the immediate and experiential exploration of the new digital world circa the 1980s.

But 1982 is a distant memory and games have become more and more complex in both online and offline spaces. In 2004, Martin Peterson made the case that the gaming industry and technical communication belonged together. Technical communication's facility with visual design and textual clarity seemed just the fit for an industry that had what Petersen described as no uniform, standardized way to write, document, or organize information. Technical communication could also do more than create an end-user artifact. What Peterson saw in technical communication was professionals who could, via their practices and processes, manage a game's internal development and articulate ideas for all members of the team.

So where did these ideas about technical communication, the gaming industry, and documentation go? In 2011, we're not necessarily any closer to this perfect union of the two, although we've got a rich history of documentation and enormous growth in gaming. A look at the trajectory of documentation from its earliest years to today presents us with some new possibilities for where game documentation might go, especially when games are online and form a culture we couldn't have imagined in 1982.

Game Manuals—The Early Years

In August 1976, Fairchild Semiconductor released the Fairchild Channel F, the first programmable ROM cartridge-based video game console, to the American public. There were many advantages to such a system, but most importantly, programmers could develop a much larger variety of games. No longer were gamers limited to whatever video games were hardcoded on their console's microchip. Software engineers could now develop an array of games for a home console and users could switch out these games at will. Of course, it would take the Atari 2600 in 1977 to truly popularize this cartridge-based system, but with the introduction of that eponymous console came a deluge of games and game manuals and design documents. Atari would rule the 1980s.

There are literally hundreds of Atari 2600 game manuals in existence, and yet for the most part, Atari games were truly a "pick up and play" experience. Little documentation was required for a user to understand and enjoy truly simplistic games such as *Asteroids* or *Space Invaders*. Still, as the complexity of video games grew during the second and third generation of consoles, so did the corresponding documentation.

There is a certain level of artistry to the manuals produced during this era. The documents mostly followed a familiar pattern, starting out with some form of "flavor text"—literally a few paragraphs, or in some cases several pages, of text devoted to telling the game's story in a compelling manner. This storytelling section was integral to how a player interacted and engaged with the narrative. Exidy's *Crossbow* for the Atari 2600 provides an excellent example of this type of text in the first few pages of its manual: "Over scorching deserts, through dark, icy caverns, around a fiery volcano, and under the leafy cover of a steamy jungle, you and five brave friends set out to retrieve the treasures stolen by the Evil Master. Your goal is his castle, far, far away."

After the flavor text, there was generally some form of instruction or rules, followed by a definition of the controls and sometimes a section for game hints and tips. It was assumed that a player would refer to the manual numerous times during gameplay and might even want to write in the manual itself. Several early NES games provide lined pages specifically for a gamer to take notes. At the end of the manual was usually some form of warranty information.

Early game manuals sometimes performed double duty, acting not only as an instruction booklet but also as a rudimentary form of copy protection. This was particularly true of PC games such as *Wasteland* and the *King's Quest Series,* where upon loading the game, the user would be prompted to type back a particular passage from the manual. Without ownership of the paper manual (or its facsimile), an end user wouldn't be able to access the software. This process was repeated every time the user loaded the game.

Documentation Today

In recent days, the hefty print manual has seen a sharp decline. Modern user documentation for video games is often concise and simplistic, merely involving the mapping

of buttons and the introduction of key game concepts. With rising printing costs and the introduction of jeweled CD cases in the 2000s, it's no surprise that the verbose manuals of yesteryear are disappearing. Additionally, gaming instruction and documentation has now become something that is increasingly experienced in the form of in-game tutorials. Instead of an external paper manual, players are often offered contextual instruction within the gaming experience itself.

The copious strategies and hints that were somewhat common in early game manuals have largely been replaced by published strategy guides and online FAQs. Although in the second and third generation of consoles it wasn't uncommon for publishers to produce books on individual video games offering tips and tricks for players, these books were published well after the original game came to market. The production of modern strategy guides for video games is now its own separate industry. Companies like Bradygames and Prima Games produce lengthy strategy guides—full of detailed walkthroughs, instructions, and full-color game maps—that are released alongside the video games themselves.

More than anything, the collective intelligence of the Internet has changed how gamers access expert guidance in how to play a game. Websites such as GameFAQS offer vast collections of user-generated documents that provide hints, tips, and detailed walkthroughs of video games that easily rival anything that traditional publishing provides. Self-proclaimed experts produce competing FAQs, sometimes for one title over a variety of consoles such as xBox, PlayStation, or Wii. Ardent gamers engage in lively debates on forums, arguing about which game FAQ is the best.

Although the user documentation continues to be streamlined and gutted, the documentation produced has only become more complicated and rigorous, according to Jonathan Blow. In the early days of video game development, a single programmer could feasibly complete a video game alone because of the limited capabilities of earlier systems.

Now game-design teams can include nearly a hundred individuals working together on a single title. The teams are also far more diverse. Where there used to be a solitary programmer, now there are teams of concept designers, programmers, artists, musicians, and level designers, all working toward a single vision. This is no easy task when you consider all the variables involved in developing games across multiple platforms and with diverse tools.

The stakes of game development are also incredibly high. A large-scale, multi-platform release can potentially cost anywhere from $18 to $28 million to develop, according to Wanda Meloni. Given the significant financial risk for a flop, it is no wonder that the design document produced during the development cycle is so vital to the success of a video game title. Design documents are produced by software engineers and the designers themselves, rather than by a specialized technical communicator, and currently there are no defined standards for producing documentation in the gaming industry, as Peterson has noted.

A Future for Game Documentation

To quote Peterson again, technical communication and game documentation belong together—they did in 2004 and they still do today. Despite a slide toward paperless instruction, little has changed in the basic documentation set. The small printed booklet enclosed in the DVD case replicates conventions from 30 years ago; it is, in essence, a genre like the memo or letter. The cover artwork is as compelling as ever—images frame, at a glance, the tone and nature of the game. The booklet includes the back story or basic premise of the game along with any necessary character sketches. Game functions for the remote, along with other tools, tricks, and hints, are also on the printed page.

Whereas "flavor text" and other trappings of earlier eras may be disappearing from video game manuals, there is, however, one major addition to these documents that shows how technical communication fits into the gaming world—risk communication. While early manuals were free of warnings, that's not the case today. Now booklets include legal disclaimers right next to health and safety information. Notably, the first page covers warnings for health issues such as seizures, repetitive motion injuries, or motion sickness. There are also instructions on securing the hand-held remote safely. Another significant warning is the game's rating from the Entertainment Software Rating Board (ESRB) as age-based criteria.

And the warnings continue. Because current consoles can connect to the Internet for services and game play, personal security disclaimers are now the norm, as in this excerpt from a gaming booklet:

To protect your privacy, do not give out personal information such as last name, phone number, birth date, age, school, email, or home address when communicating with others.

It's clearly not 1982 anymore. The innocent days of play (in private) have given way to new concerns (from the public).

Beyond Print

While DVD-based games for consoles are still popular, MMORPGs (massively multiplayer online role-playing games) dominate in sheer number of players and up-end the need for traditional documentation. To give you a sense of proportion, James Ransom-Wiley wrote that *World of Warcraft* (a popular MMORPG) surpassed ten million monthly subscribers in 2008. Most MMORPG documentation is player-generated in an environment that echoes what Steven Rosenbaum states in *Curation Nation*: There are no economic limits for content production.

Various user forums within the online game's corporate site serve as the primary locus for the community and

disciplinary knowledge of the game. Much like what we've seen with the game FAQ community, MMORPGs are a dynamic and organic community of practice. The participants in a MMORPG are creators; specific players become defined as centers of expert knowledge based on their time in the game, levels of play achieved, and relevance of content. Various stats on posts and responses show players whose contributions may be the most significant. Moderators manage the communities and provide players with links to offline resources, such as print books. Away from the corporate sphere, social media platforms like blogs, Facebook, or Twitter drive the creation of a game's informal knowledge base.

This entire digital world is one that's constantly morphing online and off. Because of this, we have a deeper documentation quandary than we may have imagined. No one would argue that gaming and its artifacts—as tangible and intangible products—have developed cultural status. The Game Preservation Special Interest Group of the International Game Developers Association proclaimed, as part of a historical initiative, that games were in dire need of preservation. Various storage formats had differing levels of durability and the hardware subject to obsolescence and decay. To lose these products of gaming's early days would be to lose a significant part of the cultural history of the late twentieth century.

This problem of digital decay and obsolescence isn't necessarily solved by our current technologies. However, what we may lose is not the bits and bytes but the less tangible nature of the community as defined by its language—the words written across the digital domain that form the essence of the culture.

A Place for Technical Communicators and Linguists

A future for gaming documentation is one that should consider the role of linguists and technical communicators working together. Gaming has exceeded what we could have imagined even 10 years ago in documentation practices. How the game works is no longer part of just a manual or a booklet, it's part of an active and changing culture based on language. Capturing that language and preserving it is what linguists do best. Corpus linguistics, with its focus on expansive structured and searchable repositories, is the natural fit for documenting the online communities, conversations, and culture of current gaming.

The inclusion of technical communicators continues to be required in the gaming industry. Basic materials as either booklets or online quick-start guides are here to stay. However, technical communicators and linguists working together to take documentation to a new level is the future of gaming documentation. These two professions don't just create a mere disciplinary union—they can bring real star power to the development process. Stories, dialogues, plots, and character interactions—as part of a written language—can be captured by linguists and used by technical communicators to inform game development. With this model, teams of concept designers, programmers, artists, musicians, and level designers will see greater unification in their work. The multimillion-dollar gaming industry may have a new paradigm as a result of a successful and unexpected collaboration.

Gaming's rich documentation history is one that we should remember; however, it's now time to think about what we can do to maintain the unique culture that's emerged from online interactivity and a robust community of players. Technical communication and linguistics present a powerful team for the future. ℹ

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The TC/VG

Claiming Land in the Country of Gaming

By CRAIG McKENNEY

It is our job to position ourselves as experts in the technical communication of gaming.

Manifesto:
Discovered

AT A RECENT MEETING to introduce new faculty members, my esteemed colleagues and I were asked to mention our teaching and research interests. As I began talking about game narrative and simulations as workplace technical documents, I felt eyes glaze, roll, and turn to the clock. This does not bother me as much as it once did. As technical communication becomes more interdisciplinary, we must become experts at many different things, games included. With journals like *Game Studies* and *Simulation & Gaming* leading the discussion, there is not as much being done in the area of technical communication and gaming. It is our job to position ourselves as experts in the technical communication of gaming. What this issue of *Intercom* represents is awareness that there is merit in the discussion of gaming as it relates to technical communication. And that makes the eye rolls easier to take.

This article will cover how technical communicators—as innovators, communicators, and visionaries—can move the video game conversation forward within the discipline. No longer can the field be locked into conversations of novelty or outrage, dismissive ghettoization, or "pitchfork and torch" parades. Books and articles in technical communication repeatedly address the same issues, trying to determine where the field is and where it is going. By doing this, technical communicators can get down to the business of the what/how/why of the field's role as an untapped resource in the world of gaming. This article hopes to challenge and provoke discussion of that concept.

If you are excited about this issue of the magazine, then I already have your attention. This article will hopefully speak to those of you who, like my esteemed colleagues, feel games are a triviality, a pop-culture fluke whose time will pass. But of note: according to the Entertainment Software Association, the video game industry generated over $25 billion dollars in annual revenue, attributable to the 72% of American households playing computer or video games as of 2011. Employing over 120,000 people, the video game industry develops innovative technologies and applies them to external purposes: entertainment, education, edutainment, simulation, and more. Those numbers are startling for many reasons, but primarily because they have only gone up during this economic recession. The industry is strong, and from an employment perspective, that is useful information for technical communicators.

Definition(s) of Games

At this point, some defining of terms is appropriate. Thinking of games as a general term inclusive of type (video, computer, casual, simulation, and other badge/incentivizing games like the Foursquare mobile application) and genre (puzzle, trivia, card, multiplayer, action, etc.) will provide technical communicators with the richest possible exploration of how to best situate themselves: within the diversity of the discipline and within the diversity of the gaming world. For the purposes of this article, games can be defined as a self-directed activity with a specific beginning and end that is governed by rules, whether they be internal (meaning governed by construction of the game), or external (meaning governed by the agency exhibited in using the game). Katie Salen and Eric Zimmerman (2003) add that a game has an artificial conflict, defined by rules, that results in a quantifiable outcome. Such definitions will allow for an exploration of the multifaceted games currently in use in the workplace.

Truisms this article won't cover because, problematically, the conversation about video games has stalled at them: such games are variable in purpose but culturally ubiquitous. Games are a "new" form of communication, taking many forms beyond video and computer games. They have multiple applications, rhetorical function, and structure. They are symbols of culture. They do/do not cause violent behaviors.

Games: Embedded in Work

Beyond serving as a tool for entertainment, games are already in place and in use, such as in workplaces. Workplaces from the U.S. Army to local police departments, from Subway to Cold Stone Creamery, have now incorporated games in many forms: from a sophisticated, dramatized, live-action Iraqi village simulation in the middle of the Mojave Desert to teach cultural awareness and flexible thinking in situ, to a video game testing one's ability and speed at making and mixing ice cream for a corporate entity. These are very specific instances, but the point is that many corporations, public and private, have embraced gaming as a legitimate training mechanism for employees. This is where technical communicators come into play, literally and figuratively.

Technical Communicators as Gaming Specialists

Technical communicators can play an increasingly important role in the development, implementation, and assessment of such training games. Knowing that games are currently in use across workplace settings should encourage technical communicators to begin situating themselves as part of this document construction. Gaming structures can serve as useful tools for modifying workplace training. Technical communicators should be involved in the development and design of such scenarios, given their awareness of instructional design, usability studies, and new media, but also given their understanding of structuring information in a variety of document forms. Such projects are more often than not outsourced to other gaming companies, but could easily be kept in-house if a staff member—a technical communicator—had the expertise to produce such documents. The discipline has direct applications to gaming and we, as employees, bosses, and teachers, should be making that connection.

Implications for Writing: Production and Construction

Johndan Johnson-Eilola encouraged that the field of technical communication should be rethought as a "post-industrial discipline." Such an approach allows a vision of what technical communication should be: a key player in the design of information, knowledge, and recursive communication about that information and knowledge. In this case, the opportunity to rethink our field presents itself in the form of games. Michael Albers also recognized that "the focus of technical communicators has been on writing documents. However, in recent years, technical communicators have been widening their scope and expanding into areas such as interface and interaction design, information architecture, information design, and usability. In tandem with this expansion, the fundamental methods of delivering information have changed, primarily through use of single-sourcing, XML, and multiple methods of delivery, all of which have increased the need for both collaboration and project management." With this in mind, the gaming industry's influence and intersection with what technical communication as a field is and could be becomes clearer.

Michael Hughes extends this line of thinking by focusing on the value a technical communicator brings to an organization by "creating organization (internal) knowledge," and he argues that technical communicators need to re-envision themselves as "creators of knowledge" instead of "information packagers." Technical communication has many avenues where this is currently happening: we produce knowledge through research (usability testing, ethnography) and could transition those skills to meet the needs of corporations implementing games, but in addition, those skills could be offered to corporations testing/researching games. Nintendo and Microsoft (to name but two game companies) have game usability labs, where the expertise of a technical communicator could aid the production of scholarship on game testing, further developing the discipline's body of knowledge.

Implications for Research: Assessment and Analysis

As research practitioners, technical communicators have a lot to offer in the field of game and simulation studies. Such research does exist, but it is often an exercise in shambolic research practices. Part of the problem is definitional: analysts speak about games or simulations without a common lexicon, and so there is no consistency of concept from article to article. Another problem is that the research itself is simply ill-conceived or lacks rigor. In one specific case, a research study by Julie Dugdale et al. in 2006, the authors began observing firefighters' use of a virtual reality system in training. However, when the researchers did not have enough firefighters to test the system, they simply went with non-firefighters to test one phase of the study. With

technical communicators leading the research in gaming, the opportunity arises for developing a rigorous, fair research methodology that is consistent with its concept, making the technical communicator an essential team member.

Albers suggests that technical communication, "from the practitioner's view[,] has a heavy focus on the technology side, while often ignoring the softer social side. The academic view, on the other hand, often seems too focused on rhetorical or discourse analysis of texts, while ignoring both the technical and social side. We need to move both sides closer to a middle ground." With the pervasiveness of technology in the field, and a shift in effective learning methodologies not recognized in TC literature beyond a handful of articles, professional technical communicators and students of the discipline must understand a broader flexibility in providing information in a variety of formats (like reality-based simulations, for they best reflect the kind of learning needed by the users) specific to the needs of the given audience. These user-driven needs will ultimately shape the development of the discipline, and the discipline should be open to those changes.

Implications for Design: Documentation

These disciplinary growing pains are challenging, because the topic of simulation is something not considered under the limited purview of technical communication. Barbara Giammona (*Intercom*, August 2004 and May 2009) explored the doom-and-gloom of the early 2000s and how technical communication was seen as a dying field by many practitioners. Suggesting ways for the discipline to reinvent itself, she revisited her 2004 article five years later, only to conclude that the same problems still exist, with a few exceptions: 1) technical communicators have become more a part of the development and innovation process (as Johnson-Eilola suggested needed to happen in 1995), and 2) technical communicators have responded to needs in their cultures, such as becoming solution providers (e.g., the symbolic-analyst Johnson-Eilola suggested in 1996). This indicates the persistence of the conversation since 1995 with little to no practical change as a result. One thing of interest here is that in 2004 Giammona also noted that gaming technologies were a rising trend (and still are), and yet that is still something underserved by TC research and emphasis.

George Hayhoe (2005) provides an interesting anecdote to this idea, tracing technical communication's relation as an offshoot of a high-risk industry: "technical communication got its start as a profession in the years after World War II when defense and aerospace contractors in the U.S. and U.K. were required to produce large numbers of proposals, reports, and procedures in response to government requirements." As the role of national defense has changed culturally and rhetorically, and as knowledge has become less reliant on text, there is a consequential change to the way TC functions in this regard. Hayhoe states, "we

must also face the fact that technical communicators in the future will work in different subject domains than computer hardware and software," and identification of such domains (such as simulation design and assessment) is an essential task of the industry. In particular, given the discipline's high-risk industry roots, it would make sense to further develop those connections to organizations like fire and police departments.

Technical communicators are the bridge between information and the user, often tasked with simplifying complex information for specific workplace audiences. Games and game studies (disciplines often not associated with technical communication) present models that reflect this kind of knowledge construction. Increased knowledge of games and their import to education provide a likely connection to the field of technical communication. With growing examinations of the use of games at work—such as training—technical communication becomes a viable field through which to explore this recent trend. Given games and their use in training, and the attention paid to their importance to learning, technical communication can—and should—support the development, implementation, and assessment of workplace games and the user's experience, especially as employers shift to alternative models of documentation, teaching, and knowledge management, such as simulations.

Conclusion(s)

To summarize: the gap for TC practitioners is that the field has not decided what it is and what it covers in the area of gaming. This identity crisis is, unfortunately, transferred to the workplace. Technological changes that affect the amount of information and how it is represented within the workplace for the user and the way the user learns presents a rich opportunity to expand the boundaries of technical communication. This article is one such effort to expand those boundaries given the game-like changes in the workplace. There is great opportunity for technical communicators to aid the state of research in game and simulation studies. Likewise, the structure and dissemination of knowledge in new formats is an important role of a technical communicator. As a practical workplace concern, Susi et al. (2007) recognize that "serious games are also becoming ever more important in the global education and training market, which in 2003 was estimated at $2 trillion. It is also predicted that 'by 2008, 40 percent of U.S. companies will adopt serious games in their training efforts.'" Rather than outsourcing these tasks, technical communicators are ideally suited to complete this work, because it is in the forefront of user support as opposed to being added as an afterthought (where the TC professional supports instead of participates) in the design process (Johnson-Eilola 1996). This backward process is problematic in that such disciplinary limitations—whether self, academically, or workplace-imposed—negatively impact the user because they then miss out on the expertise of technical communicators. At the same time, technical communicators do not get to address the needs or concerns of the user prior to implementation and use of a product.

Much like learning and training is changing, so too must the field of technical communication. The TC practitioner must become a symbolic-analytic worker, for "symbolic-analytic workers possess the abilities to identify, rearrange, circulate, abstract and broker information" (Johnson-Eilola 1996). Technical communication can (and should) incorporate a symbolic-analytic process to better promote the idea that it is a constructive discipline and not just a supportive one. Ultimately, will you be left rolling your eyes or will you find a place to position yourself for developing the discipline and expanding your employment possibilities? ℹ️

CRAIG McKENNEY (cmckenney@highline.edu) is a child of the 1980s and has played games since he could walk. He has lived through more gaming platforms than he cares to recount. Currently, he teaches technical communication in Washington state, where he continues to research simulations used in corporate settings as a technical document and the rhetoric of game narratives.

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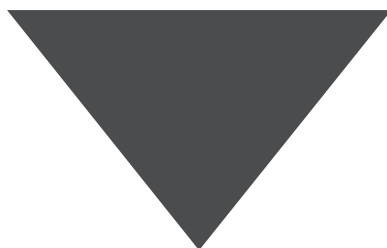
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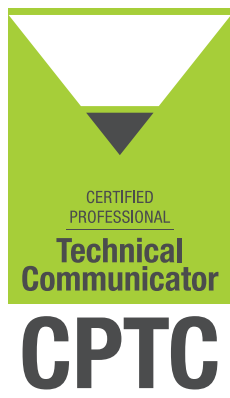
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- **Process Management**—Plan the deliverables schedule and monitor the process of fulfillment.
- **Information Development**—Author content in conformance with the design plan, through an iterative process of creation, review, and revision.
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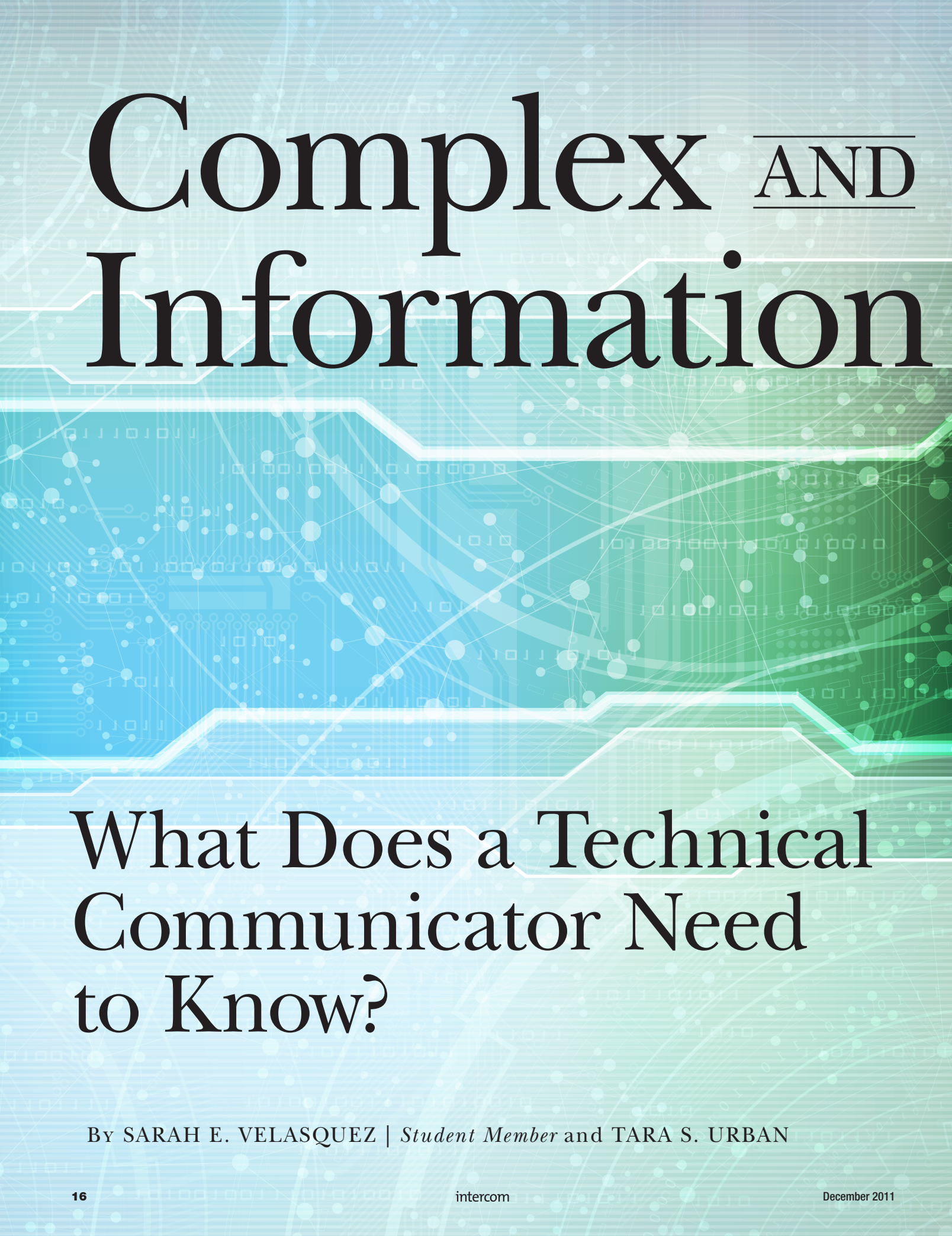
Complex AND Information

What Does a Technical Communicator Need to Know?

By SARAH E. VELASQUEZ | *Student Member* and TARA S. URBAN

Complicated Systems:

INTRICATE WEBSITES called complex and complicated information systems (CCISs) present a huge challenge to technical communicators. CCISs draw from multiple sources for their information, requiring the technical communicator who works with them to think about multiple types of content and delivery. Although we don't expect technical communicators to be Web designers or technical support, we see a need for technical communicators to have general knowledge of how CCISs function to be able to work with the content of these systems. In the rest of this article we will explain these information systems in more detail and then suggest how technical communicators should use their skills to work with CCIS content.

What Are Complex and Complicated Information Systems?

In *Combining Rhetorical Theory with Usability to Evaluate Quality of Writing in Web-Based Texts,* Dr. David Hailey defines CCISs as websites that are so complicated that they can only be managed by computers. These systems are overseen by people, but their operation is managed by computers because they handle information from too many sources for humans to manage alone. To be a CCIS, websites have to meet several criteria. Attributes such as accessing external file sources and outside systems; being reactive, situational, and dynamic; and performing customer specific tasks are required for a site to be classified as a CCIS.

Driven by External Files

The basic explanation of a CCIS is that it relies on the ability to connect and be driven by external files, RSS feeds, databases, and other websites. A CCIS works first by an inquiry from an external source. For example, a human or another computer visits a website and requests information about a certain topic. The CCIS then responds by reaching

Lukas Radavicius / Shutterstock.com

beyond its internal files and servers to access outside information. This information source can be anything from a database to another website. The resulting problem is that the content from these external sources is not under the control of the people who created the CCIS.

Additionally, there are opportunities for automation of CCISs. Preprogrammed scripts can be set to run when certain scenarios are triggered by a user. JavaScript might also be used to update the page periodically. For example, automatic cycling can be programmed so that sites like *CNN.com* can update the news, weather, and stock market report at regular time intervals to avoid the need for human intervention.

There are limitations when dealing with CCISs. For one, the more information requested the trickier it is to gather all the information together to create a meaningful final product. Even a single component of the system can be hard to examine because much of the information does not exist in the final format until it has been delivered to the user's computer. This can complicate the process, because if the system is not structured properly it won't gather the information requested correctly, resulting in pieced-together content that isn't organized or meaningful.

Reactive and Dynamic

A CCIS must also be reactive and dynamic. To suggest that the CCIS knows where all information is at all times would make it cumbersome and slow. The CCIS does not remember where everything is, nor does it store all its information in one place. It must be able to react to different scenarios in different ways and respond to each situation individually. Information is accessed in a different way every time, meaning it can move along different paths. If information is requested from a user, the information is retrieved along a certain path. If a different user requests the same information, an alternate path might be used. This is necessary for many reasons, one of which is that websites and data are not static but dynamic and forever changing.

Because websites are dynamic, CCISs need to be dynamic, also. By dynamic, we mean their responses must be nonlinear and able to change and adapt according to location changes of source information. Information may also be requested by different media, such as cellular phone, Web, and computer, which requires the system to access the same information in a different way, suggesting that a different path be used. In all of these scenarios, the technical communicator needs to make sure that the content is meaningful and makes sense for the situation and user.

Capable of Recognizing Users

One of the features of CCISs that people are often exposed to is user recognition and customization. Much like Amazon.com, CCISs are able to "remember" users and preferences via cookies. These cookies are often used for

sites like Amazon.com to provide customized home pages and information from other sources that apply to the user. The result of this feature is that CCISs maintain a reader history and responds to individual users differently every time they visit the site, depending on the information that the user views, accesses, and saves. User recognition is yet another characteristic of CCISs that makes control over the content on these websites challenging. Underlying all of these complexities is the problem that the content often goes completely unexamined by the provider. While the content might be appropriate, it also might not be, and nobody may be checking either way.

How Should Technical Communicators Approach CCISs?

Don't Leave the Content to the Programmers

Now that we understand some of the characteristics of CCISs, we can see that these sites are very technically complicated and require programmers and other IT professionals to create and maintain them. However, their expertise and focus is on the coding that goes into these sites, not the content. Because CCISs pull pieces and parts from different files and databases, keeping the content current and relevant becomes a real challenge. The question then becomes, who is responsible for content control and quality as more sites and databases are involved? The logical answer to this question is the technical communicator, who has the tools to evaluate content that a programmer doesn't possess. Programmers may not be paying attention to this aspect of a CCIS. Without a technical communicator it is easy for the content to slip through the cracks. In discussing CCISs, Hailey states that "[i]n the face of such complexities, IT professionals and technical communicators have developed increasingly sophisticated metrics for evaluating quality in navigation, structure, and content." But he also goes on to say that, "there seems to be no good system for simultaneously evaluating relevance and rhetorical quality of the content." This task falls to technical communicators, who will best understand how to analyze the exigency, purpose, and audience of the different components of a CCIS to ensure quality content.

Content Evaluation

Before addressing content in CCISs specifically, we need to recognize that technical communicators can all struggle with evaluating digital content, even on simple Web pages. The typical ways that websites are evaluated, such as usability studies, Web analytics, and search engine optimization, will not necessarily detect deficiencies in content. However, technical communicators, with their understanding of rhetoric, can use their skills to focus on the content, word choice, and whether these words fulfill their purpose, as determined by a rhetorical analysis.

A rhetorical analysis begins with exigency. All websites are created because of a need. Does the website creator have too much inventory on hand, or do they have an art exhibit that no one is attending? Understanding the need is the foundation of website analysis because no purpose or audience can properly be determined without knowing the underlying reason for the site. Once the need of a site is determined, the technical communicator can then examine purpose and audience.

The purpose of a website is to address the creator's need by providing an outlet for his or her information. For example, the exigency of the Turner Broadcasting Network is to be the leader in providing news information to the public. The purpose of the website for their well-known news channel, *CNN.com*, is to provide the most current breaking news information. The purpose defines what the page is designed to do and is the reason a person will want to visit a site. Because of that purpose, technical communicators can consider what audiences will be reached and then tailor the content for those audiences.

After determining the purpose, we can identify the audiences. There may be many different audiences for a website, and each requires different content to persuade them to do what the site creator intends. Each page of a website might have a different audience and purpose. Further, there may be audiences that the site creator never imagined would visit but should be accommodated. Determining the purpose and audience and then focusing the content to those purposes and audiences will help the audiences identify which pages are intended for them and will tend to persuade the audience to the purpose of the page.

Although it may not be commonly recognized, all websites are trying to persuade users to take some sort of action (called "conversion") or leave the site with information that they did not possess previous to their exposure. If the desired action of visiting the page is having the user click on a certain link, by evaluating the page, the technical communicator can quickly see if the content is or is not working. In this context, a good approach to evaluating a Web page is to follow these steps:

1. Identify why the page needs to be made.
2. Identify what the page is supposed to do.
3. Identify the audience(s) the page is supposed to impact.
4. Evaluate the extent to which the page meets that need and purpose with each audience.
5. Justify the evaluation to others if necessary.

These steps generally lead to an excellent sense of how well the content on the page is written.

How Does This Apply to CCISs?

A technical communicator can take the rhetorical analysis just described for simple sites and apply it for CCISs on a page-by-page or even item-by-item basis. But, you may ask, if the programmers create the websites and the technical communicators can help create or evaluate the content,

why do the technical communicators really need to have a more in-depth understanding of CCISs, as we are suggesting? In short, technical communicators need to be aware of the complexities of CCISs to be able to perform their rhetorical analyses within this framework. As Hailey says, "If you understand how cars work, you become a safer driver and have a better sense of how to maintain your car. You don't have to replace your oil and filters to know that you were not fairly treated." A technical communicator has to understand the basics of CCISs in order to talk intelligently about the problems with the content and be able to relate to the programmers and developers. Understanding the challenges, such as not being able to change the way a piece of information is presented because it is being pulled from a database that is owned and managed by a different company, will allow the technical communicator's content analysis to be much more successful, therefore resulting in better organization and wording of content.

We suggest that the technical communicator perform the analysis described previously for each page of a CCIS. By working with programmers to see what parts of a page are dynamic or are being pulled from external sources, the technical communicator can suggest how to write content that is under the site creator's control to best frame the parts that are being pulled in from elsewhere or that may change based on time of day or user. With a good understanding of the exigency, purpose, audience, and rhetoric, the technical communicator will be able to identify content that is not relevant in a CCIS and suggest ways to improve it.

Conclusion

Technical communicators have the skills to evaluate digital content that programmers and developers do not possess. As more and more websites continue to evolve, taking on the form of CCISs, controlling and evaluating the content will become a greater challenge. CCISs is where Web design is headed, so technical communicators need to get on board in trying to understand how these sites are constructed and refining effective ways of evaluating the content to make sure it is good. There are a number of good reasons technical communicators should know how CCISs work and how to evaluate content in them, but perhaps the best is that the technical communicator who can evaluate texts in CCISs becomes indispensable in the web based world. ℹ️

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Technical Translation:
A Decisive Role in International Marketing Communication

By FRANCIS BAO | *Senior Member*

TECHNOLOGY HAS BECOME a major force and power of world economy. Many high-tech companies are trying to globalize by exporting their products to other countries. For this reason, international marketing communication has become a very significant part of this globalization process. Indeed, the intensification of international exchanges involves a growing need for communication and thus of technical translation. The amount of technical translations is already substantial and keeps increasing. What is the role of technical translation in international marketing communication? The answer to this question is that technical translation has played a decisive role in international marketing communication and is a means of communication par excellence of companies exporting their technologies.

Localization is an effective method for cross-cultural marketing communication. Marketing translations require an ability to translate the text correctly and accurately, especially for high-tech marketing campaign materials, since cutting-edge technologies require the use of many special terms. What is important is that the text must still deliver the same message and retain the effectiveness of the original description; however, this has to be done in a different language and target a different culture.
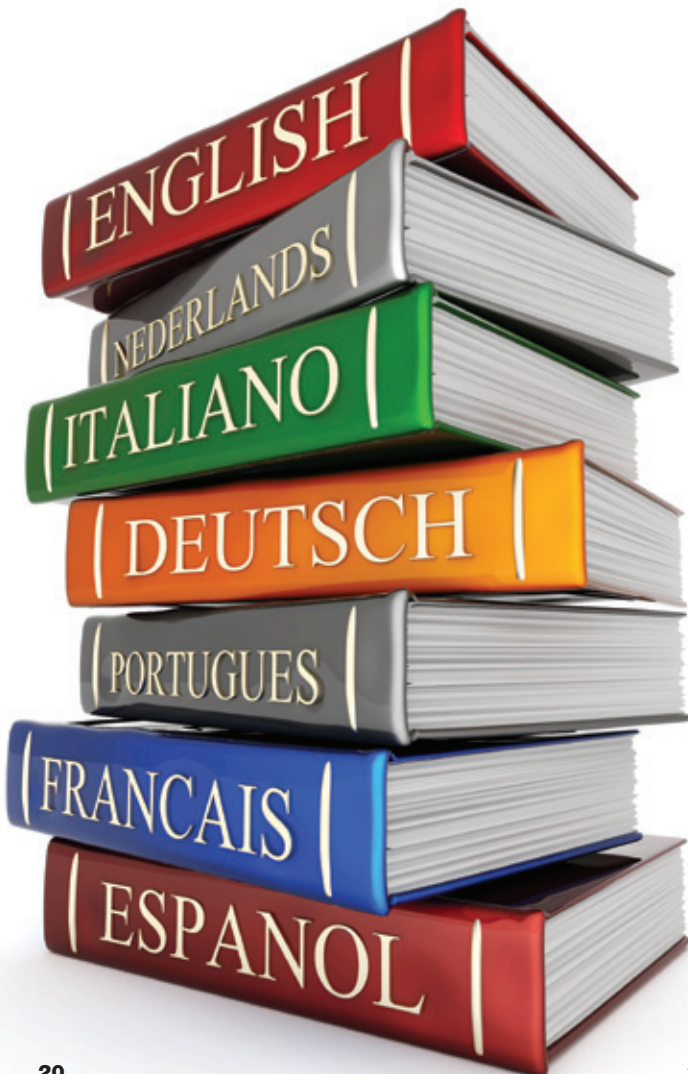
From my own experience as an international marketing communicator in China, I have worked to assist an American high-tech company market healthcare products. These products feature the newest technologies that people in China have never experienced. Thus, in order to let people learn and become familiar with the technologies, and use them for their well being, technical translators not only must have the ability to translate from source language into target language but also need to modify the style of the text to be totally meaningful to the target audience. In other words, when the text is translated from English into Chinese, it has to be modified for the Chinese language and make the description meaningful to a Chinese audience. All lines in the description must be carefully translated to express the same message and energy of the original campaign.

Cultural differences as well as linguistic differences must also be incorporated into the translation process. An effective translation will not let an audience sense that the text was originally written in another language. This process requires experience and knowledge in order to determine how far the translation can deviate from the original text, and it must also produce a correct but non-literal translation which projects the message from the original text in a style suited to different countries.

Language can be a major barrier that affects international marketing communication. The language people speak is part of the culture in which they were raised or have adopted. Therefore, the language used in all marketing communication, including advertising, public relations, and general communication, should reflect the unique cultural expressions and values of the target locale. This is why technical translations of marketing messages for international campaigns often create contextual ineffectiveness, as those special technical terms cannot be easily translated; therefore, word-for-word conversions are not sufficient.

When I translated technical testing material of the healthcare products from English into the Chinese language, I found that context was a big issue for the translation since the structure of the Chinese language is very different from English. If the text is translated in a literal manner or word-for-word format, the original meaning of the material will be totally changed and may even mislead an audience. This problem will also cause a company to fail in marketing the products to the target consumers. A very significant fact is that consumers prefer products and communications that have local branding elements that identify with their cultures. People buy a product or service because of what it can do for them, not because of what the product and its feature mean to the marketing people. Communication becomes effective abroad only after the message has been translated accurately. Without this decisive step, the technologies and products are unlikely to make a significant impact on the foreign consumers, no matter how many powerful effects these technologies can achieve.

Technical translation can result in three types of effects that will affect international marketing communication. The first one is a **zero** effect, in which the translation of the original message into the language of the foreign consumers does not bring any change to the communication status of a company, so that the technologies and products sales volume remains the same. The company will not be able to increase revenue from its products.

The second effect is **positive**. From international marketing expectations, technical translation almost automatically involves increased brand awareness and an increase in demand on the market targeted by the translated campaign. With this effect, technologies will be marketed successfully within foreign nations and the company will increase its profit worldwide.

The third effect is **negative,** in which translation will weaken the strength of a company on the international market. Ineffective technical translation will become a disadvantage for the technologies and products that do not serve the interests of consumers from different cultures. With this result, the company will eventually lose its competitive power on the global market.

The intensification of international exchanges involves a growing need for communication and thus of technical translation.

Technical translation increases the direct revenue of multinational corporations by acting as a leveraging effect on cross-culture marketing communication, as well as sales abroad, and it can is a strategic asset with respect to global business competition, in the sense that it enables companies to standout in a highly competitive market. In addition, technical translation must become an important business function, which will encourage companies to adapt their marketing communication to the consumers they are targeting. Technical translation also will be a future trend that assists marketing communication professionals to globalize their products and technologies. ℹ

FRANCIS BAO, *senior member and past president of the STC Chicago Chapter, owns a technical writing and translation consulting company in the Chicago area. He has won several professional awards, such as the Chicago Chapter annual competition award, APEX awards, a president award, and a distinguished chapter service award. He has written articles for the chapter newsletter,* Byline, *and served as a competition judge for more than five years.*

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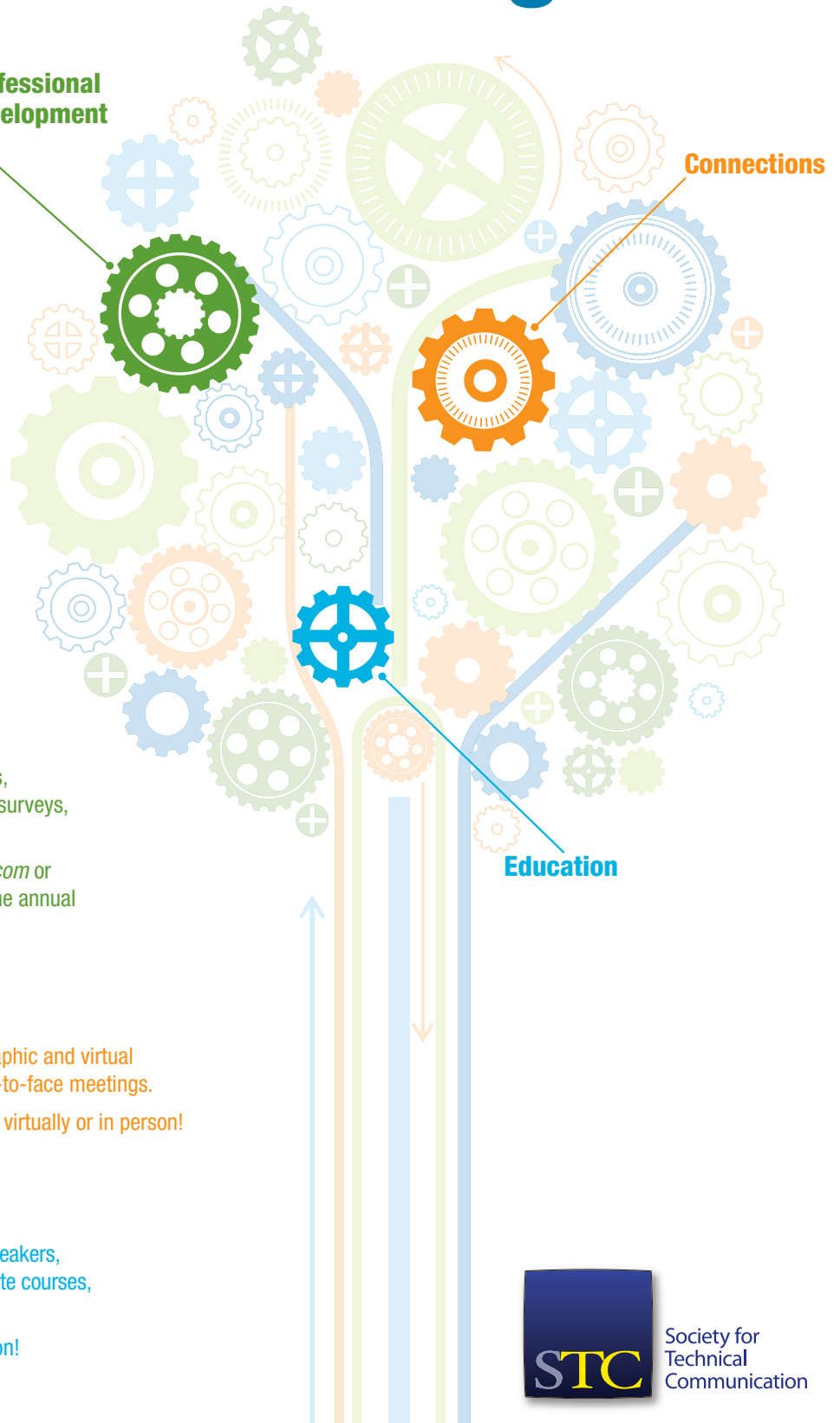
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Designing Interactive PDF Forms

By SAMARTHA VASHISHTHA

AS PROFESSIONAL COMMUNICATORS, we often come across opportunities to stretch the conventional boundaries of our role. Consider this situation: your organization is planning to gather inputs from customers about product usage patterns and the features that they would like to see in future releases. While you can always help draft intelligent questions for the survey, wouldn't it be nice if you could also devise a workflow to gather the required feedback and present it as tabular, actionable information? If I see you nodding yes, this article is just for you!

For many years now, PDF forms have remained a popular way to gather inputs from users within an organization's firewall or across the Web. While such forms are intuitive for recipients to fill and submit, they are also surprisingly easy to create and distribute.

PDF forms also render well in print and fit seamlessly into the paper-based processes that still persist in many organizations. Think of a different scenario where form recipients are trying to get approvals to attend an event for which you've designed the registration form. They may have to submit printed copies of the filled-in form to several departments—finance, accounts, and training, to name a few. If the form in question is a PDF form, you can even offer snail mail as one of the modes by which recipients can submit the filled-in form, possibly with supporting documents or payment instruments.

Some Real-World Applications

You can create PDF forms for a variety of business purposes, such as the following:
▸ Customer satisfaction survey
▸ Help desk request
▸ Feedback on products or services
▸ Purchase order
▸ Quote
▸ Request for quote
▸ Status reports
▸ Editorial checklists
▸ Handoff checklists
▸ Performance appraisals

Prerequisites

Many professional communicators already have Adobe Acrobat Professional or Acrobat Pro Extended installed on their computers. If you're one of them, you're all set to create and distribute PDF forms. Acrobat Professional and Acrobat Pro Extended versions 7.0 and above bundle Adobe LiveCycle Designer, the native application for creating PDF forms. Acrobat X bundles LiveCycle Designer ES2.

After you've created and distributed the form, recipients can fill it in using Adobe Reader, Adobe Acrobat, or any other PDF reader application that supports completing and

submitting PDF forms. Adobe Reader is, of course, a free download available from Adobe.com.

For the purpose of this discussion, I've created a sample conference registration form using Acrobat Professional that we'll discuss in detail as we move along. The form is posted online at *http://blogs.adobe.com/samartha/files/2011/07/ Intercom_Sample_form.pdf*; take a moment to familiarize yourself with it. Detailed instructions for recipients to fill and submit the form are included in the form itself.

Workflow

The workflow proposed in this article lets recipients send their filled-in forms directly to your email inbox. You can add these completed forms to a "responses" file that Acrobat automatically creates on your computer when you distribute the form. Further, you can manage, consolidate, and export the received data using Forms Tracker (*http:// help.adobe.com/en_US/acrobat/standard/using/WS0C017BFC-057C-4996-B1AE-7137093B41B4.html*), a tracking utility provided by Acrobat that you can also access from the Windows system tray.

Refer to Figure 1 to understand the form workflow better.

Creating the Form

You can either create a form from scratch in LiveCycle Designer or modify an available form template according to your requirements. Designer provides numerous predesigned templates to fit different business needs and

scenarios. For instance, the sample form for this article is an extensively customized version of the Conference Registration template.

Follow these steps to begin creating a new form:
1. In Windows, click *Start > Adobe LiveCycle ES2 > Adobe LiveCycle Designer ES2*.
2. Click *New Form* in the Welcome to Adobe LiveCycle Designer ES2 dialog box.
3. In the New Form Assistant, select one of the following options:
   ‣ Select *Use a Blank Form* if you want to create a form from scratch.
   ‣ If you want to customize an available form template according to your requirements, select *Based on a Template.*
4. Click *Next.*
5. Finish the New Form Assistant wizard by specifying the additional information requested. If you chose to model your form after a template, you'll be asked to pick one of the many available templates. If you chose to create your form from scratch, specify page settings and the basic buttons that you'd want to add to it.

Once you've completed the New Form Assistant wizard, you can use intuitive, easy-to-use building blocks—such as text fields, numeric fields, text areas, drop-down lists, list boxes, and radio buttons—to design your form further.

Figure 2 shows the completed sample form in LiveCycle Designer, with the utilized building blocks labeled for easy
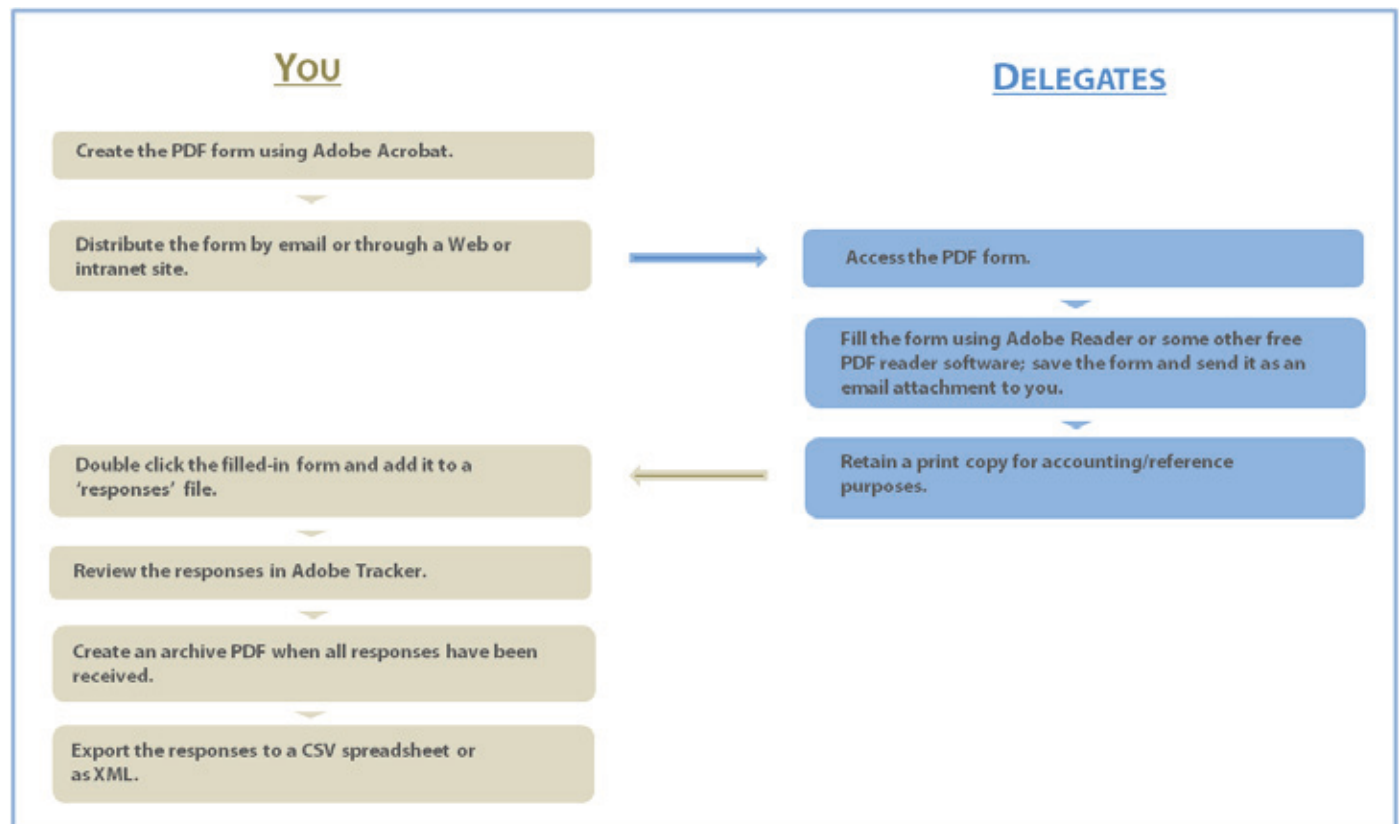

Figure 1. Form workflow

identification. Compare this figure with the actual form linked to earlier in this article.

Note: If you're unable to see a palette labeled in Figure 1, you can choose it for display from the Window menu. For example, select *Window > Object*.

Key Considerations

As you design your form, keep the following important considerations in mind:

▸ Include instructions for completing and submitting the form. See the sample form.

▸ Wherever necessary, include tool-tips for fields. You can create tool-tips on the Accessibility page (labeled 4 in Figure 2). See the sample form.

▸ Assign a unique, easy-to-remember Name to each field on the Object – Binding page (3). You'll use this name later to interpret the data in the responses and create field-level controls using JavaScript or FormCalc scripting.

▸ To make a field mandatory for users to fill-in, select *User Entered – Required* for the field from the Type drop-down menu on the Object – Value page (2).

▸ You can specify available options for drop-down lists and list boxes on the Object – Field page (1). These options are automatically assigned unique numeric values, which may be difficult to track if you have many users registering. You can modify these default values on the Object – Binding page (3) and assign easy-to-track text values to the options.

▸ Radio buttons are added to the form in mutually exclusive groups to provide "one out of many" choices to the user. You can change the default, numeric values for the members of a radio group on the Object – Binding page (3). For example, values for the FeeRadio radio button group in the sample form are "Paid" and "Exempted."

▸ When you add two radio buttons to the form consecutively, they are automatically added to the same radio group. However, to make radio buttons that were not added consecutively to the form part of the same radio group, select[1] all the radio buttons, right-click, and select *Merge Radio Button Groups* from the context-menu. However, if two radio buttons in the merged group have the same value, you will need to manually resolve the values on the Object – Binding page (3).

Previewing the Form

While you are designing a form, you can quickly preview the results in the Preview tab.

Ensuring Compatibility with Older PDF Reader Software

Perform the following steps to ensure that recipients using older versions of PDF reader software will be able to complete and submit the form:

1. In LiveCycle Designer, click *File > Form Properties > Defaults.*

2. Choose *Acrobat and Adobe Reader 7.0.5 or Later* from the Choose Version To Run Form In drop-down menu.

3. Click *OK*.

---

1 *Click and drag to form a selection rectangle that encloses all the radio buttons.*

1. Object – Field | 2. Object – Value | 3. Object – Binding | 4. Accessibility
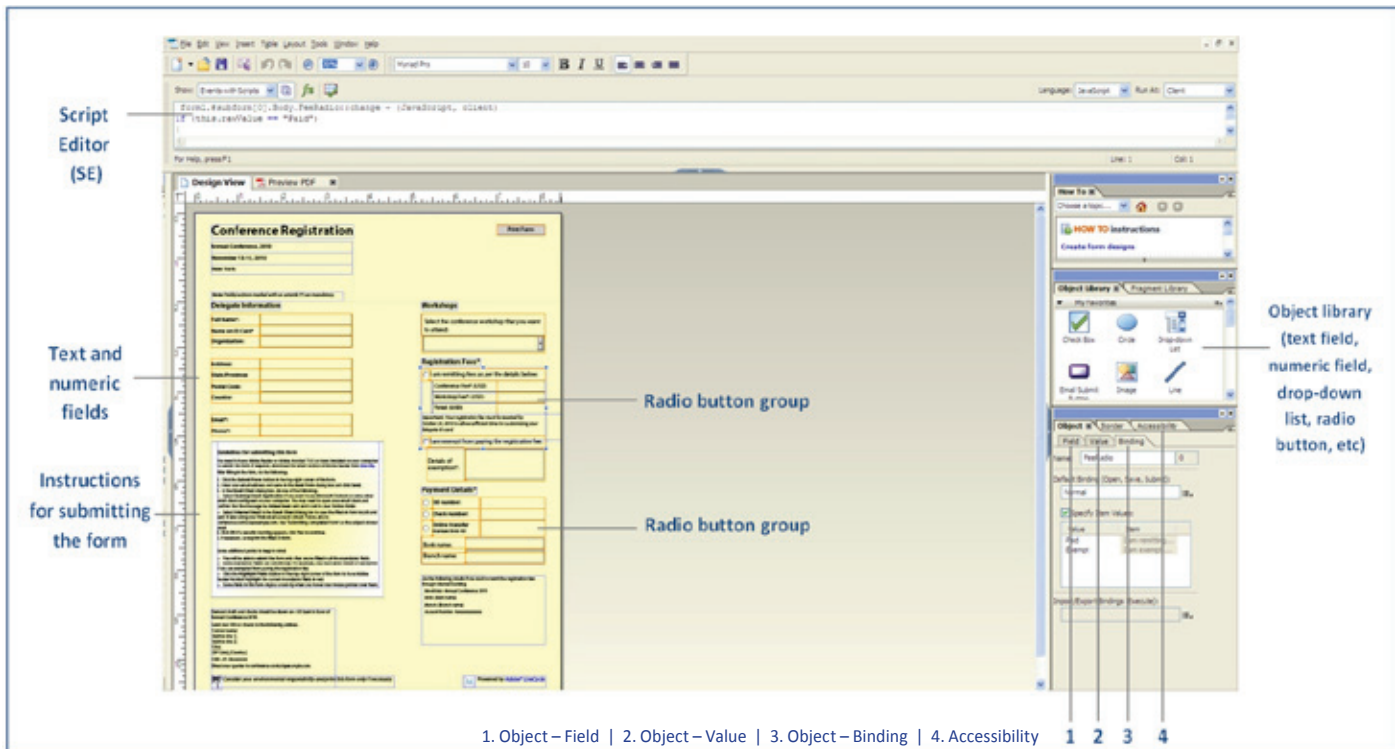
Figure 2. The completed sample form in LiveCycle Designer

Distributing the Form

After you've created the form, you need to distribute it to the intended recipients. The following steps represent a good distribution strategy for the sample form, considering that the conference has 200–300 delegates registering:

1. Save the file as a PDF form file to a dedicated folder. This folder should be retained until the registration drive for the conference is complete.
2. In LiveCycle Designer, with the form open, click *File > Distribute Form*. LiveCycle Designer launches Acrobat with the Distribute Form dialog displayed.
3. Choose *Manually Collect Responses In My Email Inbox* from the How Do You Want To Collect Responses drop-down menu. Click *Next*.
4. Choose *Save a Local Copy and Manually Send It Later* and click *Next*.
5. Click *Finish* on the Distribute Forms screen. You'll now have the following additional PDF files in the folder where you copied the PDF file:
   ➻ *[form name]_*distributed.pdf
   ➻ *[form name]_*responses.pdf

   These two files, together with the PDF form file, should be retained all through the registration drive. Responses that you receive will be added to the *[form name]_*responses.pdf file and will also be visible through the Adobe Tracker.
6. Upload the *[form name]_*distributed.pdf file to the conference website, so that it is available to users for download and submission.

When you distribute the form, Acrobat automatically adds your registered email ID to it, so that users can submit the filled-in forms to you by email.

If you intend to distribute the form to recipients within your organization's firewall, you can share the *[form name]_*distributed.pdf file on the intranet or place it on shared storage and then communicate the location of the file to the recipients. Alternatively, you can attach the *[form name]_*distributed.pdf file with an email message and send it to recipients for an end-to-end email-based workflow.

Managing Responses

Filled-in forms arrive as email attachments in the mailbox of the identified point of contact who distributed the form. If the recipient submitted the form through an email client, such as Microsoft Outlook, the subject line of the email with the response attached is *Submitting Completed Form*. However, the subject line of the email may differ if the recipient submits the form using a Web email account, such as a Gmail or Yahoo! account.

Perform the following steps once you receive a completed form:

1. Double-click the attachment from the email and wait for Adobe Acrobat to open it.
2. In the Add Completed Form to Responses File dialog box, ensure that the correct *[form_name]_*responses.pdf file is selected and click *OK*. Acrobat will add the response and open Adobe Tracker to display all responses received so far.

Figure 3. Adobe Tracker

Archiving Responses

Whenever required, you can use the Archive option (see Figure 3) in the Adobe Tracker to create a consolidated archive PDF (*[form name]_*archive.pdf) containing all received responses. You can also use the Export option in the Adobe Tracker to export the responses in one of the following formats:

‣ A CSV spreadsheet that can be edited using spreadsheet applications
‣ An XML file that can be manipulated further. See *(Advanced) Analysis and reporting possibilities.*

Recommended Practices

‣ After distributing the form, do not modify or fill information into the *[form name]_*distributed.pdf file until it is uploaded or saved in a shared location.
‣ Add the received responses to the *[form name]_* responses.pdf file as regularly as possible.
‣ After adding one or more completed forms to the *[form name]_*responses.pdf file, save the file before exiting Adobe Tracker.
‣ Backup the *[form name]_*responses.pdf file regularly to prevent any data loss.

(Advanced) Using Scripting for Conditional Fields

Thoughtful use of scripting goes a long way when you're creating PDF forms. While LiveCycle Designer offers extensive scripting capabilities for power users, even users new to programming can leverage simple JavaScript and FormCalc constructs to build intelligence into their forms. In particular, I find the ability to create conditional fields—fields that accept input or become mandatory fields based on the selection in a radio button group—very useful.

Consider the following logic for the FeeRadio radio button group in the sample form:

‣ If users indicate that they are exempted from paying the registration fee, they *must* enter the details of exemption. At the same time, Conference Fee, Workshop Fee, and all fields in the Payment Details section should no longer accept input.
‣ On the other hand, if users indicate that they are not exempted from paying the registration fee, the ExemptionDetails field should no longer accept inputs. Conference Fee, Workshop Fee, and all fields in the Payment Details section should be open to input. In this case, users must enter a valid value in the Conference Fee field and select one of the available modes of payment.
‣ Users should be allowed to change their selection. For example, if some user selected "Exempted" remembering that they had a privilege coupon, only to realize that the coupon expired, they should be allowed to select "Paid" instead. Any "details of exemption" entered in the moments of indecision should be cleared when the user selects "Paid."

Figure 4 shows this logic implemented using basic JavaScript constructs. I used this script for the FeeRadio radio button group for three events—Enter, Change, and Click. You can select events using the Show drop-down menu in the script editor (labeled SE in Figure 2).

Figure 4. Implementing conditional fields using basic scripting

As an exercise, study the sample form for more examples of field-level scripting.

(Advanced) Analysis and Reporting Possibilities

Once you export the received form data as XML in Adobe Tracker, it is possible to generate a wide variety of reports from the XML file using XSL Transformations (XSLT). A fuller discussion of such transformations is beyond the scope of this article.

Further reading

‣ LiveCycle Designer ES2 Help (*http://help.adobe.com/en_US/ livecycle/9.0/designerHelp/index.htm*)
‣ The Creating a Purchase Order form tutorial (*http://help .adobe.com/en_US/livecycle/9.0/lcdesigner_qs_poform.pdf*) ℹ

SAMARTHA VASHISHTHA *(samartha@adobe.com) works on the Community Help and Learning Resources team at Adobe Systems, India. He is also a bilingual poet, writing in English and Hindi, and an intermittent technology journalist. His blog about all things Adobe is at* http://blogs.adobe.com/samartha *or follow him on Twitter* @samarthav.

Why Join a Chapter?

BY BEN WOELK | *Senior Member*

I'VE STATED MANY TIMES that I believe the communities are the heart and soul of STC. For many members, communities are the face of STC and where they will find the most meaningful interaction. Geographic communities (chapters) are where members engage one another, learn from one another, and sharpen their skills. (Many chapters are also finding ways to serve a more geographically diverse membership by providing virtual meetings and webinars.)

We're in our annual membership renewal period. There's an additional fee to belong to a geographic community and some of you may wonder whether chapter membership is worthwhile. I asked the Rochester chapter council members what they found to be of the most value. The key theme for all of us was *opportunity.*

Here are some of the *opportunities* you may receive from joining and participating actively in a chapter:

1. *Networking face to face* with like-minded intelligent individuals who are committed to a wide range of technical communications activities.
2. *Receiving recognition* for your company, department, and yourself by entering local tech pubs competitions and receiving feedback from your peers.
3. *Volunteering* as a publications judge and helping others improve their craft.
4. *Helping an organization* reinvent itself to keep pace with a changing profession and society.
5. *Mentoring* others and helping them advance in the profession.
6. *Participating* in local and regional conferences and events.
7. *Developing* leadership skills by serving on council and committees.
8. *Building* self-confidence and credibility.
9. *Improving* yourself by learning new technical skills to apply to your job.
10. *Staying informed* about available employment opportunities and hiring entities in your geographic area.
11. *Belonging* to a respected group of dedicated diverse professionals.
12. *Forging friendships* with a great group of people who face similar challenges.

Choose membership in a chapter. They're led by dedicated people who are striving to provide services to their members. More importantly, participate actively by attending chapter functions and working as a volunteer. That's where you'll receive and provide the most value. ℹ️

BEN WOELK *is the Immediate Past President of the Rochester Chapter, a community that had an almost 80% membership renewal rate in 2011. He's currently serving as the STC Community Affairs Committee Outreach Lead, leading a team whose mission is to serve the STC communities by mentoring community leaders, sharing best practices, and serving as an advocate for and liaison between the communities and the STC Board.*

DON'T FORGET: Recruit New Members and Save On Your Dues

DON'T FORGET THAT you can recruit new members to STC and save money on your own dues—$10 off for each new member who lists you as a referral, up to $50 off!

Every time you recruit a new member, you strengthen STC. A vital and growing STC membership means greater recognition of technical communicators, improved educational and networking opportunities for members, and the advancement of the profession. Why not reach out and share the same valuable opportunities with your colleagues?

Simply tell your colleagues how you have benefited from your membership in STC and suggest that they visit *www.stc.org/membership* to learn more about membership and to join.

Chapters and SIGs can get in the game, too, with prizes available for referrals. This program runs through 15 January, so start the conversation now.

STC's Member Get a Member page (*www.stc.org/membership/mgam*) has recruiting tips, sample emails to send to colleagues, talking points, and more. Talk to your colleagues about STC—they'll thank you, and STC will thank you, too, with a lower bill for your own membership. ℹ️

Helder Almeida / Shutterstock.com

Why Join a SIG?

BY LORI MEYER | *Senior Member*

IF YOU ARE A MEMBER of an STC geographic community, you know the many ways it can enhance your STC membership. Many members have also come to know the value of another group of STC communities—Special Interest Groups (SIGs). SIGs are virtual communities that reflect the diversity of skills and interests in the technical communications profession. STC's more than 20 SIGs include members who share common experiences, goals, and challenges. Each SIG provides access to a body of knowledge through resources such as newsletters, webinars, discussion lists, websites, blogs, special programs, and social media outlets.

Joining a SIG provides many opportunities to support your professional development and enrich your STC membership. Examples include:

▸ Expanding your skill set in one or more special-interest areas, which provides value for your employer, increases your marketability, and contributes to the technical communication profession.

▸ Keeping abreast of changes in your special-interest area and their impact on the profession.

▸ Networking and building friendships with fellow STC members who share your technical knowledge, interests, and challenges.

▸ Volunteering, developing your leadership skills, and receiving recognition for your contributions.

▸ Sharing your expertise through demonstrations, presentations, workshops, newsletter articles, and mentoring.

SIGs welcome members of all skill levels. They provide an excellent opportunity both to teach and to learn. You can build new skills, expand the skills you have, and mentor newcomers.

SIG membership links you with like-minded professionals all over the world. The small membership fee can open the door to good things for you, your career, and your profession. During this renewal period, add a SIG to your STC membership. Find out more about SIGs by visiting *www.stc .org/about-stc/communities/special-interest- groups/category/sigs*. ℹ

LORI MEYER *is a member of eight STC Chapters and five Special Interest Groups (SIGs). She is currently serving as membership manager of the Rochester Chapter, secretary of the Technical Editing SIG, and communications manager of the Carolina Chapter. She also volunteers for the East Bay, Palm Beaches, and Northeast Ohio chapters, and is a member of the Community Affairs Committee outreach team.*

STC, Social Media, and You

STAY CONNECTED WITH STC wherever you go! STC's Notebook blog (*http://notebook.stc.org*) includes multiple posts during the week on STC events, communities, hot topics, and more. On Twitter, follow STC *@stc_org* and follow the *#stcorg* hashtag; get information about the Summit from *@STC_Summit* or *#stc12*. Are you on LinkedIn? Search for the Society for Technical Communication group, or visit *www.linkedin .com/groups?gid=2926*. STC has started putting more videos up on YouTube as well; find us at *www.youtube.com/Society 4TechComm*. And sign up for our RSS feeds, too—click the RSS icon on the STC home page, STC's Notebook, and both *Intercom* online (*http://intercom.stc .org*) and *Technical Communication* online (*http://techcomm.stc.org*). And of course, visit MySTC at *www.stc.org/mystc* and get involved in STC's own social network, just for technical communicators. It's all part of staying connected and getting more out of your STC membership. ℹ

STC Introduces New TC Professional Membership Level

NEW FOR THE 2012 membership year, STC has introduced the **New TC Professional** membership! This membership level costs $160 per year and is aimed at recent graduates new to the technical communication profession. It's a step between Student Membership and Classic Membership to help recent graduates continue their STC membership at an important time in their careers.

The New TC Professional level includes membership in one professional chapter and one Special Interest Group, plus everything all members receive: online access to *Intercom* and *Technical Communication*, free archived education seminars, access to the MySTC Network, education discounts, and so much more. All new members also receive the 2012 STC Salary Database free when it's published in July 2012.

To qualify for the New TC Professional membership rate, individuals must have graduated from a college or university within the past three years. If you have any questions, please email the STC membership department at *membership@stc.org*. ℹ

Conference Registration Now Open

REGISTRATION FOR THE 2012 Technical Communication Summit, taking place 20–23 May 2012 in Rosemont, IL, opened 1 December. Visit *http://summit.stc.org* to register.

The Really Early Bird rate has expired, but STC is offering an Early Bird rate of $925 for members through 30 March. That's a savings of $100 over the regular Advance rate, and $300 off the Onsite rate, with access to all the educations sessions and networking opportunities.

Register now and get access to:

‣ Over 80 sessions, organized by ten tracks
‣ More advanced sessions, identified as Institutes
‣ Free attendance for two receptions plus morning and afternoon refreshment breaks (Honors Banquet and closing lunch are available for an optional fee)
‣ SUMMIT@aClick (when available after the conference)
‣ An opening general session and reception in Expo Hall
‣ SIG networking events
‣ Networking with colleagues in the Expo Hall, before and after events, and around the hotel

The Summit website includes a schedule of events, the preliminary program, information on hotels and travel, a Summit-specific blog, and more. Further information and more details will be posted there when available, including the announcement of the keynote speaker, final program with dates and times, and specifics of special events at the conference. ℹ

TECHNICAL COMMUNICATION
SUMMIT '12
STC's 59th Annual Conference
20-23 May 2012 • Rosemont – Chicago

Must-Do List for Exploring Downtown Chicago

BY MARY WHALEN | *Senior Member*

THE 2012 STC SUMMIT will be held just outside of the city of Chicago at the Hyatt Regency O'Hare in Rosemont, Illinois. On your Summit trip, you may be able to fit in a downtown Chicago outing. And on your outing, here are some tourist spots you should have on your list of things to do.

One of Chicago's newest and most visited attractions is Millennium Park. The 24.5 acre park, opened in 2004, is located downtown, on Michigan Avenue near the Lake Michigan shoreline. At the park, you can't miss these famous sculptures: 1) Cloud Gate (or, The Bean, as Chicagoans know it), a legume-shaped smooth silver structure and 2) Crown Fountain, two 50-foot high structures made of glass brick where water flows into a plaza covered in black granite. Though you might spend an hour or two roaming and viewing the artwork and garden area, you also might catch a concert in the park or a show in the Harris Theater. For food, you easily can find a Chicago-style hot dog at one of the many food stands, and the Park Grill offers sit-down service and a variety of food options.

Of course, Chicago has some of the most well-known museums in the world. The Art Institute, the Museum of Science and Industry, and the Field Museum are among the three most popular. All three museums include ongoing collections on display as well as special exhibits that rotate throughout the year. The Adler Planetarium and the John G. Shedd Aquarium are family-friendly attractions that never fail to entertain and educate visitors of all ages.

The most popular Chicago tourist spot is Navy Pier. Navy Pier offers a great view of the cityscape and Lake Michigan. Other great views you can have are in the stained glass museum or on a walk through the gardens. If you're in a carnival kind of mood, take a ride on the giant Ferris wheel or play a round on the minigolf course. When you're ready for something to eat, you can choose from the many food court options

Millennium Park's Cloud Gate sculpture

Jeremy Reddington / Shutterstock.com

or opt for a stand-alone restaurant like The Billy Goat Tavern (subject of the John Belushi *Saturday Night Live* "Cheezburger, Cheezburger" skit from the seventies), Harry Caray's, or the upscale Riva Restaurant. Either way, you can enjoy your meal while overlooking the city and lake. When you're done, pick up Chicago souvenirs in the many shops.

Off of Navy Pier, you can catch a lake or riverboat tour. Either option is good if you want to relax and enjoy the view. But if you want a tour of the art, design, history, and landscape of the city, an architectural boat tour is the best bet. You will get a narrated trip through the river and canals along downtown streets. Native Chicagoans enjoy and recommend this tour, as it offers insights from experts and delves into the fascinating and little-known details about Chicago's famous skyline.

Two of Chicago's most popular beaches are only a short walk from Navy Pier. At Oak Street Beach, you can enjoy a nice view of the city or catch some rays in the sand. At North Avenue Beach, you can watch the sand volleyball players or enjoy a bite to eat or a drink at the boathouse, overlooking the water. For a sky-high view of the city, head back to North Michigan Avenue and the Signature Lounge on the 96th floor of the John Hancock Center. There you'll be able to enjoy cocktails and view the city and Lake Michigan shoreline from what is arguably the most stunning perspective in town.

The restaurant offerings in Chicago alone might be worth a trip downtown from Rosemont. For seafood, Shaw's Crab House is a favorite. Or if you'd like to get a nice steak while you're in town, you can go to Ruth Chris's Steak House, Morton's, or Gibson's. For a taste of Chicago personality with your food, visit Ed Debevic's diner. And if you want to be sure to get your Chicago pizza fix, you can go to Uno's, Lou Malnati's, Gino's East, or Giordano's.

For most of these downtown destinations, you can take a train from the conference area, then walk or take a short bus or cab ride. And for Navy Pier, there might be trolley or water taxi service available from the train station. If you plan to drive, check ahead at each location for local parking options (though Navy Pier, Millennium Park, the Field Museum, and Museum of Science and Industry do have paid parking lots onsite).

Before you leave the Hyatt Regency O'Hare, you might want a little more information. Chicago Chapter Host Committee members will be on hand at the Summit Hospitality Table and may be able to advise you on the schedules for the downtown trains and provide further information on restaurants and attractions, as well as what plays or attractions are at Chicago theaters. ℹ

Details on the 2012 Summit Official Hotel

THE 2012 SUMMIT takes place 20–23 May 2012 in Rosemont, Illinois, just minutes from downtown Chicago. This year, all events take place in one location—at the Hyatt Regency O'Hare, a short drive from O'Hare International Airport.

STC has negotiated a special conference room rate for single or double accommodations at the Hyatt. Rates are $199 per day for a single and $209 per day for a double; you must register through the STC Summit website, *http://summit.stc.org*, to get that rate.

According to the hotel's website, the Hyatt Regency O'Hare is "an iconic O'Hare airport hotel with cutting-edge design and dramatically transformed public space and guestrooms." A $64-million-dollar upgrade included adding a conference center to its meeting space (which the hotel also renovated), allowing STC to hold all events at the hotel.

Dining and entertainment options at the hotel include the Red Bar and the "hip, contemporary" O'H American Grill, serving breakfast, lunch, and dinner.

The Hyatt runs a complimentary shuttle service between the hotel and O'Hare Airport. Look for the signs for the Hyatt Regency at the Bus/Shuttle Center; it departs from door 1.

Staying at the official conference hotel allows attendees to take advantage of the after-hours informal networking that often takes place in bars, restaurants, and lobby of the hotel. And by staying at the Hyatt, you also help STC fill its contractual room block and keep rates down for future conferences.

See you in Rosemont at the Hyatt Regency O'Hare! ℹ

ROSEMONT, ILLINOIS

Be Where It All Comes Together

The Early Bird rate of $925 is good through 30 March; register today!

2012 TECHNICAL COMMUNICATION SUMMIT

20–23 May 2012

The Society for Technical Communication is where it all comes together, and nowhere is that more evident than at the Technical Communication Summit! Technical communicators from around the world will converge on Rosemont, Illinois, just outside of Chicago, from 20–23 May 2012 for the 59th annual Summit. Choose from over 80 sessions in 10 different tracks at the conference, with some of today's top technical communicators coming together to share their knowledge.

And the sessions are just the beginning of your Summit experience! In-person networking, the Expo Hall, preconference education, the honors banquet, SIG meetings, and so much more are also available to help you advance your career.

Visit *http://summit.stc.org* for complete details on how you can be where it all comes together.

STC

TECHNICAL COMMUNICATION
SUMMIT '12
STC's 59th Annual Conference
20-23 May 2012 • Rosemont – Chicago

Making the Time for Social Media

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BY RICH MAGGIANI | *Fellow*

WHENEVER I PRESENT on social media, I am invariably asked, "Where do I find the time to regularly participate?" It's a good question. To paraphrase Steven Covey, "I make the time."

Still, I found keeping up with social media to be difficult at first. Over time, I've developed a process

that works for me (most days, at least). Before I get into details, let's back up a bit to consider the larger perspective.

First, let's talk rationale. Why engage at all? Two big reasons. One: social media is one of the primary uses of the Internet; it has exploded over the past few years.

Social media has transformed the way we communicate. This column discusses the intricacies and ramifications that social media has on our everyday personal and professional lives. Suggestions for topics are welcome. Email me at *rich.maggiani@ solari.net.*

And two: your engagement can enrich your professional career.

Second, let's talk strategy and answer a most relevant question in communication: Where are you going? Define the overriding goal for your social media presence, then make sure that everything conforms to this goal. For example, because I am an independent communication consultant, my goal is to be perceived as an enlightened, knowledgeable expert. I know this is a lofty goal, but it certainly gives me something to continually pursue. In that respect, George Bernard Shaw has motivated me when he wrote, "I like a state of continual becoming, with a goal in front and not behind."

Now that the foundation is set, let's talk process. I spend at most 20 minutes each morning on social media. It's time that I can more easily fit into my schedule if I do it first.

When I open my browser, I double-click a folder I created that bookmarks my pages on LinkedIn, Twitter, Facebook, and my Toward

Humanity blog. This causes each bookmark to open in its own tab. You can set up your folder anyway you want (for instance, Europeans might want their Xing page to open). I could have set my browser to open these pages on start up, but I only want to open them once, and creating the folder enables me to control when they open. Once open, I spend some time on each one.

There's so much to do on these social media sites; here's a list of ways to engage on the three that I use most often: LinkedIn, Twitter, and Facebook. Choosing different ones every day allows you to diversify and actually is more fun.

LinkedIn

You can appreciably enhance your experience on LinkedIn by adding

applications. Currently, I use Reading List, Events, Polls, WordPress, SlideShare, and Tweets. I will refer to these in the list below. Consider these as well as all the other LinkedIn applications. (While I don't subscribe to it yet, I'm intrigued by Google Presentation.)

▶ Review your profile summary and consider editing it to ensure its accuracy.

▶ Write an update and share it on Twitter (the first 140 characters, at least).

▶ Review the People You May Know section and invite five to connect. Or search for people to invite as connections.

▶ Scroll through your All Updates feed and find something that inspires you. Then do something: Like it, leave a comment, send a message, share it; click a link in the entry and investigate it. If the entry was also tweeted: retweet it, favorite it, or reply to it. Or click the hashtag (if there is one) and check out those tweets. Doing just this can easily consume your 20 minute allocation.

- Write a recommendation for someone.
- Ask for a recommendation for one of the entries under Experience and Education in your profile. Consider working toward at least one recommendation for each entry.
- Join a group (or leave a group you are no longer interested in).
- Click a link under your LinkedIn Today headlines; read and comment on the post. Today's interesting headline was: "What To Say on LinkedIn When You've Been Laid Off."
- Review the people who have viewed your profile recently. Consider connecting with them.
- Follow a company or engage with one of the companies that you already follow.
- Add a book to your reading list; be sure to write a comment to accompany the book. Watch someone's reading list in your network. Check out a connection's reading list. Of course, if you have written a book, add it!
- Browse the events of your connections, comment on one, RSVP to one (as Attending or Interested). Today, in my profile, there is a free Webinar: "Better PDFs with FrameMaker-to-Acrobat TimeSavers." I'm interested!

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- Add an event that you are planning to attend or present at in the future.
- Check out a presentation on SlideShare. Comment on it, recommend it, favorite it.
- Answer a question; ask a question.
- Start a discussion in one of your groups.
- Read and comment on a group discussion. (You can tell a lot about someone by what they write in their comments, so consider your words and tone.) Like the discussion. Follow the author if you find them particularly provocative. With enough activity in a group, you can become one of the group's weekly top influencers.
- Peruse the promotions in a group; see if there are any that interest you. (Not all groups have a Promotions tab.) Again, comment on it, like it, follow the author. Or post your own promotions.

Twitter

Get the most out of your Twitter experience by carefully choosing the people you follow—unless, of course, you want an audience for your tweets, then you probably want to get as many followers as you can. Just make sure that you balance the number of people you follow with those that follow you.

And, consider this division of your tweets: one-third about your industry; one-third about tech comm and your company; one-third about you.

- Tweet something every day. You can get ideas by reading what others tweet. I get tweet fodder from various email lists I subscribe to plus STC's *News & Notes.*
- Tweet about what you are reading (for example, an *Intercom* article or column), what you have learned, what you are doing so long as it is important to your followers (such as a conference you are attending, or a webinar or presentation you attended).

- Include an appropriate hashtag on your tweets if you want: #*techcomm* and #*stcorg* are good ones to use. Use #*stc12* for tweets concerning the 2012 Summit in Chicago.
- Find and follow ten people whose tweets would fit your goals.
- Tweet an inspiring quote.
- Scan your Twitter Timeline and retweet something interesting.
- Reply to a tweet or send a direct message to its author.
- Create a list and add people to it. This makes it easier to follow the tweets from a certain group of people that you decide.
- Follow someone else's list for a while and read their tweets.

Facebook

While I use LinkedIn and Twitter almost exclusively for business and professional endeavors, I use Facebook mainly for personal issues. So why include Facebook as part of my professional social media presence? It gives me an avenue for pursuing a personal part of my life. And besides, even with Facebook's privacy settings, in reality, everything you post can be viewed some way or another. I "friend" a select group of people for my Facebook account, and certainly enjoy their repartee. Besides, Facebook enables me to have a bit of fun.

- Update your status. Think about doing it every day.
- Add a couple of new friends.
- Scroll through your News Feed and share items of interest. (I particularly enjoy this.)
- Add a new photo or two.
- Post on a friend's page.
- Ask a question.
- Post an event.

Of course, there is a lot more you can do, but this list ought to keep you busy. Choose a few to do everyday. And reap the benefits of actively engaging in social media. ℹ

Mark Your Calendar

Organization events across the globe

2

4

6

1

5

3

F.Y.I. lists information about nonprofit ventures only. Please send information to *intercom@stc.org.*

3 **21–25 March**
The **American Society for Information Science and Technology (ASIS&T)** will hold the IA Summit at the Hyatt Regency in New Orleans, LA. For more information, contact:
ASIS&T
asis@asis.org
http://2012.iasummit.org/

1 **23–26 Jan**
The Annual **Reliability and Maintainability Symposium (RAMS)**, on "Securing Tomorrow's Future With Reliability and Maintain-ability," will be held at the Nugget Hotel and Resort in Reno, NV. For more information, contact:
RAMS
+1 (603) 863-2832
www.rams.org

2 **16–20 Feb**
The 2012 **American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS)** Annual Meeting, with a theme of "Flattening the World: Building a Global Knowledge Society," takes place in Vancouver, BC, Canada. For more information, please contact:
AAAS
+1 (202) 326-6450
meetings@aaas.org
www.aaas.org/meetings

4 **18–23 April**
The **International Society for Performance Improvement (ISPI)** will hold its Performance Improvement Conference at the Sheraton Centre in Toronto, Ontario, Canada. For more information, contact:
ISPI
+1 (301) 587-8570
conference@ispi.org
www.ispi.org/AC2012

5 **19–21 April**
The **American Society for Indexing (ASI)** will be holding its annual conference at the Bahia Resort in San Diego, CA. For more information, contact:
ASI
conference@asindexing.org
www.asindexing.org/

6 **20–23 May**
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Creating a Career in Knowledge Management

BY CAROLANN KOWALSKI

(HINT: You're probably already doing most of it….)
I WAS CALLED for jury duty recently, and as the 40-plus juror participants stated their name, occupation, and city of residence, the judge only stopped and questioned one person: me. He wanted to know what a knowledge manager does. I'm sure many of you have experienced the same look of confusion when answering, "technical writer," or some other technical communication title. Trust me, it's worse when you're a knowledge manager.

Occasionally I give a snarky response like, "I manage the knowledge." But truthfully, it took a little while to wrap my head around what a knowledge manager does. Knowledge management comprises practices and strategies for identifying, organizing, and distributing information within an organization. As director of knowledge management for Edmunds.com Inc. (which I will refer to as Edmunds), my responsibilities have spanned such a potpourri of topics that most folks think me and my team are involved in everything. And the assumption isn't too far off.

Before knowledge management, I worked for seven years as a technical writer and information designer, creating a range of documentation from hardware and software operating manuals to online policies and procedures. Four years ago I took a chance and applied for the first knowledge management position offered at Edmunds, which publishes websites that help automotive consumers, enthusiasts, and insiders. A private, family-owned company with approximately 500 employees, Edmunds.com launched in 1995 as the first automotive information website, and it needed help to organize the tremendous amount of information that flowed through the company.

I was initially brought on board to manage the enterprise adoption of new tools and processes. I had no previous experience with Agile (a project management methodology that emphasizes iterative development), but am now a Certified ScrumMaster and have acted as project manager for multiple teams at Edmunds. I also had the opportunity to product manage the creation of several internal products, such as the training module we currently use to manage sign-up for internal instructor-led trainings.

After the team that was managing our wiki-based intranet dissolved, I volunteered to take over. In addition to the intranet, I now manage several of our corporate communication systems, including our micro-blogging application and our idea management tool. By "manage," I mean that I ensure new employees know that these resources exist and how to access them, oversee feature implementation, help departments/teams maximize the tools' capabilities, and of course, wrangle incidents.

In late 2010 Edmunds made a bold move to turn our product creation process on its head by adopting user-centered design. Instead of asking our project teams to execute on product ideas delivered by our executive team, the responsibility of defining product roadmaps now lies with the teams themselves. All team members received user-centered design training, and now routinely complete tasks like interviewing real users regarding their pain points in the car research and purchase process. Teams speak in terms of personas, fictional people created to represent bands of research/buying behaviors and attitudes. Where common product conversations might have begun, "I wouldn't use this feature," they now sound more like, "Would Roberto use this feature?" I played a key role in the adoption of user-centered design and have led two teams through the process.

Now the most common response I hear when I explain what a knowledge manager does is, "My company needs one of those." And I think that sentiment will become more and more common. As technical communicators, we naturally possess many of the qualities that make a good knowledge manager: interpreting business requirements from stake-holders, organizing information in a logical manner, and communicating it to those who need it. All these skills come into play in knowledge management. So whether you are looking for a job or simply a change of pace, try looking in the knowledge management world. Opportunities abound and as a technical communicator you're in a good position to take advantage. ℹ️

To find out more about Edmunds and how we work, read our Harvard Business Review-McKinsey M-Prize for Management Innovation entries that I helped to write:

▸ *How a Shopping Cart Transformed the Way We Work: "User Centric & Employee Driven"* www.managementexchange.com/story/how-shopping-cart

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