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The CPTC assessment encompasses broad areas of practice that represent the major activities performed by technical communicators. The certified practitioner demonstrates proficiency in the following areas:

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Visit [www.stc.org/certification](http://www.stc.org/certification) for more information and to submit your application.
A Note from the Editors

HAPPY NEW YEAR! To kick off 2013 and Intercom’s 60th anniversary, we’re pleased to present a special issue on the global job market, guest edited by Kit Brown-Hoekstra. With her expertise in globalization, Kit has been instrumental in shaping the content for this issue. Kit is an STC Associate Fellow and principal for Comgenesis, LLC, which provides consulting on internationalization and localization issues and content strategy, as well as training and other technical communication services. With this issue, we are also introducing a new ethics column by Derek G. Ross and a President’s Midterm Report by STC President Alan Houser. My deepest appreciation for all who contribute to Intercom.

—LIZ POHLAND
liz.pohland@stc.org

TECHNICAL COMMUNICATION TOUCHES every product, process, and service on this planet and, based on archeological evidence of stone tablets that contain instructions, is one of the oldest professions. However, the status and maturity of the profession varies widely by country, industry, and availability of academic and other training programs. In addition, more and more people are working outside their home countries, which adds other interesting challenges.

About six months ago, several members of the Europe SIG had a discussion about the profession and job prospects in different areas, as well as how cultural expectations, industry, and other factors influence the way we search for jobs, conduct interviews, and expect from a résumé. This issue of Intercom is one result of those discussions.

With this issue, we explore some of these expectations and techniques. Maxwell Hoffmann explores some general trends with the profession that affect the way we do our jobs and the skills that managers are starting to seek in an applicant, while Victoria Koster-Lenhardt provides the perspective of an ex-pat in Europe. Zhijun Gao, Jingsong Yu, and Menno de Jong explore the increasing importance of technical communication in China. Leah Guren debunks a few myths about Israeli culture and talks about the great respect that technical communicators in Israel have. Fabiano Cid and Cecilia Iros talk about Latin America's emerging markets. Vinish Garg provides a manager’s perspective of hiring technical communicators in India, while Catherine Janzen explores the process of coming home after spending a decade as an expat. In addition to the paper version of the magazine, several additional articles are posted on the Intercom website, http://intercom.stc.org, including articles by Jack Molisani, Sumedh Nene, and Uday Chava.

After reading these articles, we hope that you will gain a greater insight into the lives of your colleagues around the world and into the ways that culture influences common business practices.

—KATHERINE (KIT) BROWN-HOEKSTRA
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intercom

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MEET THE STAFF
“Less is More”:
MUCH HAS BEEN WRITTEN in this past year about our changing roles and responsibilities, and the need for rebranding. A few years ago, most of us called ourselves “technical writers” and prided ourselves on skill sets with certain proprietary authoring solutions. There have even been several articles or references within *Intercom* regarding new job titles or rebranding that we should embrace.

Two events in 2012 changed the job market for 2013, as well as our individual and collective value in the marketplace:

1. The wide proliferation of tablets and eReaders, along with the general public's willingness to accept the few limitations that happen when one moves away from paper
2. The availability of tools that will publish to multiscreen HTML, enabling single-source publishing to go to a variety of disparate devices in one action

Sometime in 2010 and 2011, technical communication consumers became accustomed to on-demand information in video format, even though it was seldom framed within the “technical documents” that they were reading: video information on one channel, technical documentation in another.

Now, consumers expect more than frequently updated websites. They demand and expect at least a Quick Start Guide or an executive summary version of technical instructions updated daily on their tablets or smartphones. At first blush, this seems like one more technical communication nightmare—yet another form of deliverable to add to the matrix of different versions, languages, etc., that we are expected to deliver. This is actually a blessing in disguise; over time it will make our jobs more creative and exciting. These trends will also dramatically increase our value within the job market.

**Our jobs have never been more creative or more dynamic**

On the surface, it would appear that each of us is expected to be a writer, storyboard editor, content curator, videographer, animator, and heaven knows what else. Because we now have tools or publishing environments capable of handling all of these aspects of communications, some portions of conventional news media have assumed that each of us must wear every hat and master every skill. Dream on.

We’ve all either worked with or tried to be a jack-of-all-trades. It has never worked. At best, it leads to mediocrity, and if one is prolific, it leads to a temporary, false sense of productivity.

Yes, we do all have to become familiar with, and even somewhat competent at, each of the communication channels described above. Yet, in my long career, I’ve never met one person who was heavily talented in every one of those areas. So, what is the solution?

*Increased collaboration and flexibility.*

Even if you are not destined to become the team member who will create enticing and effective videos or screen simulations, as a writer or content creator you do need to be able to outline what should be “filmed” to make your technical communication deliverable more effective. Whether it is a native talent or not, we all need to learn how to think visually and envision instructions in forms of images, not just words.

This transition to new communication media will not be an overnight process, but we have a lot going in our favor. All of us have had to communicate without words at one time or another. Our ancient ancestors had some form of rich communications without a written language tens of thousands of years ago. Essentially, we have that ability and power to communicate through images in our DNA. It only needs to be awakened.

*“They had faces then”*

In the seminal movie *Sunset Boulevard*, about someone who didn’t move on with the times in Hollywood, faded movie queen Norma Desmond brags “We didn’t need dialogue. We had faces!” Her dream world of a return to silent communication may be slowly approaching us.

For many reasons, we will continue to see images (static and moving) replace a sizeable portion of the textual content that we create today. Future generations might look back on our current technical documentation and react the way we do when we attempt to wade through thick Victorian prose. I’m not referring to Dickens—try reading one of the “penny dreadfuls” or romantic “purple prose” fiction from the 1880s.

Movies, radio, and television truncated the attention span of mid-20th-century consumers. More recently, we
have undergone forces from social media—a Niagara Falls of video and constant updates that has further diminished both our attention span and patience. Communication that used to require hours to consume now only allow for minutes or seconds.

For example, try using LinkedIn’s fairly zippy app on an iPad or a Galaxy for two weeks. Then, try to go back to using the multi-step UI on the Web. It’s not easy. Our readers and consumers are undergoing a similar transformation. Icons and images swiftly become familiar friends, whereas extensive scrolling through more text-oriented content soon begins to wear thin.

**The new, international English**

To effectively serve a global audience, if source content is created in English, the fewer words the better. Gerunds and dozens of other constructs specific to English simply don’t translate at all into many languages. About the only path to success is one of many forms of simplified English widely documented on the Internet. And, whenever possible, the best solution might be no words at all. We need to move away from 15 successive screen captures to video screen simulations and moving, 3D-exploded parts diagrams that the user can manipulate.

**Good writing will always be needed**

Writing will never completely go away. We have the opportunity to become more effective (and more highly compensated) authors by proving that “less is more.” Much of what we document will, in some sense, become simpler; software will be forced to appear and behave more app-like. This will take a few years. But, in the near future, almost everyone will either have a tablet that does everything, or a tablet and a laptop that have virtually identical UIs and apps.

Ironically, if you are a gifted writer who produces excellent (though lengthy) narrative prose, you have an ideal starting point to become a sought-after, 21st-century communicator. All you have to do is hone your skills in selectivity—editing and paring down content. In addition, you can master the skill of converting “word pictures” into actual images.

Many of us have struggled for years trying to find the right combination of sentences to create a visual sense of what should be taking place on a software screen or with a technical instrument. Now, we finally have affordable, accessible tools to capture motion or video—essentially, to make mini-movies that condense 2.5 pages of text to about 15 seconds. We can’t change our ways overnight, but we can change them. We all have a disparate combination of skills that will help us accomplish the goal to achieve more visual communications. We just aren’t in the habit of using all of the required skills at the same time.

**What employers are looking for now**

Ironically, many hiring managers don’t really know exactly what they want. They too are befuddled by the dynamics of all the change I have described above. But the number-one complaint I’ve heard from technical publications managers is, “Much of my staff is about to retire, and I’m having trouble finding anyone who can write correct grammar and simple, concise, accurate text.” Even though images are important, even though some of us live and breathe on some form of social networking in our off hours, we still have to communicate with accurate text.

One extreme example comes to mind. I have a good friend who was called in to “heal” a previously constructed XML authoring solution that had no control over page breaks. One ill-fated page break sent a critical sentence to the next page. The documentation involved the maintenance of nuclear power plants. Someone on the staff didn’t turn the page and thought that he/she had completed the process. A leak occurred that led to a $2,000,000 fine.

**An ideal portfolio for today’s job interviews**

In the past, many of us had links to 15-page blogs, 200-page websites, or other extensive loads of content to showcase our writing skills. Switch gears and try the following: take a potential employer’s windy tract of Web or tech docs and republish it using embedded video and reduced English to cut the content in half. Use a vocabulary of 2,400 words. Keep sentence length to around a maximum of 20 words. Avoid all English constructs that your research reveals to be bad for language translation and localization.

You can actually create your own return-on-investment calculator to prove how many hours/weeks and dollars you will save in terms of timely product release and drastically reduced translation costs. And, oh yes, include the financial effects of “litigation-free” instructions that make the content “bullet proof.” If your job interview sales pitch focuses on these issues, you won’t be between projects for very long.

I love writing more than any other talent I knowingly possess. Yet, I know that if I stick to my keyboard and continue to communicate primarily through long, narrative, descriptive text, I’ll eventually end up like Norma Desmond, waving at a parade that passed by long ago.

MAXWELL HOFFMANN is Adobe’s product evangelist for the Technical Communication Suite and a former product manager for FrameMaker at Frame Technology. He spent nearly 15 years in the translation industry, where he managed or published over one million pages of multilingual content in thousands of projects. He has managed projects in DITA and XML, as well as authoring tools such as Word, InDesign, QuarkXPress, and structured FrameMaker. Hoffmann is based in a virtual Adobe office near Portland, OR, and has presented face-to-face, hands-on training to over 1,200 people in scalable authoring solutions.
THIRTEEN YEARS AGO, I wrote “10 Myths about Working in Europe” in Intercom. Though many of the tips still apply, there have been changes to the local laws and recruiting practices that have made it easier in some ways, and more difficult in others, for Americans to find employment abroad. Because of the job situation in the United States, more Americans are taking a global approach to finding work. Europe was once very appealing; however, it is no longer the most desired destination. It is going through its own cycle of the global financial crisis and the average jobless rate for the EU countries keeps climbing. The prognosis for 2013 isn’t positive. In comparison, there are jobs in the BRIC (Brazil, Russia, India, and China) countries for offshore job seekers. Regardless, if you have your sights set on working outside of the United States in the next couple of years, prepare yourself by knowing what to expect.
**The Good News**

**Improved Expat Support**

These days, companies are not the only ones wanting to attract the best people for their workforce. Cities and countries want the same thing. As a result, more city governments are working to provide better services for expats beyond what existed even five years ago. In some cases, these services are available for free and include helping people relocate, find work, start a business, make friends, and become volunteers.

As companies cut back on their human resources (HR) services, they are outsourcing the expat support to trained professionals, whether they’re small businesses or global companies, who specialize in this business niche. Another recent trend is that some companies now include a small budget in the expat package to pay for services to help the “trailing spouse” find work. First-time expats sometimes experience difficulty in settling into a new foreign assignment because their spouse is (unhappily) unemployed and dealing with the various financial and emotional impacts of the change. Sometimes, trailing spouses are not allowed to work because of the stipulations of the expat package. Other times, it is just very difficult to get a work permit. But if a trailing spouse wants to work (as is the growing trend), it’s helpful to have access to outplacement services that will make the job hunt in a foreign country and culture much easier.

**More Access to Training**

Although there are fewer STC chapters now outside of North America, there’s more training available for technical communicators overall. Other technical communication training organizations (based in the United States and abroad) have filled the training gap left by the foreign STC chapters that have folded. That’s good news for two reasons. First, the technical communication industry is flourishing abroad and there are good jobs to be found. Second, more technical writing jobs are going to local people. Even if English isn’t their native language, their English is usually good enough. These training courses and conferences are having a positive impact on the technical communication being written in English by non-native English speakers. That’s good for all technical communicators (and translators) everywhere.

**The Bad News**

**More Local Competition**

Because English language skills of the local workforce are acceptable, being a native English speaker is no longer enough to land a job in most places (unless you’re teaching English as a second language) or to justify a work permit. In addition, many local job candidates have more advanced, technical degrees than their American counterparts, and they’re willing to work for salaries that might be perceived as too low for many Americans. Nevertheless, English is an important “skill.” If you’re a native speaker who has a lot of specialized business experience, you could still have an advantage over a local candidate. For most of the world, the United States is still known for innovation. That means that people coming from the United States are often perceived as having more knowledge and exposure to the newest ideas, technologies, and business concepts. Couple this with your language skills, and it could move you to the top of the list.

**Financial Restrictions**

Because of the global financial crisis, taxes, banking, and citizenship have become hot topics. If you have a specific country that you’re targeting in your job search, talk to an accountant who’s knowledgeable in the tax laws of the United States and that country’s tax laws toward Americans. Some countries are friendlier than others when it comes to granting Americans bank accounts, providing investment opportunities, and taxing your worldwide income. How you’re taxed in the foreign country not only depends on your citizenship but also on where you legally reside.

**Company Budget Reductions**

Fewer global companies are sending lower-level, non-management staff abroad on expat packages. Most of the exciting technical writing jobs are available closer to headquarters. If you’re working for an American company, those jobs are more likely to be in the States.

**Choosing to Move Abroad**

If this news hasn’t changed your mind and your heart is still set on working abroad, start learning the local language of the country you’re targeting and have your fluency level certified. It will make you a more attractive candidate and ease your transition. Also, seek job assignments while you’re in the United States that give you exposure to giving and receiving training via the Web, using Skype or in-house VoIP systems, participating in video conferences, and working on teams with colleagues who live in different countries, cultures and time zones. You will broaden your skill set and be better prepared for an international assignment.

Most people I know who move abroad today move for the same reasons I did 25 years ago: love, adventure, or both. If one of these reasons is your motivation, you’ll find that navigating the challenges of changing countries will be a second priority to all the excitement and success you’ll experience working and living life abroad.

VICI KOSTER-LENHARDT (vkosterlenhardt@gmail.com) moved to Europe in 1987 and has first-hand knowledge at being an expat. Based in Vienna, Austria, Vici worked for The Coca-Cola Company for 21 years in various communications management roles where she recruited technical writers from the United States and Europe. She was the founding president for the TransAlpine STC Chapter, which provided training and networking events for STC members living and working in Austria, Germany, Italy, Switzerland, and Slovenia.
Translation contributed strongly to China's early development. User documentation and interfaces of foreign products had to be translated and adapted for Chinese users. The importance of translation is reflected in the 159 Master's degree programs in translation and interpreting that emerged in Chinese universities. Technical communication, in contrast, is still in its infancy as an academic discipline in China, despite initiatives starting in the late 1990s and early 2000s (Tegtmeier et al., 1999; Barnum et al., 2001). However, it is generally acknowledged that the economic developments in the
country require highly trained technical communicators, and that the prospects of technical communicators in China are very good.

In this article, we provide an update of the position of technical communication in China. Our main input was a Technical Communication and Technical Translation Salon that we held on 20 October 2012 at Peking University. The Salon was organized by the Department of Language Information Engineering of Peking University and the Localization Service Committee of the Translators' Association of China. It was attended by over 200 participants, consisting of professionals, employers, academics, and students. The three-hour program started with short keynote presentations, but most time was reserved for free discussion. We complemented our insights from the Salon with literature, database information, and focused interviews with some of the Salon participants.

Growing Demand for Technical Communicators

The attendance at the Salon can be seen as an indication of the growing interest for technical communication in China. Companies are looking for highly qualified employees, students appreciate the good job prospects, and universities are considering starting technical communication programs or including technical communication courses in existing curricula.

To further examine the demand for technical communicators, we conducted an analysis of job postings and a salary review. For job postings, we used the Chinese search term “documentation engineer” instead of the less familiar “technical writer” or “technical communicator,” and limited our search to the most popular Chinese recruitment website, 51job.com. On 16 December, we found a total of 714 job postings on the site with “documentation engineer” in the job title or as a prominent part of the job description. Technical communication jobs are offered in various industries, such as telecommunications, hardware, software, and health care. For comparison, there were 672 job positions for news editors in the same period on the same website. News editor is a well-recognized job in China; every year, broadcasting companies recruit hundreds of news editors to work for them.

For the salary review, we used a well-known salary website, Fenzhi.com. Many employees report their salary rates on this site. Although the salaries cannot be verified, the data can be used to establish rough indications of salaries on the site.

A total of 102 technical communicators entered their salaries in this site. On average, technical communicators earn 5,495 renminbi (RMB) (around $880 USD) per month. The salaries range between 1,000 RMB ($160 USD) and 25,000 RMB ($4,010 USD) per month. For comparison, the average salary of 461 translators on the website is 4,234 RMB (around $680 USD). While the number of technical communicators is smaller than the number of translators, salaries are higher for technical communicators.

Technical Translation and Technical Communication

In the academic literature, the fields of technical communication and technical translation are not strongly connected. In the Chinese situation, however, the common ground between the two disciplines logically reflects the country’s development. The translation of existing user documentation is gradually replaced with the creation of new documents. A similar connection between translation and technical communication can be found in France, where technical communication as a discipline has only recently emerged (Minacori and Veisblat, 2010).

Traditionally, technical communication focuses more strongly on theories of effectively instructing users and on formal and informal research techniques to safeguard the usability of documentation. In technical translation, the main concern is with the relationship between the source document and the target document. The goals of both disciplines, however, are exactly the same: producing usable instructions for the users of technology (Lentz and Hulst, 2000).

Whether technical translation and technical communication overlap depends on the interpretation of the task of translating. For nontechnical translation processes, Yan Fu’s three criteria for successful translations are dominant in the Chinese academe: faithfulness, expressiveness, and elegance (Wang, 2011). Faithfulness means that the translation must be as close as possible to the source document, which is especially relevant in the translation of official documents or literary works. Expressiveness and elegance both refer to the mastery of the target language.

For technical documentation, usability should be added as a fourth criterion. A translated document must optimally support the intended users to effectively and efficiently use the software or device. The growing body of literature on cross-cultural communication shows that literal translations of source documents are not always the optimal solution. Instead, a broader “localization” approach is preferred (Barnum and Li, 2006).

We would argue that the tasks of a technical communicator and a technical translator are very similar. In fact, both have to “translate” the logic of software or devices to the perspective and use context of the users. The main difference involves the basic information that both groups have at their disposal. For technical communicators, engineers and the intended users will be the main sources of information, in addition to their own practical wisdom, experiences, and analyses. For technical translators, the source text can replace all or some of these resources.

Technical Communication and Translation Processes

One of the topics discussed in the Salon involved the language policy in design processes of user documentation. Normally, the technical documents
of Chinese companies are first written in Chinese and then translated into English. Translations into other languages are then based on the English document. This sequence causes unnecessary delay in the release of new products. More recently, many companies are taking a different approach: they write their documentation in English first and translate the English document into other languages, including a Chinese version. Many English documents are first written by Chinese technical communicators and then reviewed by native English speakers.

Specific Research Is Needed

A precondition for a further development of technical communication in China is the advancement of solid technical communication research within the Chinese context. Several studies show that there are many differences between Western and Chinese contexts, which might question the applicability of Western insights in Chinese technical communication practice. Differences involve the preferences and routines of users, the textual conventions and traditions, and the implications of the totally different scripts (Western alphabet versus Chinese characters). The literature about such cultural differences is not systematic and not very rigorous, and relatively many contributions are based on comparisons of document characteristics instead of comparisons of users using documents. Technical communication in China needs its own supporting research, both by academic researchers and by practitioners, as well as platforms for the exchange of experiences between practitioners. STC can play an important role here.

Need for Creative, Problem-Solving, and Research-Minded Professionals

Employers need technical communication professionals who can combine a profound knowledge of principles of effective technical communication with creativity, critical thinking, Chinese- and English-writing skills, and a problem-solving attitude (with tolerance for complex and broadly defined problems). Empirical and analytical research are important as sources of information and as tools to support the solution of practical problems. This calls for innovative and specialized technical communication programs that diverge from common practices as described by Ding (2011), where rote learning and a focus on basic English are important characteristics.

Conclusion

To summarize, in the current situation supply and demand are not balanced in China in regard to technical communication. There is a clear demand for qualified technical communicators, but the field is only in its early stage of development. There seems to be a fruitful connection with the field of technical translation, a connection that might also be worth exploring in other national contexts. It is important that technical communication develops its own identity in China, with research and education aimed at effective technical communication in the Chinese context, at the same time offering the Western world a mirror to consider the cultural limitations of existing theories and insights.

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Technical Communication in Israel:
More Geek, Less Chic

BY LEAH GUREN | Associate Fellow

Welcome to Israel!
I’VE LIVED IN ISRAEL since 1991 and have watched the technical communication field develop here. In the mid-1990s, when the high-tech bubble was gaining momentum, almost any Anglo (native of an English-speaking country) with a modicum of computer skills could land a job. Companies were naive about what a professional technical communicator should know and do; they focused instead on finding people who had good English skills and could use Word.

Soon, everyone wanted in on this desirable, white-collar profession. But, as employers became more savvy (often because of project partners in the United States and the expectations of customers), they began to expect more. In response, technical communication training programs sprang up. These were commercial ventures; some were just attempts by untrained (and often unscrupulous) individuals to cash in on the growing market. These questionable commercial courses, which still appear from time to time, usually died out as quickly as they appeared, but some of the better programs have survived. These programs make a serious effort to prepare their students for the real world of technical communication in Israel.

In the early days of rapid high-tech growth, it was often impossible to find a skilled technical communicator with the necessary background for a project. Usually, a company could get permission from the Ministry of the Interior to hire a foreign writer on a temporary work permit. They just had to prove that there were no local people with the needed skills or training.

These days, however, if you want to experience working in technical communication in Israel, you either need to immigrate or you need to already be a technical communicator of an international company with offices in Israel.

To fully appreciate the technical communication work environment in Israel, you need to understand three things:
1. The Israeli high-tech industry
2. How the field of technical communication in Israel differs from that of North America
3. How the culture influences the profession

Israeli High Tech
Let’s start with an exploration of the unique environment that makes up Israeli high tech.

Innovation
Israel might conjure up images of camels against a backdrop of palm trees, but the reality is more Buck Rogers than Indiana Jones. Think silicon, not sand.

With one of the highest per capita rates of PhDs in the world, and a culture that encourages innovation and discovery, perhaps it is no surprise that Israel pulls in more venture capital money than any other place in the world apart from Silicon Valley in California. Israeli research and development efforts lead the world in chip design, network technology, telecom innovation, and bio-medical patents. Even agricultural life on the kibbutz has contributed to the high-tech explosion with automated dairy management systems, solar water heaters, and drip irrigation.

Much has been said about the Israeli ability to innovate. Dan Senor and Saul Singer’s book, Start-up Nation (2009), put forward a theory of the connection between the Jewish tradition of study, questioning, and independent thought, with the ability to “think outside the box.” Earlier, Dr. Geert Hofstede inferred that the personality traits of societies influenced more than just individual behavior. While some of Hofstede’s theory of cultural dimensions has been questioned in recent years, his initial ideas about what makes a national culture tick remain insightful. Hofstede’s emphasis is on understanding cultures to improve sales and marketing efforts, but the basic concepts can be extrapolated to other areas. For example, one clue to Israeli innovation may be connected to the extremely low PDI (power distance index), which measures the range of power (financial or political), or how deeply hierarchical a society is. A high score shows a society with a large gap between the rich and the poor, or between those with political clout and those shut out of the system. An extremely low score indicates a very flat social hierarchy, without large gaps between the haves and have nots. In Israel, this is quite visible in high tech, where the only currency of honor or respect is merit, not position. In such an environment, the lowliest programmer has no problem arguing with a top-level manager or challenging the design ideas of a more senior engineer.

Historically, a tradition of questioning developed within Judaism. Rather than rewarding rote memorization, scholarship always included the right of the student to ask questions and engage in discussions. Most of the great rabbis throughout the ages where those who were able to find creative solutions in their interpretation of halacha (Jewish law).

International Perspective
This cultural proclivity to innovation, when coupled with a society that embraces technology, creates an interesting mix. In an article published by The Economist in 2006, Israel topped the list of computer ownership per capita at 122.1 per 100 people, compared to a mere 76.2 in the
United States. Cell-phone saturation in the 1990s was one of the highest in the world (Israel’s position has since dropped, as many other countries who were late adopters have overtaken them). Israelis embraced gadgets early and with none of the trepidation once found in other markets. Technology is not viewed as suspicious or geeky, but as a legitimate, intellectually challenging pursuit and desirable career, attracting almost 8,000 new engineering graduates each year. Israel invests a whopping five times more in technology research and development (as a proportion of business research and development) than the United States. It is no surprise, then, that many American high-tech companies, such as Intel, Cisco, and Microsoft, open research and development centers in Israel.

On the flip side, technology companies founded in Israel inevitably take advantage of American expertise in marketing, usually by having marketing planning handled through their offices in the United States, and sales and support offices globally. Even with a technologically savvy consumer group like Israel, the actual market size in this country of eight million people is tiny. Therefore, virtually every high-tech company must market to the world to thrive. Luckily, Israel technology firms have been doing that successfully for many years. Examples of Israeli technology abound: Windows XP and NT operating systems, the media chips in many MP3 players and digital cameras, popular PC CPU chips, and ICQ (instant messaging) are just some of the computer-related technologies that the Western world takes for granted—and all based on Israeli patents. Other fields, including agriculture (drip irrigation, new hybrid fruits, water desalinization) and bio-med (pill-sized cameras, cardiac stents, laser corrective eye surgery), have also made an impact globally.

The Emergence of Technical Communication

The need to sell complex technology products outside of Israel made the high-tech market one of the first to recognize the importance of technical communication. Suddenly, documentation became more than a “nice-to-have” add-on—it was a necessity. In some cases, as with bio-med companies dependent on regulatory approval, documentation became as critical as any other aspect of the development process.

Further, this situation meant that product interface and documentation had to be created in English; after all, it is far easier to find a good translator to localize a product from a source language of English than from Hebrew! For the companies who spread their development efforts internationally, all technical documents, including requirements and design specifications, were written in English. But being able to read and write English well enough to communicate with another developer was not the same as being able to write end-user documentation. While, on paper, English is one of Israel’s official languages and most college-educated Israelis have a functional grasp of English, it is not a mainstream language (with less than 2.5% of the population being native English-speakers). Suddenly, a critical profession emerged that required professional-level English skills in a country where English was not a widely used language.

Israeli Technical Communication Challenges

Unlike their colleagues in North America, Israeli technical communicators work almost exclusively in high-tech industries such as chip design, networking software, and bio-med products. They must not only cope with highly complex products, but they must also be the resident English experts, often without the luxury of other sources within the organization for editing or support. They are more likely to have broad responsibilities rather than narrow niche roles, often involved in document design, production, and graphics. These professional technical communicators are expected to use a wide range of software applications to get their work done. Additionally, since these technical communicators are ensconced in a highly dynamic environment, they are expected to cope with constant change and absorb new information as fast as it comes. One new employee told me, “I thought you were exaggerating about the pace of change, but it’s worse. I come back from a bathroom break and the programmers have already stuck another version [of the product] on the server!” In this environment, technical communicators are left trying to document a moving target. Like a circus clown riding a unicycle and juggling, the Israeli technical communicator must do all this with the added complexity of a multilingual (and often multicultural) environment.

Rachel J., a technical communicator who worked in Israel for many years before moving back to North America, sees the difference both in the writer’s mentality and the way the writer is perceived by the company. “As a tech writer in Israel, I was much more part of the technical team. Here [in North America], tech writers seems less adventurous with new technologies, and the career itself is not prestigious, as [it is] in Israel.”

Ahuva C., a senior writer at one of the Israeli branches of a major, international, high-tech company, adds, “The documentation produced by other tech pubs departments [within the company but outside of Israel] is very basic. All the cool stuff—the interactive tutorials, the new generation Help—was produced here. It is as if Israeli technical communicators are less afraid of coding, of figuring out technology, of troubleshooting advanced software applications. No fear.”

Israeli Population and Culture

National culture plays a major role in the work environment. To really understand technical communication in Israel, you need to know something about Israeli culture.

Immigration

Since its founding in 1948, Israel has absorbed over three million Jewish immigrants from all over the world, including approximately 118,000 from North America (United States and Canada) and another 60,000 from other
English-speaking countries (Great Britain, South Africa, Australia, New Zealand). While representing less than 6% of the total immigration and only about 2.5% of the total population, the Anglo community enjoys prominence disproportionate to its size.

Most Anglo immigrants come by choice, not necessity. They are not refugees fleeing persecution, but individuals who are pursuing a dream. As such, they bring with them more financial and academic resources than other groups. Anglo immigrants, particularly from North America, are likely to hold college degrees and be white-collar professionals. This is certainly a good way to start a new life in another country, but there is one serious problem: many professions require recertifying. A lawyer, accountant, architect, or teacher cannot simply go to work without learning a new legal system, a new set of tax laws, a new set of building codes, and a new set of education standards—and all of it in Hebrew. Imagine learning a language well enough to pass a law board exam! For many Anglos, the reality is that they will never master Hebrew well enough to be able to practice their original profession. Even if they can master the language, there is a chance that their profession might not exist in Israel, or might not provide enough income.

Others, particularly those who came to Israel when they were in their 20s, ended up with manual labor jobs on a kibbutz. At 22, the spirit of the collective agricultural community seems romantic and idealistic; at 42, getting up at 4:00 am to for the first milking makes the promise of an office job quite appealing. Additionally, many of these Anglo immigrants take advantage of their language skills by teaching English in the public schools, a stressful environment that further enhances the appeal of white-collar work.

So, whether they are new immigrants in Israel, or well-established immigrants facing burnout from physically demanding or terribly stressful jobs, they form a group of educated adults looking for a new profession that will take advantage of their mother-tongue English skills.

Suits need not apply
In this casual meritocracy, people pay a lot more attention to what’s inside your head than what’s on your back. After returning from a speaking engagement in France, I was struck anew by the Israeli lack of style or fashion. Lumpy, dumpy, and frumpy is often the order of the day. I’ve seen CEOs in Crocs, engineers in shorts, and technical communicators in sandals. Anything goes.

A Lumpy Melting Pot
It isn’t just the personal appearance, either; our whole cultural mix seems to be lumpy. Immigrants from the former Soviet Union came with little knowledge of Jewish custom and ritual, while immigrants from Ethiopia faced culture shock from an immersion into the modern world. Each group quickly develops a patina of common Israeli culture, which is communicated through language (Hebrew), music, and politics. This common culture can prove to be a thin veneer indeed, as any stressful job situation quickly has people reverting to their native culture.

Cultural Adaptation
While all immigrants and long-term residents must learn Hebrew to really survive, Anglo immigrants face an additional challenge: coming from cultures where polite behavior is the expected lubricant for most social and business interactions, Anglos often have trouble adjusting to the forthright Israeli approach.

In the mid-1990s, past STC president Saul Carliner came to Israel and spoke to a group of writers, editors, and information architects. He started his lecture by describing a scenario in which the technical communicator, an outside contractor on a project, had been called in to document a project lifecycle. He painted a careful picture of a high-level manager who expected a glowing tribute to the brilliant project, and the decidedly bleak reality of developers who thought that the whole project was an unmitigated fiasco. He challenged the group to strategize on a solution.

Most of the senior technical communicators at the event looked at him as if he had sprouted a second head. Finally, someone asked, “What’s the problem? Why didn’t the developers just tell the manager that the project was crap?”

Carliner was somewhat taken aback. “You have an interesting culture,” he said.

That one exchange has come to symbolize to me all that is different between American and Israeli corporate culture. The flat social hierarchy and the relative lack of respect for rank or position makes the Israeli culture ideal for innovation, but also leads to interactions that seem brusque and even (to an Anglo ear) downright rude.

Adjust or Fail
Technical communicators who have lived in Israel for more than a few years are usually quite familiar with the mentality and mannerisms of the people they will work with. New immigrants, however, must wrestle with a completely different set of rules about social interactions, business expectations, and an endless supply of potential communication pitfalls. Much of this is something that can be learned by going through the process of klitah (absorption into Israeli society), but to succeed as a technical communicator in Israel, you need additional cultural awareness:

- Understanding the perspective of developers. A good technical communicator needs to deal with grey areas, while the average developer tends to reside in a world of binary thinking. Technical communicators must consider the subject matter expert’s (SME) thought process so that they can correctly translate information. Learning to interview SMEs by asking scenario-based, open-ended questions helps keep technical communicators from missing critical information. Here, creating and maintaining good relations with SMEs is even more
important. Technical communicators can do this by being an English resource, by learning to read code, and by organizing their questions to minimize annoying or repetitive interruptions.

- Developing a Hebrew technical vocabulary. The writing may be in English, but meetings, water-cooler discussions, and project gossip are not. Technical communicators need to learn a few key terms in Hebrew, along with a robust English technical vocabulary, to help them “talk the talk and walk the walk” with the developers.

- Working with management. The flat hierarchy of business interactions is hard for some non-native technical communicators to adjust to. They expect managers to offer direction and are uncomfortable with the idea that employees must sometimes initiate change or direct a project. The idea that they have to be very aggressive to get the information needed at the start of a project, and to set certain guidelines, such as rules for reviews during the edit cycle, is alien. This means that a successful technical communicator cannot passively accept a project at face value.

- Bracing for the interview. Role playing is a useful tool and can help technical communicators mentally prepare for the interview process. Those new to Israel are often shocked by the seemingly rude (i.e., personal) questions that arise during the average job interview.

Summary: The X Factor

In conclusion, technical communication in Israel is a vibrant, well-established profession that is well recognized and equally well respected. Add to that a vibrant culture of art, literature, theater and music, amazing history, gorgeous weather, fabulous food, and some of the most genuinely warm people in the world, and you can see why we truly enjoy living and working here.

What Makes Technical Communication in Israel Different?

The main characteristics of Israeli technical communication can be summarized as follows:

- Technology is king. A highly technical market, with most technical communication jobs existing in high tech, requires that any technical communicator be more than just computer “literate.”

- Most technical communicators here have re-tooled from another profession. After being away from an academic environment for 20+ years, they may need to brush off rusty skills, such as notetaking and researching. On the other hand, they bring with them business savvy, professionalism, work ethic, and maturity.

- The profession is not appropriate for everyone. While many people think that this is a good way to make money, they may be ill-suited for the demands of the profession here. I tell people, “If you can’t imagine yourself sitting in on geeky engineering meetings about software design, this might not be for you.”

- The real world is tough. We live and die based on deadlines and complex technology challenges, and we do it all in a multilingual environment. We have to juggle work with security flare-ups, when half of the developers may be called up for reserve duty and employees might have to interrupt their work to run for bomb shelters.

- Culture sets the tone. Technical communicators must be made aware of the differences in social cultures and how they affect work, projects, and interactions. And that includes appreciating the not-so-subtle differences between a Sabra (native Israeli) and a Russian, for example.

Still Interested?

If you want to try working in Israel for a few months or even years:

- Find out if your company has any research and development divisions in Israel. This is the easiest way to get a temporary work permit on your tourist visa.

- Study Hebrew. Simple conversation-level Hebrew will go a long way to helping you stay connected and involved.


- Build on medical. Bio-med is huge here. Any medical knowledge can be a big plus.

Have questions? Contact Leah at leah@cowtc.com

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ONCE A REGION that was only attractive for its beauty pageant contestants, talented soccer teams, exotic sceneries, tasteful dishes, tropical climate, and sensuous dance rhythms, Latin America today offers unique advantages for foreign professionals wanting to diversify and boost their careers with a multicultural experience in an exciting economic landscape. However, there are many factors to be considered when deciding to move southward and, despite its ever-increasing movement toward internationalization, Latin America is still a bit resistant to the new attempts of massive immigration waves that occurred in the beginning of the last century.

The cultural similarities with North American and European countries are perhaps greater here than in other continents, such as Africa or Asia, but fast adaptation is crucial for a successful enterprise. Like in any other area of the world, moving to a foreign country requires a minimum knowledge of the culture, business etiquette, work environment, and—perhaps above all—the language. The great advantage here is that you have basically two languages to choose from: Spanish or Portuguese. In Latin America, you also have to be ready to adjust your biological, psychological, and moral standards to a number of factors, ranging from the food to the concept of time to the ways some more-complicated matters are better resolved. But these issues go beyond the scope of this article. What we will try to describe are the opportunities that have been created in recent years with the economic boom experienced by most of the 21 Latin American countries and how you can better position yourself to eventually find the new Eldorado of the global job market.

Estamos Contratando
(We’re Hiring):
How to Tap into the Opportunities of the Job Market in Latin America

By FABIANO CID and CECILIA IROS
Regional Economy

The projected average growth in the region for next year is around 4%, which is below recent figures but still promising when compared to other regions of the world, especially in more developed countries. The emergence of the middle class, which can be detected in most emerging economies, has provided Latin Americans with better living standards and access to higher levels of education. With this economic prospect comes an average unemployment rate of 6.5%, which is less than half that of the previous decade. In some countries, unemployment has reached zero as the low-digit figures can be attributed to people changing jobs rather than not actually being able to find employment.

Even though income inequality is still the norm, the gap between high- and low-income earners has decreased considerably, and so has the disparity between men and women, who have increased their share in the labor force, with 65% of women aged 25 to 65 joining the lines of the employed. According to The Labor Market Story Behind Latin America’s Transformation, a report released by the World Bank Regional Chief Economist office in October 2012, with the average length of schooling rising from five to eight years and the share of women in the labor force growing steadily, 35 million jobs were created over the past decade. “It’s quite remarkable that Latin America has been able to break with a tradition of high unemployment and informal employment to bring down overall unemployment rates to new historic lows,” said World Bank Regional Chief Economist Augusto de la Torre.

Education

Not everything in the Latin American garden is rosy. Despite the increasing levels of access to school, the goals for universal education in some countries are still very far from becoming a reality. According to UNESCO’s Education for All Global Monitoring Report, published in October 2012, 2.7 million Latin American children do not attend primary school and 1.7 million teenagers are out of secondary school. This prevents new generations from acquiring the necessary and much-desired skills for employment.

“We are witnessing a young generation frustrated by the chronic mismatch between skills and work,” said Irina Bokova, the director general of UNESCO. “Many youth, and women in particular, need to be offered alternative pathways to education, so that they gain the skills to earn a living, live in dignity and contribute to their communities and societies” (see Figure 1). Latin American universities, too, lag behind when compared to other regions of the globe. Even though some institutions, such as the University of Buenos Aires or the National Autonomous University of Mexico, enroll several hundred thousand students, overall performance is rather unimpressive. Scientific research studies are mediocre in number and not rewarded with additional funding. In most universities, students pay nothing to attend, but drop-out rates are extremely high, teaching methods and curricula are outdated and politicized, and staff cannot be fired, despite low performance rates.

“Across the region, good students are recruited to faculty at their own universities, rather than encouraged to leave and broaden their horizons,” says Jamil Salmi, a higher-education specialist at the World Bank. “And there’s hostility to the very notion you might hire faculty from abroad.”

English Proficiency

This situation, although presenting great challenges to local governments, businesses, and population, is the perfect scenario for foreign professionals with higher degrees or better levels of education. As the region maintains its growth rates, businesses prosper and the need for skilled workforce increases. This applies to both local enterprises and multinational companies with offices and branches in Latin America. These so-called Multi-latinas (see Figure 2)—a recent phenomenon that was only possible due to a combination of economic reform, advances in technology, improved education, comparatively low costs, abundant natural resources, and increased management sophistication—are the primary place to...
look for a job if you are a native English speaker willing to “offshore” yourself.

In 2009, the Boston Consulting Group updated their previous list of the 100 high-performing Latin American companies that “are expanding their operations internationally with impressive speed, ingenuity, and sophistication, adopting approaches that may offer valuable lessons to others.” Their countries of origin include Brazil, Mexico, Peru, Chile, Argentina, Colombia, Bolivia, and more, which means several different cultures and geographies to choose from. If these companies are selling to the United States—and they certainly do today—then you have an advantage over local candidates because the difficulty of finding English-speaking employees has increased considerably in recent years. (The region has, according to some rankings, one of the lowest levels of English fluency.)

“Remember that communicating in English fluently, at the executive level, is essential in most searches. Sometimes, it is even more important than having an MBA,” said Carlos Marro, owner of Cozzi, Marro & Asociados and Hand Selection, a headhunting firm with offices in Argentina and Brazil, whom we interviewed for this article. “It is fairly common to work with organizations that already have relocation policies. Depending on the executive being relocated, offers are more or less generous,” he added. “Searches are more globalized. Executives apply online and recruiting companies actively search for profiles in other countries through executive networks” (see Figure 3).

**Relocation Considerations**

It is not just language that will interfere in your ability to secure a job in Latin America or even to make you decide to apply for one. Does the country you are moving to have a tax treaty signed with your country of origin? Are the relocation costs high and would your potential employer be willing to cover them entirely or partially? What is the best time to move and adjust to the climate and other circumstances, and how much time is necessary to be fully functional? What are the best and most affordable cities or neighborhoods in your target destination? What are the best means of transportation to take you from home to work and around the city? How will you cope with the distance from family and friends? And, last but not least, what are the visa requirements and how do you make sure that you will have a safe stay throughout the period you planned?

Adecco Group is the world’s leading provider of human resource solutions, with more than 33,000 employees and a network of over 5,500 branches in over 60 countries and territories around the world. We interviewed Pauline Amilhaud, international requests coordinator at their office in Sao Paulo, Brazil. “Usually the preference is for the nearest location,” she said. “But in the absence of specialized labor force, companies open their selection scope to candidates from other states and even from other countries, depending on the requirement level of the position.” She also said companies that need to seek candidates from other locations know that they need to build attractive proposals so that these candidates accept the offer and this usually includes the costs of displacement and, in some cases, even the housing costs.

LinkedIn recently reached 10 million users in Brazil, which was greatly celebrated both in their Sao Paulo office and in the Mountain View headquarters. We talked to
Danielle Restivo, manager of corporate communications for Brazil and Canada, who told us that there is a great deal of competition between companies in Latin America to attract the best talent, which means that there are plenty of opportunities for candidates if they have the right skills. “Candidates should think about how they can build a strong network on LinkedIn in order to find out about the best jobs and to be introduced to the right people to open the door to new opportunities,” she said. “Recruiters in Brazil are leveraging LinkedIn to find top talent so professionals should think about not only building their network, but [also] keeping their profile up to date with a clear explanation of their skills, background, expertise and education.” Understanding what skills are required for the job is key.

Resources for Job Hunters
LinkedIn skills (www.linkedin.com/skills) tracks all the skills on LinkedIn being posted by members and can help a professional see what skills are growing or declining. Researching the résumés of professionals on LinkedIn who have positions you aspire to can help you understand what kind of experience and skills you need to acquire to land a job internationally. Professionals can also leverage LinkedIn to research and get introductions to employees at companies where they would like to work in a foreign country. In addition, LinkedIn Answers (www.linkedin.com/answers) is a great place for professionals to ask such questions and to learn from others who have relocated to another country for a job.

In my personal experience, LinkedIn has proved to be an excellent tool for recruiting talent. In an ad posted during a single month in November 2011 looking for an administrative and financial director, we received 174 submissions. Even though it was clear that the successful candidate would have to live in Rio de Janeiro, most of them came from other Brazilian states and from countries as far as Australia, Canada, Denmark, India, Israel, Italy, The Netherlands, Portugal, United States, Saudi Arabia, Serbia, Spain, and United Arab Emirates. This was for a position in which the selected person would have to have extensive knowledge of the Brazilian legal, accounting, banking, and financial systems; therefore, we could not continue the process with a foreigner with little or no familiarity with the Brazilian market. Later, in March 2012, we used the same system to fill a sales and marketing manager position and the results were similar. This time, though, after analyzing the 150 submissions, we ended up hiring an Italian expat living in Sao Paulo, which only proves that the opportunities are there; all you have to do is be alert and prepared.

Another meaningful experience we had was the search for a United States–based director of business development for our Latin American company. Since this position did not involve relocation, even though it meant becoming part of a Latin American team, we used the services of a North American recruiter to do the initial screening. In only a couple of weeks we had eight interested candidates who matched the profile we were looking for, and after an exhaustive selection process we chose a Pittsburgh-based professional with previous experience in the translation and localization industry, who later came to our offices in Argentina to be trained and familiarize himself with how we did business.

Whether you respond to a job post on LinkedIn, contact a local HR consultant, or send your résumé to a global staffing firm, all options are worth pursuing. It will definitely depend on the position and the profile of the hiring company and what you are looking for in terms of position, salary, and commitment.

If you have made up your mind and have found a job opportunity in Latin America, then it is time to prepare for the necessary adjustments. One good way to start is by talking to colleagues who have had similar experiences or who are currently living in your locale of choice. There are numerous forums, blogs, and discussion groups on the Internet created and run by expats who will be happy to share their experience with you and give you tips on how to make the move less traumatic. Kiss, Bow, Or Shake Hands, Latin America: How to Do Business in 18 Latin American Countries, by Terri Morrison and Wayne A. Conway, can also serve as a good reference to understand the culture and customs of the Latin American people. Having lived here for most of our lives, we can attest that it is worth the try.

Today, Latin America is a land of opportunity and perhaps one of the most exciting places to experience the revolution that sound economic policies, democratic governments, and an ever-optimistic population can create. And, if none of these social and economic transformations are of interest to you, there will always be beautiful people, passionate soccer matches, exotic landscapes, hot temperatures, exotic meals, and voluptuous dance moves to enjoy. Regardless of your choice, know that the vacancies are there and we are now hiring (or, as a local sign would read, “Estamos contratando”).

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CECILIA IROS (cecilia@sumalatam.com) from Cordoba, Argentina, founded former industry leader IMTT as soon as she graduated from university. More recently, she founded suma, a Latin American Language services provider serving clients around the globe. She has performed all the different roles in a translation and localization company and has organized more than 30 training events for translators and translation companies in six countries. She has given several presentations at different industry events.
Hiring technical communicators brings the same kind of challenges, complexities, and even apprehensions all over the world, although the regional preferences and trends vary across locations. A documentation manager in Boston plans a hiring campaign differently than in London or in Pune; however, the fundamental requirements remain same.

Primarily, every manager looks for a candidate with a good command of the English language, a positive attitude toward working in a team, and preferably, the knowledge of tools that the documentation team uses. What essentially separates them are factors such as the organization work culture, the industry practices in that country, and personal preferences of the hiring manager.

For this article, I conducted an online survey of Indian technical communication professionals. Approximately 200 professionals responded to the survey questions, and I have used the survey results to talk about the trends and preferences in Indian technical communications community.

**Hiring Managers and Job Seekers: A Level Field**

While hiring a technical writer two years ago, I called our trusted placement agency and asked for a conversation with an eligible candidate. “A conversation? Or do you mean an interview?” was the agent’s response. I dislike the word *interview*. A candidate needs a job as much as an employer needs a qualified candidate. When they meet, both try to understand if they can really work together on mutually agreed-upon terms. So it is a conversation and not an interview.
No ecommerce is a success because of buyers only. A buyer needs a book as much as the seller needs to sell it. The same holds true for employment, although it is not always reflected. It is a level field.

**Practices, Preferences, Priorities, and Trends in India**

The chief executive and chief technology officers of many companies in India are more concerned about the challenges in talent management than in technology upgrades. The new complexities in talent management have reshaped the leadership styles. For many years, the primary challenge in talent management was to find the right candidate. Now, the challenge is also to retain the candidate, and to plan for risk. Job seekers are more aware now. They have access to a wider network of employers and are ready to relocate, even internationally. Talent management leadership must be more proactive and strategic, yet friendly to retain talent. In hindsight, it means that hiring managers are more rigorous about the hiring process.

**Hiring Managers: Practices, Preferences, and Trends**

The survey I conducted asked hiring managers to share their experience and preferences. Table 1 shows the key findings.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hiring methods used by hiring managers</th>
<th>Most Important</th>
<th>Least Important</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Use networking and communities (Linkedin Groups, STC, TWIN-India)</td>
<td>Experience and role in projects</td>
<td>Current location</td>
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<tr>
<td>Internal references (networking and word of mouth calls)</td>
<td>Domain experience</td>
<td>Current and expected salary</td>
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<tr>
<th>Information on résumé</th>
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<tr>
<th>Evaluation in personal interview</th>
<th>Most Important</th>
<th>Least Important</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>English language skills</td>
<td>Tools knowledge (fine if listed on résumé but not evaluated)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soft skills (communication, confidence, thought process)</td>
<td>Surface skills (scoping, business analysis, wireframing, UX)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project planning skills (documentation plan, schedule, milestones, review process)</td>
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In India, the hiring process invariably involves a written test and the format and level of questions vary for the candidates’ experience. The survey results suggest that more than 85% of hiring managers use a question in the test such as, “Write a procedure or instructions for a sample snapshot of an application,” while 50% of managers added that they include instructions to edit a poorly written procedure and a descriptive question. For the descriptive question, a beginner might be asked to write 200 words on “why you think you are a good technical writer,” whereas a seasoned technical writer might be asked to write 400 words that “give details of your most challenging project so far and how you added value to the business.” The objective of this descriptive question is to evaluate different aspects of candidate’s skills, such as language skills, comprehension skills, and the actual answer to the question.

**What This Means for Job Hunters**

**Hiring method.** Managers prefer to use networking communities and groups to identify the talent pool and reach to target professionals; it helps them find references as well. Managers are not sure how to evaluate the value a new writer brings to the team. To many, the new candidate is another resource to plan documentation or to write procedures. How it impacts the return on investment is left for human resources. The candidates need to be active on community groups for notifications of new postings by companies. They need to update their professional profile regularly for skill and experience and be part of discussion groups to showcase their subject knowledge and experience. This interaction is a win-win situation for the community.

**Information on résumé.** Hiring managers are more interested in the candidates’ role and experience in past projects and less concerned with their location or salary expectations. They want to know whether the candidate has the right skills to work on their documentation projects. The work experience detailed in a résumé allows the manager to shortlist suitable candidates, those who are familiar with the domain and have been developing the deliverables as that manager needs. Location is not an issue because many candidates are willing to relocate.

**Personal interviews.** During personal interviews, managers are most interested in evaluating soft skills, English-language skills, and to a lesser extent, project-planning skills. They observe a candidate for confidence and communication skills and try to understand how well the person fits in their documentation team. The candidate’s familiarity or experience in such software as RoboHelp or Confluence is generally not doubted, or at least not discussed in detail. The common assumption is that it is easier to train a candidate on the tools than to train them on communication and other soft skills. The survey suggests that managers are least interested in the business analysis skills of candidates, such as project scoping, wireframes, and

![Table 1. Key findings from hiring managers.](image-url)
For many years, the primary challenge in talent management was to find the right candidate. Now, the challenge is also to retain the candidate and to plan for risk.

prototyping, because few writers are actually involved in the business analysis or scoping stage of documentation projects. Such tasks are usually done by the product managers and documentation managers.

**My Take**

So it all boils down to individual preferences. Sudhir, a senior technical writer from NetHawk Network, says, “Language skills are important but this is not the most important factor for me while evaluating a candidate. Many English language graduates fail to be good technical writers in spite of their excellent language skills. I find evaluation of other aspects such as content organization, learning quotient, simplistic approach, and rapport building as more important than the language skills. Though, I ensure it in the initial rounds of communication before interview that the language skills meet the minimum expectations.”

**Job Seeking: Preferences, Priorities, and Trends**

**Job Search Methods Used by Job Seekers**

The survey also asked what methods job-seekers were most likely to use.

**Most likely:**
- Job Portals (naukri, monster, shine, and others)
- Communities (LinkedIn Groups, STC, TWIN-India)

**Least Likely:**
- Unsolicited résumés to employers
- Social media
- Placement agencies

**What This Means for Managers**

**Most preferred job-search methods.** Most candidates prefer to use online job portals. The job portals enable candidates to set their preferences and keywords so that the right employers contact them for open positions. Candidates need to upload their profile only once to the portal and its mass reach connects the candidate to many employers. In addition to job portals, candidates prefer to use professional communities and groups, such as those on LinkedIn, STC, or the TWIN-India portal for their job search campaigns. This is primarily because professionals invariably have access to the Internet 24/7 and they can directly reach companies who post requirements for open positions. In addition, professionals see only relevant postings that are specifically targeted to technical communication professionals. This works best for them because—as we saw in the hiring managers’ preferences—many open positions are posted in these professional groups and mailing lists and hence it serves a purpose for both candidates and employers.

**Least preferred job-search methods.** Candidates do not use social media or placement agencies while looking for new jobs. Indian writers use social media primarily for leisure-time activities. Also, because few companies use social media to post open positions, candidates do not find social media responsive or useful enough. For placement agencies, candidates have many channels to directly reach companies (professional communities and mailing lists apart from traditional methods such as direct email to company human resource offices) that they do not really feel any added advantage in calling placement agencies.

**Specific Note on Core Skills**

While it is a good sign that Indian technical writers are rubbing shoulders with the best in the world, be it with their technical skills in using authoring software, following documentation process, or delivering the deliverables, I feel that this growth has been quite one-dimensional. Most often, even the experienced candidates lack basic skills and discipline to apply to open positions, particularly when communication is the important factor. I recently wrote a guest post on Tom Johnson’s blog ([http://idratherbewriting.com/2012/08/16/core-skillsets-for-technical-writers](http://idratherbewriting.com/2012/08/16/core-skillsets-for-technical-writers)). Several mistakes reflect the experienced candidates’ lack of seriousness or respect toward the profession:

- Poor résumés (mistakes, poor structure, formatting issues, duplicate and irrelevant details)
- Poor email skills
- No follow-up or thank-you emails
- Poor attitude when responding to feedback

These errors are unfortunate and it is not easy to find out the reasons for this sorry state of attitude.

A high percentage of hiring managers overlook the issues in candidates’ résumés and emails. They focus on their requirements, which mean that candidates are not made to take these basic skills seriously. I do not buy this logic. Individuals however should plan and write a good résumé not for hiring managers but for themselves. We write good emails not because the receiver will feel good but because we feel good about writing professionally accurate and clean emails. As technical communicators, we are answerable to ourselves first.

There are no (or only a handful of) recognized Indian universities that offer technical communication programs to inculcate these basic skills in young graduates or beginners. And when candidates learn these skills on the job, the focus is usually on HAT and deliverables. When
one grows in experience, the focus is on documentation plans and scrum meetings. And somewhere along the way, the core skills take the back seat.

This reflects a more linear thought process and absence of a commonsense approach. A writer with two years of experience includes details of three projects in a résumé and the same writer with six years of experience includes details of 14 projects. And the résumé turns out to be 12 pages. I wrote a post on handling poor résumés and difficult candidates, where I shared my experience of dealing with a nasty applicant (http://enjoytechnicalwriting.com/2011/04/06/handling-difficult-applicants).

No university will teach such basic things, but when a majority of writers are thinking alike with no commonsense approach, it is high time that Indian universities roll out programs in technical communication with dedicated focus on core skills.

Conclusion
The job market for Indian technical writers is growing just like everywhere else, and more writers are being trained on board and by private training services providers and are hired. It is again a welcome sign that beginning-level writers get a chance to work with onsite teams and for exposure to the global work culture and authoring software. Both the managers and candidates have some common preferences and thought processes. Both prefer to use professional communities and groups, such as LinkedIn or STC, for hiring and job search, respectively, although both talk less about the added value a new writer can bring to the documentation team. The only concern is a lack of focus on developing core skills—something that currently both managers and candidates are missing. Overall, the Indian technical communication industry is at an interesting juncture.

VINISH GARG (vinish.garg@vhite.com) works as director of operations, technical documentation, in vhite systems. Vinish is an STC member, and he has developed technical communication (B2B, B2C, and B2E) for global businesses in past nine years. In addition, he is a published author and has been writing for media for 13 years.

“STC has evolved since I first became a member and has begun to treat this profession of technical communication much more broadly. And that broadening of scope is critical as the careers of our members evolve. Over the years, my own career has moved from technical writing and editing to management and talent development. STC still ‘fits’ me as a professional organization because it addresses those larger issues.”
Getting Moved

By CATHERINE JANZEN | Senior Member

ONE FINE MAY EVENING years ago, my friend Liam gently set down his pint of Guinness on a scarred table in the middle of the United States, almost as far from another country as it was physically possible to get.

“Once you leave, you’ll never fit anywhere quite the same again,” he said.

Today, after living in Switzerland for the decade since his comment, I’m back in the United States as an ex-expat. As I write in temporary accommodations and wait impatiently for an Internet connection, I haven’t begun to process what having lived as an expat means to me and how I might fit in again. However, my stuff finally made it across the sea, so I thought I’d share some things I’ve learned in getting my household home.

Project Management

Any project requiring several months of preparation and execution, thousands of dollars, multiple subcontractors, and at least two countries’ worth of paperwork and bureaucracy deserves serious attention. Make a Plan A and a backup Plan B. When you don’t know what to do next, work the plan. At the same time, no matter how much you plan, it won’t matter because things will go wrong—in which case, liberally apply the “don’t worry about the little things” rule. Patience, calmness, and objectivity can mean the difference between success and misery.

Tools

The tool set is also critical, and for this project I wanted tools that were quick to access, easy to use, and highly visible.

The Book of Change. I write down—in an actual book—every to-do, pending, or done task, result, conversation, random thought, and all the rude things I want to say but shouldn’t. I write everything without exception, no matter how trivial, and capture people’s names, dates and times, and relevant contact information, including phone numbers and email addresses. I started the first Book of Change the day I decided to move, and I’m quickly filling the second. It goes with me everywhere, requires only a pen to use, and is highly visible.

My Book of Change is a Moleskine notebook with unruled paper, mid-sized, big enough to take notes and draw diagrams, but not so big as to be bulky. Screaming orange, the notebook stands out in the moving mess. I also carry two pens because naturally, the one day I didn’t, the pen I had ran out of ink.

As a project manager and confirmed geek, I feel decidedly hypocritical about using paper and pen, but each time I opened my first project plan, I hyperventilated at the hundreds of undone tasks. In addition, I was often in places where I couldn’t comfortably take notes on a computer. It’s also easier to staple receipts to the Book of Change than to
an iPad. However, if I’d been working with someone else, I would have used cloud-based software (for non-sensitive data only) to ensure that the Project Plan of Change was constantly updated and available.

**Inventory Files.** I’d never bothered with a proper inventory before, but I learned my lesson when I first moved overseas. I carefully chose and shipped a single box of my most important professional books. Weeks later, when the box arrived late after being left on a rainy loading dock, every book but one sported fur coats of blue, pink, and green mold. Because I didn’t have an inventory, I lost the original goods, as well as the replacement value.

Your detailed inventory is used by the origination moving company when packing and loading, as the basis for move insurance, as the shipping manifest for the transport companies, for customs duties in both origination and destination countries, and by the destination moving company when delivering your goods.

It took months to catalogue everything (and I only took part of my household goods), so start early. Work room-by-room and avoid backtracking. Using a good camera, take photos of individual items or groups of similar items. When I downloaded each photo to the computer, I noted location, date, and object to improve search and retrieval.

In the inventory spreadsheet, I tracked the following types of things for each item:

- to ship, to take on the plane, to send by post, or to sell/donate
- status, such as photo or receipt needed or ready to ship
- hyperlinks to photos for everything and scanned receipts and appraisals for big-ticket items
- new and replacement costs including shipping, if required, for the different currencies
- brand names, models, and serial numbers
- titles, authors, ISBN numbers, current costs with shipping, if not available in the United States, for all physical media, including books, music, and video (I would use a barcode scanner app for this in the future)
- descriptions and notes
  
  I followed the 80/20 rule on how much to inventory. For example, I have excessive detail on big-ticket, old, or hard-to-replace items, whereas for things such as t-shirts, I noted “six t-shirts,” took a photo of all six shirts laid out together, assigned a flat replacement cost per item, and multiplied to get the total. (I am still slightly ashamed about the number of shoes I own.)

Replacement insurance is generally valued at the destination, so you may have to do some research. Getting it right is critical. If you overvalue, you overpay at every step. If you undervalue, however, the insurance company, in case of loss, may reduce your compensation across the board, and customs officers may fine you if they suspect you are smuggling goods and not declaring fair value.

**Scanner/Copier/Printer and Shredder.** I sold these items last when I left and bought them first at the destination. Even with the self-contained Book of Change, managing paper is overwhelming. I scanned and shredded every document I could to reduce the bulk of paper to be shipped. Although I scanned moving papers, bank agreements, and lease information for reference, I carried with me on the plane the paper originals and all documents with sensitive data. Moving expenses are also tax-deductible for many people, so keep and label your receipts while you can remember what they were for.

One downside to being “all-electronic” is that at some point the scanner will no longer be available, so plan for a short-term workaround to manage incoming documents.

**Communications**

I’m the most uncommunicative writer ever, so please do as I say, not as I didn’t do. Regularly update your blog, social media accounts, and professional and networking communities. Send mass email letters to friends and family in both old and new countries, as they will worry about you. I just ran out of energy, which has been hard on my friends.

On public social media, be extremely careful about posting exact names, dates, and locations of social events or move information in order to prevent theft of all your neatly boxed household goods and to avoid phishing attempts and identity theft.

**The Move**

Because moving is well covered on the Internet and in many books, I’ll mention just a few things that I didn’t see in my research.

**Timing.** Avoid Summer if at all possible as it is more expensive and stressful, and subcontractors who are not professional movers might pack and load your goods. At any time, the move will usually take longer than you expect; conversely, however, don’t let people or situations rush you into making bad decisions. Many movers can store your belongings under your original insurance plan for a very reasonable rate, so ask and take the time you need.

**Request for Proposals (RFP).** I followed a standard RFP process when I hired my origination moving company. After researching and identifying five companies of interest, I had them come to my flat for an in-home estimate and interview. I used a standard set of interview questions, which I developed after researching international moving issues. Having the sales reps all come the same week kept the process consistent. When the deadline for receiving the emailed written proposals expired, I threw out the most and least expensive bids and conducted phone interviews for the middle cluster. Pay attention to how companies respond in person, by phone, and by email, because you may have to use all of these means during the move. The salesperson, however, will most likely not be your move coordinator, so get a feel for how the overall team and company work, not just the sales team. For the middle group, I blind-scored the interview answers and the estimated rates, and chose based on that data.
Stand Up for Yourself. Do not be afraid to say, “This isn’t right.” My Swiss origination moving company proposed a well-known United States–based destination agent, which sent out the required electronic paperwork. Unfortunately, the paperwork had already been completed with another client’s name and personal details. I immediately wrote to the move manager in the Swiss company, who found a new and better replacement company within 24 hours.

What to Take. You have three options: all, some, or nothing. The only people I know who take everything are high-level diplomats or executives. The rest of us are usually stuck between nothing and some. Because your fabulous inventory includes replacement and shipping costs in your destination country, you can evaluate whether it’s worth to buy a new couch later or ship the one you have.

Consider what you can and can’t find in the new place. Neither beds nor office paper are the same size globally. Think carefully about how much you want to haul a bed frame for which you can’t buy a new mattress and bedding or to take a filing cabinet that won’t fit your future files.

Also double-check in your destination country whether you can take certain foods, cosmetics, alcohol, medicines, reading/viewing material, electronics, and animal skins or woods in items like furniture or musical instruments.

Finally, do take stuff that reminds you of happy days, such as the cups with the hand-painted cherries. Who cares that they’re chipped? When you use them, you won’t see the chip; you’ll remember shopping with your friend on a sunny afternoon.

People

Although moving your household goods is likely the most expensive and physically hardest part, I’ve tried to put people first during the move, because it is the people—not the gorgeous Swiss Alps or my books—I miss most.

Manage Your Emotions and Stress. You’re going to experience an astounding array of emotions including grief, loss, and loneliness, but also excitement about new horizons and adventures. If others, such as your spouse or children, are involved, you will not experience the same emotions at the same time, which means that as a faint star of excitement appears on your horizon, your eight-year-old daughter will realize she’ll never see her friends. When you use them, you won’t see the chip; you’ll remember shopping with your friend on a sunny afternoon.

Leave Room for the People You Leave Behind. Your friends will miss you as much as you miss them. In fact, you may find people you’d never expect who genuinely want to keep in touch. So don’t forget to have a leaving party, maybe even two. Set up video conferencing ahead of time. Everyone whines about video conferencing (“Oh, I’ll have to put on makeup”; “I have to put on real clothes,” “blah blah”), but seeing the faces via conference call, although not the same as Saturday morning at the café, feels more real.

Plan for Reverse Culture Shock Before You Leave. Even though I have returned to my home country, 10 years is a long time to be gone. Re-acculturating can be difficult and lonely, and often people here don’t want to hear about there.

I’m trying to look forward and back at the same time. I’m studying my home country’s culture, sports, and politics, just as I did when I first moved to my host country. On the other hand, after a frustrating day trying to get utilities turned on via the Web in an apartment without an Internet connection, I can temporarily fly back to Switzerland by recipes from the cookbook my former neighbors gave me as a parting gift.

Send Yourself a Box of Love. I timed my box to arrive just after my plane and before my shipping container. As well as a winter coat, I included going-away cards and smaller presents, such as the cookbook, so when I looked at the items, I had a tangible reminder my friends.

Conclusion

Was it worth it?

The world I’ve come back to has changed—people have moved on, places that were once safe are no longer, processes that used to work now don’t. Repatriating, especially after a long time, means all the normal stresses of moving, coupled with the very real need to protect yourself and your family physically, emotionally, personally, professionally, legally, and financially.

I had the pleasure of 10 years of making friends and meeting people from different cultures and countries—people who were open, inviting, and enthusiastic, and who lovingly showed me their countries and reinvigorated my love for my own as I saw it through their eyes.

So without having fully unpacked my boxes or my heart, I can’t yet tell whether I’ll ever fit here again, but if the next 10 years are as lovely as the last, I’m looking forward to finding out.

CATHERINE JANZEN (cathjanzen@gmail.com) is a senior consultant and manager of projects, services, and teams for technical and corporate communications, content strategy, and business process management. For the past 10 years, she worked in Geneva, Switzerland, including as the World Health Organization/ITT Technical Communications and Training Resources team lead and for selected non-governmental organizations (NGOs).
MY PREDECESSORS, Mike Hughes and Hillary Hart, began a tradition of providing a mid-year report from the Society President. I’m privileged to continue, especially since there are lots of exciting things to share!

1. The Society is 60 years old this year! We will celebrate our anniversary at the 60th STC Summit, 5–8 May 2013 in Atlanta. The Conference Committee, under the leadership of Paul Mueller, has designed us a world-class education program, selected from presentation proposals and augmented with invited speakers from around the globe. I’m thrilled to have New York Times columnist and prolific technical writer David Pogue return as keynote speaker. I hope to see all of you there! Summit registration is open at http://summit.stc.org.

2. Our communities—chapters and special interest groups—are the core of the Society. Based on community feedback, we’ve changed the community funding model so that all communities will receive a fixed amount of funding per member. The Community Affairs Committee (CAC) is working directly with communities to handle ongoing issues, provide coaching, and advocate for community needs to the STC Board of Directors. Follow the CAC on Twitter @STCCAC.

3. Our certification credential—Certified Professional Technical Communicator™—continues to attract applicants. Under the leadership of Steven Jong, the STC Certification Commission continues to manage the certification process and design new offerings. Do you wish to validate your expertise as a technical communicator? Get certified! Learn more at www.stcert.org.

4. STC continues to expand our global initiatives and partnerships. The Society lowered 2013 dues for members in emerging nations. We have a vibrant STC chapter in India and are making inroads to support the profession in China. We’ve partnered with Germany’s tekom for cross-promotional activities. STC had a booth at the 2012 tekom conference in Germany, and tekom will have a booth at the upcoming STC Summit. For the second year in a row, STC participated in the global TC Roundtable, cooperating and collaborating with organizations around the world to support our global profession. It’s clear to me that the Society is globally known, and globally respected.

5. The Society is a leader in online educational offerings. We’ve augmented our webinar series and certificate courses with virtual conferences—most recently in technical editing and content strategy. In 2013, the MOOC (Massive Open Online Course) is coming to STC. MOOCs are changing higher education, and you can have your first MOOC experience through STC. To learn more, view STC Education Chair Phylise Banner’s STC webinar presentation, available at www.stc.org/education/online-education/recorded-seminars.

6. The Society has exciting news in membership. Members who joined or renewed before 15 January 2013 received a rate of $195 for a Classic membership. Following up on member requests at the annual business meeting, the Society loosened requirements for the Retired member category. STC continues to increase member value, with sponsored live webinars, additional free archived seminars, and a new affinity program for member savings. Check out the value of your STC membership at www.stc.org/membership.

7. We often forget that STC is a 501(c)3 organization, tax-exempt under U.S. law, chartered with promoting the profession of technical communication. This also means your STC dues may be tax-deductible as a charitable contribution. Each of us can support STC and support the profession more thoroughly by giving to the Society. Under Immediate Past President Hillary Hart, STC has developed a range of giving opportunities for individuals and organizations. See www.stc.org/support-stc-now.

8. STC acknowledges the service of former STC CEO Kathryn Burton, who left the Society in June 2012. With change comes opportunity. The Executive Director Search Committee, under the leadership of STC Vice President Nicky Bleiel, is charged with recruiting our next executive director. I hope to introduce him or her to the Society at the 60th Anniversary Summit in Atlanta.

In summary, the Society is globally supporting the profession, providing value to our members, launching new programs, and preparing for the future. I look forward to working with each of you—our Society’s members—as we launch into the next 60 years!
STC Student Membership: Challenges, Opportunities, and Benefits

By Craig Baehr and Sally Henschel

STC Academic SIG

When Students Join the Society for Technical Communication, one of the many benefits they gain is membership in STC communities, which includes membership in a student chapter, as well as a professional chapter and special interest group (SIG). In this article, we discuss some of the benefits and opportunities for student members of STC, discuss challenges faced by student chapters, outline the steps for creating a new chapter, and offer suggestions for maintaining and supporting a student chapter.

Benefits

For students, membership in STC and a student chapter provides many benefits and a few challenges. As individuals, student members receive access to training resources, job and salary resources, professional publications, and several awards and competitions. As members of a student chapter, whether at their own institutions or virtually through participation with students at other colleges and universities, students are provided valuable leadership and networking opportunities.

Leadership Opportunities. STC provides support for chapters based on membership levels, funds which can be used for chapter events and initiatives. Students find belonging to and participating in a student chapter allows them to get involved in activities and projects related to their career interest, to network with other students and professionals, and to hone their communication and leadership skills.

Networking. There are many avenues for networking within STC. As noted, student membership includes membership in a student chapter, a geographic chapter, and a SIG, each of which offers an array of monthly meetings, discussion groups, newsletters, and/or day-to-day support. The MySTC Network allows members to interact with their fellow STC members through a selection of integrated communications tools. In addition, the STC Technical Communication Summit provides students a valuable opportunity to network with professionals. At the annual event, recognized authorities in the technical communication field present and participate in panel discussions. Student members can apply to volunteer to work the Summit and have the conference fee waived. In addition, each community receives one free registration to the Summit.

Training. Each month, STC offers a series of live and recorded webinars, seminars, and online conferences on topics of interest to technical communicators, and students can enroll for a reduced rate. In addition, currently there are over 70 free, on-demand, archived seminars available for members.

Publications. Student membership provides online access to two technical communication publications:

- Technical Communication. Peer-reviewed and published quarterly, the journal showcases the work of noteworthy writers in the field, and includes both quantitative and qualitative research and book reviews.
- Intercom. Published monthly, the magazine includes articles about important topics in technical communication, and provides practical examples and applications of technical communication useful for professional development.

Job Resources. STC provides members with a Job Bank and Career Center where they can search for career opportunities with businesses and organizations from around the world. Employers can post jobs and review résumés, and members can post résumés, search the job listings, and create personal job alerts to let them know when jobs of interest are available. In addition to identifying career opportunities, members can access resources designed to help technical communicators throughout their careers. For example, the STC Salary Database, based on the U.S. Department of Labor Statistics, allows members to research and compare their compensation levels.

Additional Opportunities

In addition to the benefits of membership, there are many opportunities for networking, marketing, public relations, and job-hunting. Being a part of a student chapter provides you with multiple opportunities to get involved on campus and looks great on a resume!

“My time with the chapter has taught me a great deal about networking, marketing, public relations, and job-hunting. Being a part of a student chapter provides you with multiple opportunities to get involved on campus and looks great on a resume!”

—Eric Johnson, STC Student Chapter President, Michigan Technological University
“STC is my gateway to the technical writer community. You get to meet many people from whom there is a lot to learn. This can lead to jobs, as can the actual job post website, to which membership gains you access. These are very much worth it for the great discounted student price.”

—Razvan Ungureanu, STC Alberta

opportunities to contribute to STC’s information resources, compete in contests, and receive recognition for one’s efforts.

**Body of Knowledge (BoK).**
The STC Body of Knowledge is a wiki-based information resource portal with articles on a range of topics on the profession contributed by technical communicators. The BoK serves as both an information resource and an opportunity to contribute new content. Registered users can author new content, add to or edit existing content, and even comment on pages. The BoK has a five-year history and as an evolving collection of information resources, it is continually updated with new information on the profession.

**Competitions.** STC offers competitions to evaluate professional technical communication in different media. In addition to participating in competitions hosted by local geographic communities, students can participate in the Academic SIG Student Poster Competition. Selected students present their research posters, on-site or virtually, at the STC Summit each spring.

**Recognition.** Membership in STC provides students additional opportunities for recognition at the individual, academic, and community level:

- Distinguished Service Award for Students (DSAS)
- Distinguished SIG Service Award (DSSA)
- Sigma Tau Chi (STX), which recognizes students in baccalaureate or graduate programs
- Alpha Sigma (AS), which recognizes students in two-year or certificate programs

“...and keep all members interested and involved.

**Planning Events and Activities.** Engaging student members in chapter events and planning frequent, interesting meetings can be a challenge. Successful chapters have learned that everything a chapter does needs not to be local: they network with other chapters, SIGs, or STC members to cohost events, meetings, and guest speakers.

**Access to Chapter Meetings.** Many student members do not have access to a student chapter at their colleges or work extended hours, which makes it difficult for them to attend meetings. Consequently, student chapters find they need to reach out, recruit, and accommodate both an onsite and an online population of students. Chapters can use online meeting spaces, such as AdobeConnect or GoToMeeting, to host events so online students or others unable to attend a meeting can participate from a distance.

**Suggestions and Guidelines for Student Chapters and Their Leadership**

Ideally, chapter leaders need to focus their efforts on activities and building the chapter, and if possible, spend less time cutting through red tape. Since chapter sponsors and officers transition, the latter more than the former in most cases, chapters need

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Challenges Faced by Student Chapters</th>
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<td>Turnover in Leadership and Membership. Turnover due to graduations or relocations can bring chapter activity to a halt. New student leaders often are not aware of what forms they need to submit to STC each year to remain active and receive funding (see Suggestions and Guidelines for Student Chapters and Their Leadership), nor do they have access to a current list of student members in the area. STC has made improvements in the last year, consolidating forms and making them available on the Leadership Resources Web page, and providing online access to membership lists. Leaders also struggle to recruit new members</td>
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<tr>
<td>Community Achievement Award</td>
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<td>Community Pacesetter Award</td>
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“I had been looking for a technical writing internship for weeks, but was unable to find a single one through my school or through jobs listed elsewhere in the Denver area. Because of my student membership, I found the perfect internship for me! … In the technical communication industry, one that values experience as much as education, I know I am very fortunate to have this internship/job, and it wouldn’t have happened without the STC!”

—Claire H. Petras, STC Student Member, Rocky Mountain Chapter, University of Colorado Denver

January 2013
to keep the process of updating and reporting simple, and use consistent channels for communication—a one-stop shop so those who pick up the baton can get up to speed more quickly in their new roles and duties. Streamlining also will allow the chapters to focus on the most important aspects for students: engaging in activities that promote their understanding of issues in the field, and getting to know their colleagues and fellow members.

Other suggestions for keeping chapters healthy and members engaged:

- Use social media (blogs, Facebook, Twitter, etc.) to engage membership within a chapter or community
- Recruit students in other, but related, majors on your own campus
- Invite students who do not have a student chapter on their campus to participate with yours
- Remind students that the reduced student membership amounts to only $6.25 a month (i.e., $75 year)
- Network between other chapters and SIGs
- Consider submitting a budget to receive funding for chapter activities
- Solicit senior STC members to volunteer to speak at chapter meetings
- Include STC’s free, on-demand, archived seminars in meetings
- Participate at the Summit: volunteer to work, attend the socials
- Participate in group activities at local schools, businesses, and communities
- Be aware of STC awards, recognitions, and competitions and encourage members to enter
- Keep members involved after graduation: invite them to present at chapter meetings and to mentor new students

Getting Started with a Student Chapter

Not every institution has a student chapter, but a group of highly motivated student members may be interested in the possibility of creating and managing one. The good news is there is no fee for starting a chapter and the process for getting one started is as follows:

1. Have a minimum of five student members of STC
2. Follow guidelines for creating a student organization on your campus
3. Find a campus-related faculty or staff advisor
4. Review Leadership Resources on the STC website: Log into MySTC, on the menu under MySTC, Resources, click Leadership Resources
5. Complete and submit a Chapter Petition (found on the Leadership Resources page) with the names of the chapter members to STC at communities@stc.org
6. After the chapter has been established, submit the following documents to STC:
   a. List of leadership: name, position, and contact information
   b. U.S. Student Chapter Bylaws (see Leadership Resources page)
   c. Budget (optional, usually due in October, and found on Leadership Resources page)
7. Create a bank account and accounting system (optional). This will be done with the EIN provided after the STC Board approves the chapter formation.

Maintaining a Successful Student Chapter

A highly significant factor to success is planning events that engage your chapter’s members and help them network and grow as technical communicators. There are also other maintenance tasks that come with the responsibility of a healthy chapter. Review and follow U.S. laws and regulations for not-for-profit corporations (federal, state, and local). On the Leadership Resources page, read “Running a Community: Minimum Legal and Financial Requirements.” Familiarize yourself with the “Chapter Leaders Getting Started” guide also on the Leadership Resources page.

Periodically review your chapter bylaws and be sure they conform with provisions in the model student chapter bylaws template. Annually update your leadership list (i.e., name, position, and contact information) and send to communities@stc.org.

For those chapters interested in seeking STC funding support, write and submit an annual budget (on the Leadership Resources page, click Community Finances). Submit the chapter budget in October for January distribution. Funding is based on membership levels as of 31 August of each year. The chapter treasurer must submit an estimate of the chapter expenses (a budget) based on projected activities for the year. Also keep your eye out for Society announcements about budgeting deadlines and workshops when available.

Success comes from consistent effort and engagement, but with a motivated group of students, the good news is you can share the work involved in running, and the benefits of belonging to an STC student chapter.
Day Trips from Atlanta

BY ELIZABETH WARDEN | Member

THE 2013 STC SUMMIT will be held at the Hyatt Regency in the heart of downtown Atlanta, GA. There are wonderful places to visit in the Atlanta area that you can get to on a tank of gas. This article covers some great day trips to explore before or after your visit to Atlanta for the STC Summit.

Athens, GA (one hour and 30 minutes northeast of downtown Atlanta) is widely known around the South as the home of the University of Georgia Bulldogs. However, it’s more than a college town. Athens is where the B-52s and R.E.M. got their start, and it welcomes music enthusiasts to sample its variety of music clubs and bars that offer a taste of jazz, country, blues, and rock. “Must visits” include the world-famous 40 Watt Club and the Georgia Theatre.

On your way to Athens, be sure to stop by beautiful Chateau Elan in Braselton, GA (less than an hour north of downtown Atlanta), for a round of golf, to treat yourself to the spa, or to take a tour of the winery. Pack your golf clubs when you travel to Atlanta for the Summit to play a round at one of Chateau Elan’s two public golf courses: an 18-hole championship course and a par 3, 9-hole course. Need some leisure time after the busy Summit? Book one of Chateau Elan’s many relaxation treatments, such as a massage, a facial, a manicure, a body wrap—or one of each! Before leaving Chateau Elan, take a guided tour and tasting of its full-production winery, which includes a sampling of five wines and a souvenir wine glass.

On the other side of Atlanta, outside of Chattanooga in Lookout Mountain, Tennessee, is spectacular Ruby Falls (just over two hours northwest of downtown Atlanta). Ruby Falls is a 145-foot underground waterfall located 1,120 feet beneath Lookout Mountain. Take the guided cave tour to see Ruby Falls and learn about the history of how the waterfall was formed so far beneath the Earth’s surface. For the super adventurous, participate in the Ruby Falls ZIPStream to view Lookout Mountain from the treetops at Ruby Falls. The ZIPStream is an obstacle course suspended in the trees that includes bridges, walkways, and zip lines.

While you’re in Tennessee, stop by historic Chattanooga (two hours northwest of downtown Atlanta). History buffs will not want to miss this opportunity to visit the Chickamauga-Chattanooga National Military Park—the nation’s oldest and largest military park. The year 2013 is a special year; not only is it the 60th anniversary of STC, but it marks the 150th anniversary of the Civil War battles that were fought in the Chattanooga and Lookout Mountain area. There isn’t a better time to visit this historic landmark!

Chattanooga is also widely popular for whitewater rafting. Catering to both novice and experienced rafters, the Ocoee River offers the most popular rafting in Tennessee. It is divided into two rafting experiences: the Middle and the Upper Ocoee River. The Middle Ocoee River, America’s most popular whitewater river, is a five-mile stretch of over 20 rapids. The Upper Ocoee River, the site of the 1996 Olympic kayak competition, is a four-mile run that is only open for a limited time during the year. Each section of the Ocoee River is about one and a half hours of whitewater rafting thrills.

If a trip away from home means shopping to you, the North Georgia Premium Outlets in Dawsonville, Georgia (less than an hour north of downtown Atlanta), is the place to visit for over 140 outlet stores. Also in Dawsonville is the Amicalola Falls State Park, which sits on the Appalachian Trail. The state park is a great place for day hikes, ranging from 0.25 to 8.5 miles. The trails surround and offer breathtaking views of the tallest cascading waterfall in America east of the Mississippi River: Amicalola Falls. Many visitors pack a lunch and hike around this 729-foot waterfall to enjoy what is considered one of the Seven Natural Wonders of Georgia. Bring your bathing suit and hike the 0.6 mile Creek Trail to the base of Amicalola Falls for a swim in the Reflection Pool!

Enjoy your stay in Atlanta for the 2013 STC Summit, and if you get a chance be sure to venture out of Atlanta and take one of these day trips.
Getting Support from Your Supervisor

WOULD YOUR EMPLOYER be willing to pay at least part of the expenses of attending the Technical Communication Summit in Atlanta, Georgia, from 5–8 May? It couldn’t hurt to ask! Consider writing a memo to your supervisor that explains how you and your firm would benefit from your attendance. The following model is based on a memo that worked for its author. Feel free to modify it for use within your company.

Dear [your supervisor’s name]:

I understand that our company is cutting back on training costs and we are looking for ways to get the most for the money we spend in every area. There is a cost-effective professional education conference in May that will help [your company] reduce expenses in translation costs, structured authoring, project management of reports and publications, as well as several other areas.

I would like to attend the 2013 Technical Communication Summit in Atlanta, GA on 5–8 May, presented by the Society for Technical Communication. The Summit is packed with more than 80 sessions over the three full workdays with topics covering all aspects of technical writing, editing, project management, and publication production. The preliminary program is currently available online, and when the full schedule of sessions is released in February we can go over the list together to determine which ones will benefit the company most.

With most conferences, the challenge has always been to get to as many of the higher priority sessions as possible. That’s where the Summit is different! STC now includes SUMMIT@aClick in the registration fee. This is an online collection of the conference’s content. It’s like being able to bring the entire content of the conference back to share with the rest of the company. This increases the value of my participation tenfold. Not only does it capture the audio and visual presentations of the speakers, its content can be shared and revisited for a year after the conference.

Costs:
[List transportation costs, registration fee, cost of meals, and the price per night of the hotel room.]

The conference room rate at the conference hotel is $169.00 Single or Double, $179.00 triple or quad.

Summary of Benefits for [your company]:
With the current economic conditions, everyone at [your company] is being asked to do more and control costs wherever possible. This conference is a small investment in empowering me and others involved in [technical communication efforts] to do even more. The sessions will provide us with more knowledge of report production, editing, writing, management concepts, and government contracting. This knowledge will enable us to handle [a particular client or project] with more professionalism and confidence, which will reflect favorably on [your company]. And with SUMMIT@aClick, I will be able to pass on much of this information to coworkers—it provides me a recording of most of the sessions after the conference, so I can return to areas of interest over and over again as needed and share it with colleagues.

Thank you very much for considering this request.

For Director (two positions to be elected):
Deanne Levander
Michael Opsteegh
Ben Woelk

For Nominating Committee (two positions to be elected):
Phylise Banner
Andrea Wenger

For Director (two positions to be elected):

Congratulations to all of the candidates, and thanks to everyone who expressed an interest in running for office.

For President: Nicky Bleiel will automatically succeed from Vice President.

Candiates on the slate for the 2013 STC election:

For Vice President:
Kit Brown-Hoekstra
Paul Mueller

For Treasurer:
Jane Wilson
Brian Lindgren

The 2013 Society election is scheduled to begin at 9:00 AM EDT (GMT-4) on 11 March and end 22 March 2013 at 5:00 PM EDT (GMT-4). Please see www.stc.org/election for detailed information about the candidates and to access a question-and-answer area that you can use to ask questions of the candidates.

www.stc.org
STC Summit Preliminary Program

STC HAS RELEASED the preliminary program for the 2013 Summit. The sessions in this list include only the track and submitting speaker; there may be additional speakers in some sessions. Progressions, Project Showcase, and Leadership Day events are not yet included but will be listed in a future issue of Intercom. New sessions will be added as available.

Additional sessions will be added online until we are ready to switch the program to our Live Learning Center. At that point, you will see all speakers, titles, session descriptions, and speaker biographies.

If you are looking for the basic schedule of events for the Summit (e.g., times the Expo is open, meeting times, etc.) please see http://summit.stc.org/program-info/schedule-overview.

Track: Content Development and Delivery

- A Technical Writer's Trip to Hollywood, presented by Elisa Sawyer
- Baby Steps: Automated Publishing using Arbortext and SharePoint, presented by Rita Biromy
- Collaborating in DITA, presented by Paul Wlodarzczak
- Defining and Evaluating Success: Metrics for Information Architects, presented by Andrea Ames
- DITA Proof-of-Concept Publishing System, presented by Mato Limato
- Doc Sprints: The Ultimate in Collaborative Document Development, presented by Sarab Maddox
- Editing as an Extreme Sport, presented by Leah Guren
- Embedding User Assistance Using DITA, presented by Ray Gallon
- Key Principles and Practices for Communicating Science, presented by Carol LoSapio
- Multiple Roads to Knowledge Management, presented by Rhyne Armstrong
- Planning and Creating Engaging Infographics, presented by Michael Opsteegh
- Six Easy Ways to Control Your Localization Costs, presented by Bill Swallow
- Take Control of Your Content, presented by Jean-Luc Mazet
- Using Foreign-Accented Speech: To Localize or Not?, presented by Halcyon Lawrence

Track: Content Strategy and Design

- Big Content: Content Strategy as a Design Framework, presented by Rachel Bailie
- Collaborative Single-Source Development of Documentation and Training, presented by R.N. Homer Christensen
- Content Strategy for Mobile Devices, presented by Ann Rockley
- Defining and Evaluating Success: Metrics for Information Architects, presented by Andrea Ames
- Embedded User Assistance 101, presented by Scott Deloach
- From Technical Writer to Content Strategist, presented by Alan Porter
- Managing and Optimizing Unstructured-to-Structured Conversions, presented by Edna Elle
- The Content Life Cycle: A Strategic Compass, presented by Mollyt Barrett
- The 10 Golden Rules of Global Content Strategy, presented by Val Swisher
- Transforming Technical Content into a Business Asset, presented by Sarah O'Keefe

Track: Education and Training

- Create Learning that Lasts with Interact Documents, presented by Jamie Gillingwater
- Creating Video Tutorials in an Agile Environment, presented by Tom Johnson
- Massive Open Online Learning, presented by Phyllis Banner
- User Assistance, Tech Comm, and Learning, presented by Nicky Bleed

Track: People, Projects, and Business Management

- Bending without Breaking: Info Dev Flexibility in Agile, presented by Alyssa Fox
- Building Effective IA teams in Resource-Challenged Times, presented by Alyson Riley
- Documentation Thrives in an Agile Methodology, presented by Jenna Moore
- How to Build a Business Case and Influence, presented by Lisa Pietrangeli
- Less Pain, More Gain: Personality and Change Management, presented by Andrea Wegner

Supporting Customers: Onsite and Online, presented by Cate Valenzuela

Track: Professional Development

- A Marketing Communications Career: Making the Transition, presented by Victoria Koster-Lenhardt
- And Then There Was One … Documentation Team, presented by Kirsty Taylor
- Career Lessons I Learned from Selling Ginsu Knives, presented by Jack Molisani
- Empowering the Introvert Within: Becoming an Outstanding Leader, presented by Ben Wolk
- Interviewing SMEs: Covering the Bases and Hitting Homers, presented by Barbara Giannonna
- Staking Your Claim in the Social Media Frontier, presented by Laura Palmer

Track: User Experience and Usability

- Addicted to Meaning: Mental Models for Technical Communicators, presented by Kai Weber
- Customer Journey Maps: Visualizing an Engaging Customer Experience, presented by Donn DeBoard
- Effectively Communicating UI and Interaction Design, presented by Karen Bachmann
- Formalizing the Technical Communication and User Experience Relationship, presented by Lori Fisher
- Game On! Creating User Experience for Gamified Products, presented by Marta Rauch
- Purposes, Personas, Conversations, presented by Ginny Redish
- Storytelling the Results of Heuristic Evaluation, presented by Carol Barnum
- Useful, Saleable, and Buildable: The Role of UX, presented by Michael Hughes

Track: Web Design and Development

- Beyond the Bleeding Edge, presented by Neil Perlin
- Every Page is Page One, presented by Mark Baker
- Going Mobile? How to Optimize Content and Format, presented by Mike Hamilton
- How to Build a Referral Machine, presented by Donnie Ormsby
- Make High-Quality Voice Recordings with Simple Equipment, presented by Robert Hershenson
- Make Static Online Content Into Live Working Data, presented by Timothy Garrand
- Screen Video: Best Practices, Regardless of the Tool, presented by Matthew Pierce

January 2013
Chinese Drywall

BY DEREK G. ROSS | Member

JACKSON LARAMIE works for Pineway Construction, a small general contracting firm in Birmingham, AL. He manages their scheduling; writes estimates, bids, and proposals; and, when needed, helps out in the field as an extra pair of arms. He has a Master’s certificate from a small technical writing program and is happy to put his skills to use in a practical way. Even though recent economic difficulties have cut into Pineway’s working capital, they still manage to maintain a profitable business, largely due to their ability to get work done on time and under budget. He leaves most of the purchasing to Jackson and spends his time in the field working alongside two of Pineway’s other full-timers, Carlos Cantu and Harold “Hank” Bartleby. The fourth full-time employee, Jenna Vargos, is Pineway’s in-house designer and architect.

Pineway Construction has recently taken on contracts for a series of home modification projects involving putting up new drywall in several existing structures. In addition, Pineway has been contracted to build eight houses as part of the new Waterfall Trails subdivision on the outskirts of Birmingham.

Most of the purchasing for these projects is complete—one of the reasons Pineway has historically been so successful is they do their purchasing in bulk, when they can find items discounted and on sale. The last major item needed for the series of projects is drywall, and Kent found the mother of a deal. A warehouse on the outskirts of town was abandoned by the previous owners and its contents sold at auction. Although he usually leaves the purchasing to Jackson, Kent happened to be in the area, saw a deal, and took it—Kent purchased enough pallets of drywall to keep Pineway building for the next year. The purchase cost him most of the company’s remaining working capital, but it was worth it: the projects such a purchase enabled would pay off in spades.

Kent paid to have the drywall delivered to his own storage space and went back to work. Days later, Jackson went over to Pineway’s warehouse to inventory their wiring materials. He wanted to make sure everything was in order before they started their series of home modification projects—the deadlines were tight and there would be no time for looking for good deals once construction was under way. As he opened the door, the faint odor of rotten eggs wafted out. He saw the piles of newly delivered drywall and felt an immediate sense of disbelief—this was the good deal Kent had told him about? Jackson had seen local news reports about recent construction problems and a quick look at one of the top sheets confirmed his suspicions: Knauf Plasterboard Tianjin—he remembered the name from reading an article on www.todaysgreenconstruction.com. Kent had bought a warehouse full of Chinese Drywall. Jackson decided to look up information on the drywall problem online, but he already knew they were in trouble.

Chinese Drywall

From the Birmingham Business Journal he found that drywall imported into the United States from China from 2005–2008 as a result of housing booms caused by natural disasters such as Hurricane Katrina is causing problems (Cooper, 2009). A 2009 article from USA Today informed him that the drywall emits gasses which corrode home electronics, such as air conditioning and refrigerator coils, computers, wiring, and copper tubing, and emits the odor of rotten eggs (Schmitt, 2009). From CNN he learned that these effects are the result of the emission of “extraordinarily high” levels of hydrogen sulfide, and, in addition to damage to sensitive electronics and home...
infrastructures such as electrical and plumbing systems, residents of at least 42 states have reported sinus and upper respiratory problems, headaches, and nosebleeds—symptoms which disappear when they move out of their homes (Phillips, 2011a, 2011b). He was concerned to read that, despite these reports, in early 2011 the U.S. Centers for Disease Control (CDC) made the decision to not study the long-term effects of exposure to the Chinese-made drywall, as such a study would require extensive time and resources without the possibility of yielding valuable results.

Jackson read a directive from the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission and the Department of Housing and Urban Development, published 2 April 2010, calling for the removal of any drywall which could possibly be a problem, all fire safety devices (such as smoke alarms), all electrical components and wiring (which includes even outlets and circuit breakers), and all gas piping and fire suppression sprinkler systems. From experience, Jackson knew that such removal costs are understandably significant, so he wasn’t surprised to find a website called www.defective-chinese-drywall-lawsuit.com and information on the Birmingham Business Journal’s website that told him scenarios created as a result of the installation and subsequent removal of Chinese Drywall, such as health effects, damage to property, unethical building practices, and fraudulent liability agreements, have led to class-action lawsuits directed at builders, suppliers, and manufacturers of the faulty drywall.

**Decisionmaking Time**

Jackson thought about what he had learned and decided he had to confront Kent. On Thursday evening, he and Kent sat down to talk, and Jackson told him what he had discovered. Kent was upset. He looked troubled and thanked Jackson for bringing the problem to his attention. He said he needed to think and they both went home for the day.

A week passed, and Kent said nothing. They were due to start their first renovation project the following Monday, so Jackson asked him what he intended to do about the problem. Kent responded, “Jackson, we have an obligation to our customers to get this work done as fast as and efficiently as possible. I know we can’t use that drywall in the construction we’re doing for Waterfall Trails, but I think we’ll be fine if we use it in the renovation projects I spent all of our available money on that board, and we can’t just return it. We’ve got to make up the cost somehow.” Jackson started to interrupt, but Kent cut him off. “Jack, we can’t afford to take the loss. I know that stuff is bad news, but if we don’t use much of it and paint it well, I doubt anyone will really notice. If they do, you’ll just have to tell them that you didn’t know what you were getting when you purchased the stuff in the first place. Legally, the company that made it’s going to have to clean up the mess, so if anything bad happens we’re off the hook. I know I’ve got my wife and kids to think about, and so do you. So do Carlos and Hank, and Jenna’s got her whole career tied up with us right now. If you say anything, we’ll lose these projects, and we just can’t afford to do that. Let’s get these renovations done, fill up the coffers, and line up more jobs. If we need to make it right, we’ll go back and fix it later. Heck, we can probably even get paid to replace the wall we installed in the first place. I don’t like it any more than you, but this is what needs to happen if we all want to keep our jobs. Now get back to work.” With that, Kent walked off.

Jackson knew that Kent was right—they couldn’t afford to track down new jobs, and besides, they were already under contract and had taken upfront payments to buy supplies. All that money was gone, and they couldn’t pay it back. He also knew that Kent had a point about the drywall—he had bought it honestly, without knowing what he was getting, and maybe the clients would never find out.

Jackson didn’t like that Kent was setting him up to be the fall guy, but he knew that as Pineway’s only writer he was the one whose name was on everything. He wrote the bids, he signed the contracts, he did (most of) the purchasing. That really rankled— he knew he couldn’t make a mistake like this, but now he had to find a way to solve the issue.

Is Jackson being overly solicitous if he feels that Kent’s solutions are unethical and action must be taken? Does Jackson’s background in technical communication help him out? Is it his responsibility to worry about the client’s well-being if they aren’t doing their own research on an issue that has been widely described in the news media? If he truly cares about the well-being of the other company employees, how might he address the situation so that no one employee of Pineway Construction’s team is unduly impacted by his decision? So that no clients are negatively affected?

**REFERENCES**


Mark Your Calendar
Organization events across the globe

1 28–31 Jan
Annual Reliability and Maintainability Symposium (RAMS) 2013 will be held at Rosen Shingle Creek Resort in Orlando, FL, 28–31 January. This year’s theme is “Reliability, the Key to a Better Bottom Line.” For more information, contact:
RAMS
+1 (603) 863-2832
www.rams.org

2 14–18 Feb
The 2013 American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) Annual Meeting will take place at the Hynes Convention Center and nearby hotels in Boston, MA, from 14–18 February. For more information, please contact:
AAAS
+1 (202) 326-6450
meetings@aaas.org
www.aaas.org/meetings

3 7–8 Mar
The 2013 Mid-Atlantic Technical Communication Conference and Workshops: Sharpening Your Personal Brand, hosted by the STC Philadelphia Metro Chapter, takes place 7–8 March at the Giant Conference Center in Willow Grove, PA. For more information, please contact:
STC-PMC
www.stcpmc.org/conference

4 3–7 Apr
The American Society for Information Science and Technology (ASIS&T) will hold the IA Summit in Baltimore, MD. For more information, contact:
ASIS&T
+1 (301) 587-8570
conference@ispi.org
www.ispi.org/AC2013

5 14–17 Apr
The International Society for Performance Improvement (ISPI) will hold its Performance Improvement Conference at the Silver Legacy Resort in Reno, Nevada. For more information, contact:
ISPI
+1 (301) 587-8570
conference@ispi.org
www.ispi.org/AC2013

6 17–19 Apr
The American Society for Indexing (ASI) will be holding its annual conference at the Hotel Contessa in San Antonio, TX. For more information, contact:
ASI
conference@asindexing.org
www.asindexing.org/

7 5–8 May
The Society for Technical Communication celebrates its 60th anniversary with its annual Technical Communication Summit. The 2013 Summit takes place in the Hyatt Regency in Atlanta, GA. For more information, contact:
STC
stc@stc.org
http://summit.stc.org

* STC-related event

F.Y.I. lists information about nonprofit ventures only. Please send information to intercom@stc.org.
THE FIRST TIME I picked up a camera and took a photo, I knew it would be a lifelong passion. My first “real” camera came from my grandparents, who saw my enthusiasm and gave me the camera as an early graduation gift at the start of my senior year in high school. I used that camera, a Canon AE-1 Program, until 2001, when I switched to a Nikon N90s.

Photography gave me a way to interact with other people and gain social confidence in a non-threatening manner. I’ve always enjoyed the learning aspect of photography, such as which lens to use in low-light situations and when natural light is best compared to using flash. Along the way, I’ve also learned about leading lines, composition, rule of thirds, and exposure. I’ve also learned the Adobe Creative Suite of products, and that knowledge has had applications both in and out of work. I’ve instructed students at Portland State University in the Design Standard programs (Acrobat, Photoshop, Illustrator, and InDesign) and also updated product catalogs and marketing pieces as an emergency “creative” resource at more than one employer.

When I first started dating the man who became my husband, one of our shared interests was photography. The house we bought after we married had to have one major “non-negotiable” requirement outside of the usual options: it had to have a room we could easily convert into a darkroom. We bulk-rolled our own film canisters (often with 40 frames instead of the standard 36-exposure roll), printed up our own prints, and eventually had enough equipment to develop our film.

That all changed when cameras went digital. The darkroom sat unused, the equipment got put away, and the darkroom was turned back into a laundry room (we moved laundry into the garage as part of the darkroom conversion). And as the digital camera technology got better and started appearing in mobile phones, cameras started appearing in nontraditional areas such as concerts.

I’ve always gone to concerts, but it wasn’t until about 2008 that I started bringing a camera to capture the concert artists. Most venues don’t allow “cameras with interchangeable lenses”—a category that includes digital SLRs. I have a concert camera (a Nikon Coolpix P7000) and a digital SLR (a Nikon D600), so I’m covered no matter what the camera policy. I will often email or phone the venue to confirm the camera policy before leaving for the concert, because I don’t want to get my camera confiscated permanently or leave an expensive camera in my vehicle in a parking garage.

At first, my goal was just to get one good photo so I could use it in my scrapbooks. Now, thanks to social media, I follow concert photographers on Twitter and Google+ and regularly get inspired by the work they post. Even though I don’t usually get more than 8 to 10 “good” photos when I use a digital point-and-shoot camera, I use every concert as an opportunity to increase my knowledge of focus, composition, and lighting. There is a lot that goes into taking a photo that is visually stunning and conveys the concert experience. That experience helps when I do get to use my digital SLR to take concert photos. Those are the photos I get that are really clear, crisp, and full of detail and movement.

In the past year at work, sharing my concert photos with some of my coworkers has increased my visibility within the local campus. I was invited and accepted the opportunity to become a member of the Employee Activities Committee, which means I photograph all local employee events and some special employer events. When the senior executive team visited our campus, I was there. When the local sheriff’s office collected teddy bears for a teddy bear drive or the foster parent group collected children’s toys for Christmas, I was there. I even took pictures of our most recent employee event, the 3rd Annual Rock, Paper, Scissors Tournament. After each event, I write up a quick couple paragraphs, post-process the photos, and send the event details to Employee Communications. The events get posted on our intranet as a campus spotlight.

Photography is such a big part of my life—in my marriage, in my hobbies, and in my work. I can’t imagine a life without photographs.

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