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Television Review

Andy Richter Controls the Universe

By Matthew Nankin

This season marks the return of the Fox television network's, *Andy Richter Controls the Universe*. The show is of particular interest to technical writers as the main character (Andy Richter) is employed as a technical writer at a large corporation.

Although some technical writers might be encouraged that the profession is finally gaining some long overdue attention, a closer examination of the show reveals that the role of technical writing is no more than background for typical situation comedy antics.

For example, when the department needs to hire a new technical writer, any mention of qualifications or experience is omitted. The manager of the department, Jessica (as played by Paget Brewster), hires a new writer based strictly on a review of resumes without any interview. Instead of learning how a newly hired technical writer adjusts on the job, we spend the rest of the show with Andy at a sensitivity training class due to an inappropriate remark made to the new hire.

In another episode, Andy is scheduled to go to the company's offices in France. Although this would be an excellent opportunity to compare and contrast the different working conditions of American versus European technical writers, we spend most of the show in the air ducts of the office building as Andy chases after Jessica's lost cat. Andy's irresponsibility with the cat costs his trip to Europe.

When Andy's closest co-worker and illustrator, Byron (played by Jonathan Slavin) must leave early several days in a row, the show has an excellent opportunity to showcase the tribulations of a technical writer left alone on a project. Instead, we are left to explore the reason for Byron's excessive absenteeism—his newly adopted cult religion.

Beyond these inane plot lines, the basic working tasks of a technical writer are completely ignored. Andy has yet to use the keyboard or mouse on his laptop computer, send or receive email, attend any type of project meeting, or meet with a subject matter expert. Well into the second season, Andy has not produced any type of hard copy document or online help system nor even written a project outline (although he did once sabotage Byron's illustration of a torpedo).

For technical writers, the show is a major disappointment. For the more general audience, *Andy Richter Controls the Universe* has the potential to set the public perception of our profession back twenty years. An effort should have been made to contact a local chapter of the STC and request assistance with an accurate depiction of technical writers. Instead, millions of people remain ignorant regarding the field of technical communication and a chance to enlighten them has been squandered for some cheap laughs and silly story lines.

Matthew Nankin is a Senior Member of the STC and television critic. You can reach him at mmgnankin@yahoo.com.

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President's Message

Coping with Change... How Are You Doing?

By Taryn Light

"Life is not only a challenge... it's an opportunity."

Change is Natural

It's spring and changes are happening all around us. Some changes are visible—the scars of winter are gone and the flowers and grass look our way and smile at us. With each change of season in New England, we rummage through storage boxes of clothes and try on our next season's garments. For some, change is welcome. For most, however, change is uncomfortable (and I'm not referring to the jeans that fit last summer and are now a bit snug!).

Some Thrive on Change

A friend and colleague of mine loves change so much that he moves the furniture around his home every few months. This is probably good for his children, because they are growing up with change and naturally adjusting to it. I have another dear friend whose father was in the military so she moved around the world many, many times growing up. She learned to adjust to change so that when she became unemployed, working as a contractor was an adjustment that she could make gracefully. And there's my sister. Even as a little child, my sister moved the furniture in her bedroom at the end of every semester. We have a joke in our family that my sister loves change so much that she has it in her will to move her tombstone every 2 years. We can all quickly embrace change when exciting, positive news enters our lives such as a marriage, birth, new job, or winning the lottery. So sometimes, we like change.

Most Dislike Change

We can applaud those who love change and not understand them at the same time. I would venture to say that even for the people who thrive on change, if the change is negative and occurs out of their control, they don't like it either. So here we are. Everyone, on occasion, dislikes change. Change happens all around us—and within us—every day. We are getting older and our family members are getting older. We are working on a job or working to get a job. If there is no change in our lives, then we are not truly living. Sometimes change is clearly unwanted, such as the death of a loved one, the dissolution of a friendship, or the loss of job security.

Changes with Employment

A year ago, another colleague of ours was a manager a large company and had a dozen writers working for her. Today, she and one other employee are responsible for writing and updating all the documentation on time. Due to the economy, employers are demanding more work of fewer people in less time. This is a difficult change for everyone. For those who are unemployed, the struggle with change is in our lifestyles and our goals. We seek advice and leads from every source available. These are difficult times, indeed.

The Personal Side of Change

Well, we've got to admit that sometimes we like change and other times we don't. The key to surviving change is our attitude and the approach to how we adjust. Even subtle summer leaves are pliable and toss in the wind without breaking or disconnecting from the tree. As winter approaches, however, these same leaves become brittle, break, separate from the tree, and die. There is a lot we can't control. But there is a lot we *can* control. And controlling how we adjust to change is within us.

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Take Action Right Now!

I challenge you to take action now. You are a special person; there has never been, nor will there be, another you. And because you are unique, only you can develop your special talents. You may need help along the way, but only you can take the action to carry out your plan. Write down your goals and create a personal plan of action. Give it all you've got. Years ago I wrote a poem called "[A Brass Ring](#)" to help encourage a friend who became divorced, separated from his three children, lost his job, watched as his father was dying, and suffered from deep despair. I share it with you as an encouragement. Remember, you are very special. Give life your very best!

Taryn Light, President of the STC Boston Chapter, is the Content Solutions Manager at ArchiText in Methuen, MA. You can reach her at taryn.light@verizon.net.

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User Feedback

Get More from Your Readers (Comments, That is)

By Saul Carliner

As most organizations currently use them, Reader's Comment Forms primarily serve as Reader's Complaint Forms. Most just ask readers to report errors in the text, citing location of the error, describing the error, and suggesting a change.

What a waste!

Reader's Comment Forms potentially can provide readers' feedback on all aspects of a technical publication. But because the forms typically do not ask for the feedback, readers don't provide it. Furthermore, because most technical communication groups rely almost exclusively on inbound comments (that is, comments submitted when readers choose to do so rather than when we ask for the feedback), the comments typically provide distorted feedback, usually representing extremes of views (and then, mostly negative).

So how can you make your Reader's Comment Forms work more effectively for you? Read on.

Often, the way that readers feel about a communication product affects their performance with it and their ultimate acceptance of the product, service, or concept that it describes. By asking a broad range of questions about the communication product, you also receive some insights into readers' general feelings about the product that you support.

When formulating the questions for a Reader's Comment Form, consider asking the ones that are described in the following sections.

The First Questions — An Overall Assessment

The first two questions seek users' overall impressions of the communication product.

1. In a word, how would you describe this communication product? _____
2. Using a number, rate the overall quality of this communication product.

1	2	3	4	5
Dreadful		Neutral		Terrific

Logic behind questions 1 and 2: Asks users to express in words and numbers their response to your documentation. Words provide a mirror into their real feelings, while numbers provide a quantifiable, trackable measurement.

By asking for both words and numbers, you can also assess whether the numbers are correct. For example, if a reader describes a communication product as "Extremely useful," but gives it a numeric rating of 1, the reader probably transposed the scales when responding.

Also, by using extreme words to represent the extremes of the scale, readers can better differentiate among the numbers and the novelty factor of the words interests them in responding.

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Finally, note the term *communication product*. This is a generic term for a published work. Feel free to replace it with a term that better describes your communication product, such as *user's guide*, *help system*, *tutorial*, or *reference*.

Questions 3 through 5: Assessing Usability

The next three questions explore various aspects of the usability of the technical communication product.

3. How do you use this communication product?

Choose one:

- a. I read it from beginning to end.
- b. I only read the sections that pertain to my immediate needs.
- c. I only read the sections that pertain to my job.

Logic behind the question: This question gives you a sense of how people really use the communication product. Use this knowledge when designing future editions.

4. How easily can you find information in this communication product?

1	2	3	4	5
I can't		Average — usually after a few moments		Easily — within seconds

Logic behind the question: One of users' biggest complaints and one of the most extensive areas of research is how quickly and easily readers can find information. Asking for feedback on this issue tells you whether readers can easily find information in your communication product.

5. When you actually try the instructions that are described in this communication product, how easily can you follow them?

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all.		Sometimes I can, but occasionally I find the content confusing		With great ease

Logic behind the question: Readers often complain that the content confuses them. Get a sense of how much by asking about it.

Question 6: Gauging Learning

The next question, a two-parter, asks users to assess how much they have learned from the technical communication product.

6. How well did you understand the product *before* reading this guide?

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all		A bit		Thoroughly

After reading this guide?

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all		A bit		Thoroughly

Logic behind the question: Find out whether readers feel that the communication product is

helping them to better understand the product.

Questions 7 and 8: Open Feedback

The last two questions seek answers to open questions about the communication product.

7. The best aspect of this communication product is: _____

8. If we were to change one aspect of this communication product, what would it be? _____

Logic behind the last two questions: The last two questions provide qualitative feedback on the communication product and help prioritize work in a revision. Items that are mentioned on several responses warrant attention. For example, if 10 readers respond that the examples are excellent, then you should probably incorporate examples like these in similar communication products. Similarly, if 18 readers comment that they have difficulty finding information in the guide, then you should probably strengthen the section titles, table of contents, running headers, and index in a future edition.

Saul Carliner is a visiting assistant professor at the City University of Hong Kong. His books include *Designing E-learning, An Overview of Online Learning, and Techniques for Technical Communicators*. He is a fellow and past international president of the STC, and a former member of the Boston chapter.

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Program Report

Making Documentation Accessible

By Anne Kinsella

Despite temperatures hovering around zero degrees, STC Boston Chapter members and their guests filled the ballroom at the Sheraton Inn in Lexington on Wednesday, January 22. Mike Paciello, President of [The Paciello Group](#), presented ways to make documentation more accessible for the disabled. He defined accessibility as, "whether something is usable by a person with a disability."



Mike Paciello

His lecture raised awareness for some, and it combined instruction with warnings of upcoming changes. "The Web and the Internet have made it possible for individuals with disabilities to get around. In 1998, Congress amended the Rehabilitation Act to require federal agencies to make their electronic and information technology accessible to people with disabilities," said Paciello.

To demonstrate the difficulties of those facing disabilities, Paciello requested a volunteer from the audience and asked him to remove his coat. When Paciello asked the volunteer to put the coat back on, Paciello observed that the volunteer put his right arm into his right sleeve first. The volunteer was asked to remove his jacket again and put it on left sleeve first. "He looked at it like it should help him out. It's about attitude," said Paciello.

The volunteer was able to put his coat on with more difficulty than before. "You can still accomplish the task. You will make the sacrifice. We don't think about users with disabilities. We don't think they use hi-tech but they have been using it since the 60's. How do you think Stephen Hawking has been getting around?" asked Paciello.

Some of the problems with documentation accessibility were outlined:

- Small print, poor format
- Poor choice of colors
- Graphics without text descriptions or captions

There are approximately 50 million disabled citizens in the United States, making this group the largest single minority population in this country. There are not enough people out there to raise awareness about documentation accessibility. The crux of the problem is to force companies to code to standards.

Federal laws have been rewritten to allow individuals to work and still to have their benefits. Otherwise it would be advantageous to stay on welfare, according to Paciello. "There are now disabled workers in every company you can think of," said Paciello.



Mike Paciello

Section 508, a mandate that supports accessibility for people with disabilities, was enacted to eliminate barriers in information technology, to make available new opportunities for people with disabilities, and to encourage development of technologies that will help achieve these goals. "Focus today has expanded beyond the Web where accessibility is concerned. The Internet and multimedia have changed the notion of having a

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Mike Paciello

disability," said Paciello.

The law applies to all federal agencies when they develop, procure, maintain, or use electronic and information technology. "The biggest IRS problem is that disabled people can sue them, because their forms are not accessible," said Paciello.

The primary reason that Web sites are not accessible is lack of usability testing involving people with disabilities. The three key areas are usefulness, effectiveness, and learn ability, according to Paciello.

Some available resources that provide more information about usability include:

- <http://www.access-board.gov/>
- <http://www.section508.gov/>
- <http://www.webable.com/>
- <http://www.webaim.com/>

Questions from the audience were encouraged. "You can look to see how to code it but you don't have information on how to design it," asked P. J. Gardner of Arlington. "We are trying. We have trainers going into companies," answered Paciello.

The event was sponsored by Northeastern University. Assistant Dean and Director, Rose Doherty, and Consultant and Advisor, Neil Duane, were available before and after the presentation, to explain Northeastern's [Technical Writing Program](#).

Doherty started the new interactive design graduate certificate program that focuses on accessibility. "A certificate can be obtained by taking classes online or through classroom study. Career counseling is also available," added Doherty.



Mike Paciello

View the [Making Documentation Accessible photo gallery](#).

Anne Kinsella, a graduate of Northeastern University, is a freelance writer working out of her home in Littleton, MA. She can be reached at annek@pop.net.

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Director/Sponsor Message

Interesting Times, Interesting Measures

By Rahel Anne Bailie

We've been living in "interesting" times, as the saying goes, and many of us feel that we've had about as much interest as we can tolerate, thank you very much. Chapter meeting attendance has been down and the popularity of technical presentations has decreased, while the popularity of career cafes and career management days has increased. In any conversation between three technical communicators, at least one is unemployed, about to be unemployed, or thinking about a career change.

So after attending the first STC board meeting of 2003, I have returned with renewed hope about the employment scene and have chosen to pass along a little good news to start the year off. Between meeting sessions, we (board members from the various corners of North America) greet one another with the usual gambit, "Hi, how have you been? How's business?" We trade notes on the health of our local chapters, the chapters in our region, and the status of our own employment situations. My conclusion is that things are getting better.

My optimism is cautious. Companies tend to stay battered down and their willingness to spend on technical communication is a tenuous commitment, at best. Some companies are outsourcing their work. Others are looking for writers to work at bargain-basement salaries. A number of companies are looking outside of North America for their technical communication needs. Yet despite these trends, I hear stories that encourage me. A writer mentions that her temporary contract is rolling over to regular employee status. A contractor has lined up work for the first time in months. Someone else mentions that her company is stabilizing and may add a new person during the coming year. Demand seems to be on the rise.

The job market won't be the same as the heyday of the 1990s. In fact, the job market may never look the same again. It may get better, but in a different way, a changed way. How we cope with those changes will indicate our success in responding to the new marketplace. Are we willing to look beyond our core skills to our extended skill sets? Can we look at the trends and determine how we can fit? If we've let our skills fall behind, are we ready to do what it takes to catch up? Can we make the switch to being free agents? Do we have a personal "brand" that identifies us? Are we broadening our horizons in what we read, in where we look for contacts, with whom we network? In other words, do we know how to re-invent ourselves for this new market? Are we willing to learn?

This column is far too short to be helpful in setting out a roadmap for participating in the recovering economy. Besides, there are a vast number of existing resources available for the taking: Fast Company (<http://www.fastcompany.com/>), Career Lab (<http://www.careerlab.com/>), and Career Intelligence (<http://www.career-intelligence.com/>) are just a few of the online resources that turned up as the result of a simple web search. The idea is to actually have a roadmap, to study the new landscape, and to determine where you want to go and how you're going to get there. The rest, as they say, is a matter of interest.

Rahel Anne Bailie is the STC Region 7 Director/Sponsor. You can reach her at rahel@bailie.com.

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Society SIGs

Taking the "Dis" out of "Disabilities": Special Needs SIG Seeks Support

By Dan Voss

Although the STC membership renewal process has passed its February 28th deadline, you can still sign up for membership in Special Interest Groups (SIGs). The Special Needs SIG (SNSIG) is still looking for new members. The SNSIG's twin mission is to assist technical communicators with disabilities in the practice of our profession and to provide all technical communicators with information that will help make our communication products more accessible to users with disabilities. A detailed mission statement is available at the Web site.

The SNSIG has already made significant progress:

- A comprehensive Web site (see <http://www.stcsig.org/sn/index.shtml>)
- An online newsletter (first edition is posted at <http://www.stcsig.org/sn/newsletter.shtml>)
- Extensive support to the 49th STC Conference, including publication of *Guidelines for Persons with Special Needs* and an *Addendum* thereto
- A successful progression and several articles in the *Proceedings* (conference materials available at <http://www.stc-orlando.org/prodev/49notes/SNC.asp>).

But there is much yet to do, and to accomplish it, the SNSIG needs more people. We are looking for Active Members to join our initiatives. Additionally, we are seeking Patrons, whose affiliation will help the SNSIG secure the budget that it needs to fulfill its objectives.

To join the Special Needs SIG, download the SIG sign-up form from http://www.stc.org/PDF_Files/sigform.pdf and submit it directly to the Society Office. In order to be added to the SNSIG's newsletter and/or listserv without delay, contact daniel.w.voss@lmco.com or jvinegar@myranch.com.

Editor's Note: You can also get involved in the Boston Chapter's [Special Needs SIG](#).

Dan Voss is leader of the SNSIG and a senior member of the Orlando Chapter.

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Society Elections

Kitty Aughey for Society Nominating Committee

By Kitty Aughey

Hello, members of Region 1.

I have moved to Tucson, Arizona and I am now a member of the Southern Arizona chapter. It is a wonderful group! But, I do miss all the people that I met, and I enjoyed talking with you when I was your Director-Sponsor. It was one of the happiest jobs that I have ever had.

I am an Associate Fellow of STC; two-term chapter president of the Rochester, New York chapter; editor of the STC Chapter Handbook; and Director-Sponsor of Region 1 for the past three years.

Why the bio? I am running for the Society Nominating Committee against incredibly talented opponents, and I hope you will consider voting for me. My full resume will be printed in *Intercom* in the March issue. Thanks for listening.

No matter whom you choose, please remember to vote in the Society elections.

You can contact Kitty Aughey at kaughey@cox.net.

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Society Elections

Support Sandi Harner for Second Vice President

By Sandi Harner



The position of second vice president of STC is a very important one, because the person elected automatically becomes first vice president, then president. I would appreciate your vote for second vice president of STC.

My experience with STC began in 1984, when I became a member. In 1985, I developed the technical and professional communication major for Cedarville University where I have now taught for more than twenty years. In 1988, I chartered the Cedarville University Student chapter, which I have advised since its beginning. The value that I have received from my membership in STC is immeasurable. Through chapter meetings, publications, and regional and annual conferences, I have learned so much while developing a professional network as well as a network of friends.

I began my involvement at the international level in 1992 as manager of Sigma Tau Chi. That position quickly led to manager of the Jay R. Gould Award, judging for the Ken Caird Student Article Competition, reviewer of proposals for the STC Annual Conference, and onsite judge for the International Technical Publications Competition. I am currently serving on the STC Board in my fourth year as Assistant to the President for Academic and Research Programs. In that capacity, I am responsible for eight committees.

I was named Fellow in 2001, received the Jay R. Gould Award for Excellence in Teaching Technical Communication, and named Associate Fellow in 1996.

As full Professor at Cedarville University, I have directed the technical and professional communication program since its beginning. My responsibilities, in addition to teaching a full course load, include developing curriculum, securing and supervising fulltime and adjunct faculty, advising students, supervising independent studies, placing and supervising student internships, and advising the STC student chapter.

In addition, I have served as an independent consultant, contract writer, and trainer since 1976. In 1997, I received the STC Faculty Internship Grant and worked as a Communications Manager in a technical marketing communication firm. In 2002, I co-authored *Technical Marketing Communication*, part of the Technical Communication Series published by Allyn & Bacon/Longman.

For almost twenty years, my passion has been to prepare young people to make a significant contribution to the profession of technical communication. That role has kept me focused on core competencies, emerging technologies, and communities of practice. My current position on the STC board for the past four years has provided many opportunities to work at the Society level with initiatives such as research grants and special opportunities grants, as well as chapter-level activities in helping to develop mentoring guidelines and education committees.

In the last few years, the growth of communities of practice has broadened our traditional definition of technical communication. This is evidenced by the significant growth in the STC SIGs, which now number more than 20 with a total membership of 26,441. If we are to be effective as the leading professional organization for technical communication, then we must actively embrace those non-traditional groups such as technical marketing communicators, usability experts, instructional designers, Web designers, and others who make up the workforce of today's technical communicators. The challenge is to help the employers and employees alike to perceive them as the technical communicators they are.

I believe that all these experiences prepare me to fulfill the responsibilities of the second vice president of STC, as well as first vice president, and finally the president. The Academic Vice President, my Dean, and my Department Chair have pledged their full support should I be elected second vice president. This support will

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be evidenced by a decreased teaching load as well as financial support for the travel involved in the position.

When it is time to vote in the STC election, please take the time to go online or mark your ballot and vote for Sandi Harner for STC Second Vice President.

You can learn more about Sandi Harner at <http://www.sandiharner.com/>.

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Society Elections

Suzanna Laurent for Second Vice President

Laurent Shares Her Vision for STC

By Suzanna Laurent



While visiting Detroit's Henry Ford Museum, I learned about Ford and the automobile that he made so successful. Many people have the mistaken idea that Henry Ford was an inventor, but Ford did not invent the automobile. He didn't even "invent" the assembly line.

So what did Henry Ford do? He learned from other people's experiences as well as his own. He took risks. He saw failure as a lesson, and he applied everything that he learned to improve the product, the process, and the policies that shaped the American automobile industry. In short, he was a great *innovator*. And because he was so willing to share the lessons that he learned, he became an inspiration to many others.

I am running for second vice president because in my own way, I want to do as Henry Ford did. He wanted to "learn from other people's experiences as well as his own." I want to use the lessons that I have learned in 25 years of management and leadership positions to create

solutions that will ensure that STC becomes an organization that is vital to the diverse careers of technical communicators.

One innovative thing that I did as a director-sponsor (1999-2002) was to attend conferences and give chapter programs in every region to meet our members and listen to their ideas. As a result, I have presented 103 conference sessions, leadership workshops, and chapter programs in locations from Toronto to Hawaii. In addition, I have written 30 articles that have been published over 500 times in STC newsletters. This "listening tour" instilled a greater understanding of the unique challenges facing us, some of which are addressed in my articles.

While serving as director-sponsor, I gained a thorough understanding of the issues and concerns about STC at many levels. Working individually with leaders and other members is an invaluable experience that is crucial to being the most effective leader in the "presidential chain of offices."

Ford also "took risks." Failing to be innovative and leaving things at the "status quo" is a risky business for STC and technical communicators. We must make it part of our role as technical communicators to show the value that we add. We must continue to learn more, do more, and be more. It is important that STC become the "premier" organization for technical communicators. One way that we can do that is by listening to what our members want, because the organization that best meets the needs of its members is the one that retains its members and attracts new ones.

Ford "saw failure as a lesson, and applied everything he learned to improve . . ." During the process of defining STC's brand, we discovered where we were making our mistakes and that we were not being perceived as we wanted to be, so we've made changes to correct some of those misconceptions. As we seek new ways to prosper, we must improve our processes and the quality of our member services.

STC members work in more diversified environments than ever before—with experience, skills, and talents that vary widely. Nevertheless, we share the desire to be recognized for our contributions to the workplace. By more proactively promoting technical communication, I believe that STC can make a difference in the careers of our members.

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There are other important strategies to consider as we seek to progress. To learn more about my experience and what I have contributed pertaining to these strategies, read the expanded version of this article at <http://pages.prodigy.net/slaurent> or contact me at slaurent@prodigy.net.

With experienced leadership and guidance, STC can become the catalyst that enables technical communicators to achieve the professional status that they have earned. When that is accomplished, we will have fulfilled my vision for STC to become an organization to which technical communicators feel membership is essential to their careers.

I would sincerely appreciate your vote for me as the next second vice president, because I firmly believe that when a collection of minds, hearts, and talents work together, great things can happen!

Suzanna Laurent is an Associate Fellow with the Oklahoma Chapter of STC.

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Society Elections

Deborah Sauer: Candidate for Second Vice President

By Deborah Sauer



I started in this profession 20 years ago and I still write user manuals. However, now I also develop Help systems, design user interfaces, and perform usability tests. I also provide training in skills (such as technical writing and editing) and tools (such as FrameMaker and RoboHelp) in public workshops, customized courses, and at universities. In addition, as an independent consultant, I make business decisions on a daily basis.

I have been an independent consultant for five years. I decided that, to be successful, I needed to diversify in terms of clients, the technologies that they represented, and the tools that I used in my work. As a result, my work is far more interesting and rewarding than it was five years ago.

To research potential clients, I worked on the local STC chapter competitions and perused the winning entries at the awards banquet. I focused on companies taking new approaches to delivering content and developing innovative products. I actively pursued those companies as

clients, many of whom I could connect with through STC relationships.

Now, my clients represent a variety of industries from computer chips manufacturers to consumer electronics companies. They range in size from 20 to 200,000 employees. Working with such varied clients has given me the opportunity to learn a broad range of business practices.

I can also directly attribute my business skills to my work for the STC. As president of the Boston chapter, I managed teams and budgets, made cold calls, and initiated the development of a chapter strategic plan. I then became involved in the STC annual conference, first as a stem manager, later as a program manager, and now as the assistant to the president for conferences. These roles have given me experience in managing projects and teams, and working with large budgets.

To expand my business, I decided to pursue user interface design. I provided interface design feedback while documenting products. My contributions were seen as valuable in making products more usable and, therefore, less likely to be returned. Managers included me in design discussions, user interface design went on my resume, and, before long, became part of the scope of the project when a client hired me.

Attending STC program meetings and sessions at the annual conference and brainstorming with colleagues have given me ideas as I look for innovative ways to deliver information. For example, I worked on a Web site that customers can tailor to their needs. I also developed a voice guidance system that talks the customer through procedures as they perform them

It was this new approach to delivering information that brought home for me the global nature of my work. I received a cell phone call from my California-based product manager, who was in Singapore, telling me that he had played my voice guidance recordings at a board of directors meeting with representatives from Europe, India, Hong Kong, and the United States. That gave me perspective on just how far-reaching my work had become.

Over the years, I have worked in many capacities, both in the profession and in my STC roles. All this enables me to view the challenges and opportunities that face the profession and the STC from a broad base of experience. I can provide the leadership needed to make sound business decisions as the STC creates programs to address the needs of our growing and diverse membership. Also, I can offer a voice on the board to multiple interests. The office of STC second vice-president is an important one because the elected individual automatically becomes first vice-president and then president of the Society. I hope you will consider giving me your vote.

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Deborah Sauer can be reached at dsauer@sauer-design.com.

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Society Highlights

Start Your Annual Conference Planning Now By Visiting www.stc.org; STC Membership Soon to Hit Six Digits

By Amy M. Anson

Natalie Angier Named STC's 2003 Honorary Fellow

STC is pleased to announce that Natalie Angier will accept an STC honorary fellowship at STC's 50th Annual Conference (May 18 to 21) in Dallas, Texas. She will also be the conference opening session speaker.

Angier, a well-known science writer and Pulitzer Prize-winning reporter, has written three books, including her most recent: *Woman: An Intimate Geography* (Anchor, 1999.) *Woman* was a finalist for the National Book Award and was nominated for the Samuel Johnson Award, Britain's most lucrative nonfiction literary prize.

Angier has written for many magazines, including *Time*, *The Atlantic*, *Parade*, *Washington Monthly*, and *Reader's Digest*. She began her career in science writing as a founding staff member of *Discovery* magazine.

Topics that she has written about range from scorpions, the human genome project, cancer research, queen bees, the courting behavior of dolphins, and orchids. Among the awards Angier has received for her work: the American Association for the Advancement of Science award for excellence in journalism, the Lewis Thomas Award for distinguished writing in the life sciences, and the General Motors international award for her writings on cancer. She was awarded the Pulitzer Prize in 1991 for her beat reporting at *The New York Times*.

The Society bestows honorary fellowships on nonmembers who have made exceptional contributions to the field of technical communication or to the Society. Honorary fellowships include lifetime membership in STC. Please join us in welcoming Natalie Angier to STC.

Register for the 50th Annual Conference at STC's Web Site

At <http://www.stc.org/50thConf>, not only can you now find comprehensive information about the 50th Annual Conference but you can also access a dynamic online registration form. You can view the form at <http://www.stc.org/50thConf/regOnline.asp>. Once you enter your five-digit member number, the name and address fields are automatically populated with information from the STC membership database. (Note to members: To register at the member rate, you must enter your membership number, which appears on the address labels of *Intercom*, *Technical Communication*, and all other correspondence from the Society office. If you need to be reminded of your membership number, call the office at 703-522-4114.)

If you're looking for conference information, then the Web site will let you view all the technical sessions that are scheduled for a particular day. Session information appears in a printer-friendly format that includes brief descriptions of sessions, their locations and times, and the names of moderators and speakers. This information will be updated frequently with cancellations and room changes as the conference draws near. Keep visiting the site for the latest information.

STC's 50th Annual Conference (May 18 to 21 in Dallas, Texas) marks a great milestone in Society history: For half a century, STC has been promoting the arts and sciences of technical communication. In February, STC launched a Web site devoted to Society history at <http://www.stc.org/stc@50>. This site features a technical communication timeline juxtaposed with a chronology of developments in science and technology. When you visit this site, you can contribute to a Web log to record memories of your experiences as an STC member.

The Web site for STC's 50th Annual Conference is up and running at <http://www.stc.org/50thConf>. The site

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will provide comprehensive, up-to-date information on educational and professional opportunities at the conference.

Complimentary Membership for Nonmember Conference Attendees

Nonmembers who register at the full conference rate for STC's 50th Annual Conference will be invited to join STC—free—for the remainder of 2003. The STC office will include an application for a complimentary membership with the conference registration confirmation receipt letter.

Keep In Touch with STC

The Society office encourages all STC members to update their membership information with home addresses, home phone numbers, or home email addresses. Many members provide only their work contact information, and the office often loses track of these members when they change jobs. To update membership information, complete the STC address change form at http://www.stc.org/address_change.asp or contact the office at 703-522-4114.

STC Membership — Soon to Hit Six Digits

Member number 100000 will be assigned to a lucky new member sometime in the next few months. This number marks a great achievement to STC's growing membership and to the relatively short time it took STC to get to member 100000. It was only in 1985 that STC began assigning membership numbers, upon computerizing its membership records. Since the founding of STC in 1953, more than 115,000 people have been members of the Society.

Member number 100000 could present a few challenges to IT staff at Society headquarters, however. The STC membership database and the log-on field for the members-only section of the STC Web site must be modified to accommodate six-digit membership numbers. So STC advises chapter and SIG Web masters and membership managers to examine their Web sites and databases—member 100000 will soon be logging on!

Welcome, New Student Chapter:

The Arizona State University student chapter in Mesa, Arizona, is the newest STC chapter. It has been assigned to STC's region 5, and the chapter advisor is Barry M. Maid.

STC Membership at a glance

As of January 31, 2003: 22,222

Members in the US: 19,197
Members in Canada: 1,970
Members elsewhere: 1,055
Total Chapters: 154*
*Includes 35 student chapters

Amy Anson, a former Boston Broadside managing editor, is a senior editor at Forrester Research in Cambridge, MA.

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Chapter Membership Reports

Compiled by Zohra I. Mutabanna

November 2002 Membership Report

Total STC Members: 21,456

Total Boston Members: 1,048

New Members: 7	Reinstated Members: 1	Members Transferring In: 1
Cesira J. Daukantas	Steve Straight	Dawn M. Magi
Dolores Fallon		
Karen Fowler		
David P. Hoyle		
Barbara A. Keeler		
Martin Sander		
Elaine B. Welch		

December 2002 Membership Report

Total STC Members: 21,736

Total Boston Members: 1,057

New Members: 8	Reinstated Members: 5	Members Transferring In: 1
Kelly JS Beauchemin	Jacqueline A. Cabral	Cynthia Geigel
Rhonda E. Fitzgerald	Jenny M. Collins	
Trisha L. Hasch	Terrance M. Skelton	
Marie D. Manfredi	Laura Soar	
Peter D. Myers	Jonathan A. Young	
Beth Norsigian		
Beverly A. Surette		
Jeffrey Szalai		

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The Broadside staff is working very hard to provide the best newsletter possible. We would appreciate it if you could take a few minutes to complete this form. Your feedback will go to improve the site and help us provide the service possible. Thanks.

First Name (optional)

Last Name (optional)

E-mail Address

What type of articles would you like to see more of?

Please enter any additional types of articles you'd like to see:

Please rate the usefulness of the newsletter.

If you answered "not useful" to the above question, please tell us how we can improve the newsletter:

Please rate the length of the articles.

Average number of articles read per issue:

Indicate the newsletter format you prefer:

Suggestions for future article topics:

What do you like about the newsletter?

What do you dislike?

What feature would you like to see?

Would you like to be contacted about writing an article for Broadside? Yes No

Thank you and come again soon.

To start again, press:

To send form, press:

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We welcome articles, advertising, and news about meetings, workshops, and courses that pertain to technical communication. When you submit an article, please let the editor know if this article has run elsewhere, and if it has been submitted for consideration to other publications.

Please send article ideas and articles to Daphna Edgar at bostonbroadside@yahoo.com.

Article submission deadlines are as follows:

- August 5 (for September/October issue)
- October 5 (for November/December issue)
- December 1 (for January/February issue)
- February 5 (for March/April issue)
- April 5 (for May/June issue)
- June 5 (for July August issue)

For information about advertising rates and procedures, contact Anne Louiselle at alouiselle@attbi.com.

Advertising submission deadlines are as follows:

- December 10 (for January/February 2003 issue)
- February 15 (for March/April 2003 issue)
- April 15 (for May/June 2003 issue)
- June 17 (for July/August 2003 issue)
- August 19 (for September/October 2003 issue)
- October 14 (for November/December 2003 issue)

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And the Answer Is...

By Marguerite Krupp



Web Poll #47 asks in what year women first comprised a numerical majority of STC membership. The answer is 1983.

Marguerite Krupp is an Associate Fellow of STC and a member of STC@50, the Society-level committee working on the STC's Golden Anniversary Celebration.

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