

The Australian and New Zealand Journal of Technical Communication

Southern Communicator

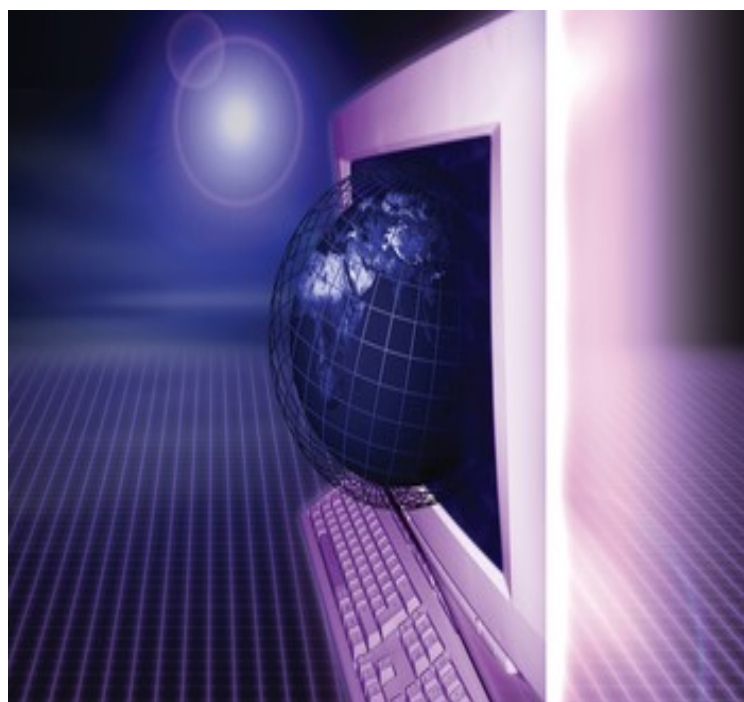
ISSUE 1

SEPTEMBER 2004

Saving time and money with Web standards

Getting there with Google

THE ONLINE WORLD



Information on the Web — for everyone

The making of ISO standards

Why they leave without buying

Editing single-sourced projects

Feature articles

2	Foreword	Margery Watson
3	Saving time and money with web standards	Char James-Tanny
6	Getting there with Google	Suchitra Govindarajan
11	Information on the web - for everyone	Dr Sofia Celic
14	Editing single-sourced projects	Jean Hollis Weber
15	How are ISO standards made?	Richard Hodgkinson
16	International standards	Richard Hodgkinson
18	How to plane your English	Deb Doyle
20	A new website for Salisbury District Council	Dr Tom James
22	Web accessibility toolbar	
23	Why they leave without buying	Gary Bunker
26	The marketing of technical authors	Ellis Pratt
27	Accreditation - an update	Andrea Tappe
28	Introducing the editorial team	Sue Woolley

Regular articles

5, 19	Book reviews	
17, 25	Word tips	Gary Bunker
17	Letter to the editors	
27	Spelling tips	Craig Hadden
30	Submission and advertising guidelines	

Southern Communicator is a joint publication of:

Australian Society for Technical Communication
(Victoria). www.astcvic.org.au



Technical Communicators Association of New Zealand.
www.tcanz.org.nz



Australian Society for Technical Communication (NSW).
www.astcnsw.org.au





Foreword - Margery Watson

Welcome to the new Australian and New Zealand Journal of Technical Communication. The advent of this publication breaks new ground for our profession in Australia and New Zealand, with international co-operation across the Tasman bringing together the widespread community of practitioners in our two countries. Our thanks must go to the initiatives of Sue Woolley, our Editor, and her willing band at ASTC Victoria, Matilda Reich the NSW coordinator, and to Hasib Shakoor the coordinator for the Technical Communicators Association of New Zealand.

The aim of this publication is to provide a forum for sharing ideas on current and important issues relating to technical communication. Current areas of interest include changes in technology that influence our work, standards, educating and supporting technical communicators and publishing results of research and surveys. We may develop regular columns to focus on specific areas.

With cooperation as a focus, part of the success of the Journal will depend on your contributions. Our editor would welcome your papers and articles. You may have ideas on a particular subject you wish to share, or views you would like to present to our readers.

And while we are talking about cooperation, I would like to introduce INTECOM, the International Council

for Technical Communication. As President of that organisation my role is to encourage communication and cooperation between technical communicators around the world. Perhaps this clarifies why I have been asked to write this foreword.

INTECOM aims to provide a professional service to technical communicators around the globe. The members of INTECOM are organisations from Europe, North America (Canada and USA), Scandinavia, and the South Pacific (Australia and New Zealand) so far.

We have recently been assisting the development of technical communicators' organisations in the "New" Europe (countries that have recently joined the EU), Ireland, and Italy. Currently we are working to assist technical communicators in India and Brazil, and plan to expand into South Africa shortly. These organisations are potential members of INTECOM, spreading the links between members of the technical communication community even wider.

Besides support for new organisations, membership of INTECOM provides a number of ways in which individual technical communicators gain support and assistance. You may be surprised at the resources available to you through INTECOM. We also look at the international issues that affect us all; standards, education and training, accreditation, and recognition of the profession as a whole.

While the activities of INTECOM are

largely carried out by volunteers, freely giving their time and resources to support the organisation, there are also financial costs to be met by membership fees, and support through member funding of delegates. We feel it is important to understand just what is involved in INTECOM activities and the contribution made by individuals and members.

Although our members are organisations, INTECOM is really just people, like you, who support us. Some of that support is in making use of the resources we provide. We also welcome your input, through contributions to discussion on matters raised through INTECOM, and working in teams on our international projects.

Today we can all be world travellers, in reality or virtually through the Web. As part of an international organisation it is great to find friends and colleagues with whom you can share ideas and similar experiences wherever you go. From an INTECOM perspective, this new Journal is a great step forward on that journey.

Margery Watson is a founding member of TCANZ and is also current President of INTECOM. She has been working in the documentation and training fields in the software industry since the mid-1980s. Margery has her own documentation consulting business specialising in online documentation for commercial and in-house software.



Saving time and money with web standards

- Char James-Tanny

Web standards let you separate content from presentation when developing web sites. You may not be able to tell if a site uses web standards. Some clues: the site displays quickly over any connection, and it displays even when you use an older browser (although it may look different).

What are web standards?

Web standards are guidelines for developing web sites and HTML pages. Set by the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C), the standards cover HTML, XHTML, XML, CSS, accessibility, and more. To see the list of standards and read descriptions, go to the W3C Web site (<http://www.w3.org>).

In the last year, many popular and highly-visited sites have converted to standards.

Some sites have made the attempt, even if they haven't totally succeeded. Eric Meyer tracks the redesign of many sites at <http://www.meyerweb.com/eric/redesigns/>.

Benefits of using web standards

Standards let you put your users first. No matter what browser users have, they always see the content (even if the design isn't identical for each browser). Downloads are quick, even over dial-up, because the pages are

smaller. Users can access the content in numerous ways: reading it, hearing it, or with different browsers or platforms.

Standards improve accessibility.

Screen readers can have problems accessing table-based sites, because tables are supposed to be used for tabular data, not layout. (It is possible for a screen reader to access a site that uses one simple table for the design, but many folks use either nested or complex tables, which are much harder to "read.")

"HTML pages developed with standards are much smaller than their non-standard counterparts, especially when compared to sites that use tables to create the shell."

Standards let you save development time, maintenance time, and bandwidth.

You only need to create one version of a site, not two or more, to accommodate older browsers. It takes less time to verify the coding for accuracy. HTML pages developed with standards are much smaller than their non-standard counterparts, especially when compared to sites that use tables to create the shell. (Savings of more than 80% have been realized on some converted pages, although the average is 25% to 50%.) The page size difference directly correlates to the bandwidth required to download the page.

The following table shows site redesign statistics from JTF Hosting (one of my sites):

Original page (table layout)	27 Kb	18.5 sec (14.4K modem)
Updated page (removed layout table)	9 Kb	5.8 sec (14.4K modem)
New page design	8 Kb	5.2 sec (14.4K modem)

Wired reworked their site to use standards. Heavily visited (20-25 million page views per month), the average page weight (size) dropped almost 50%. It now takes *Wired* developers five minutes to rearrange a module instead of one to two hours.

Standards provide improved search engine rankings. Search engines can interpret information in standards-based sites more easily. Table-based layouts may not be interpreted correctly; graphical sites don't usually have "readable" content. (<http://devedge.netscape.com/viewsources/2002/wired-interview/>)

"Wired reworked their site to use standards. It now takes Wired developers five minutes to rearrange a module instead of one to two hours."

Sites are ready for new browser agents and updated standards.

You don't have to update a standards-based site page by page when a new browser or standard is released.

Content can be printed, while unnecessary pieces of the shell are ignored. You can attach a print Cascading Style Sheet (CSS), and remove the navigational links when printing. The positioning of the remaining elements can also be adjusted so that information prints correctly on letter or A4 paper (and users don't have to change from portrait to landscape to prevent information from running off the page). A print CSS cannot remove the pieces of a table that do not need to be printed, such as a column with navigational links.

When you start new sites from scratch, use standards from the beginning. Code the content and then tweak the presentational elements. As you get more familiar with standards, the time you spend on the initial layout is reduced. Once the shell is finished, you can build new pages in less than 30 minutes each. When editing a standards-based site, you only have to modify the content area. However, when editing a table-based site, you have to find the correct cell to modify, and possibly modify the itself table to allow for new columns and rows.

If you have a large site to convert, you don't need to rework the entire site before releasing it. You can rework it in stages and release each piece as you update it.

Validation (using the W3C validation tools) ensures that your code is correct, according to the standards. Valid code ensures that sites are displayed in all browser agents. This saves QA time, because if a valid page is displayed properly, all pages built with the same template will also be displayed properly.

Structure of a page that uses standards

```
<!DOCTYPE html PUBLIC "-//W3C//DTD XHTML 1.0 Transitional//EN"
    "http://www.w3.org/TR/xhtml1/DTD/xhtml1-transitional.dtd">
<html xmlns="http://www.w3.org/1999/xhtml" lang="en" xml:lang="en">
<head>
<meta http-equiv="Content-Type" content="text/html; charset=us-ascii" />
<meta name="description" content="description" />
<meta name="author" content="your name" />
<meta name="keywords" content="keywords" />
<title>File Title</title>
<style type="text/css" media="all">@import "filename.css"; </style>
<script language="JavaScript" type="text/javascript">
if (top != self) { top.location = location }
</script>
<script language="JavaScript" type="text/javascript" src="filename.js"></
script>
</head>
<body>
</body>
</html>
```

The example above shows how to tag an XHTML page so that it is structured correctly.

DOCTYPE - This affects how your browser interprets your Cascading Style Sheet. DOCTYPE is required for HTML and XHTML validation and is essential for rendering. The W3C defines the valid values (see *Fix Your Site with the Right DOCTYPE!* at www.alistapart.com/articles/doctype/). DOCTYPE must always include a Universal Resource Identifier (URI), which many sites overlook.

"As you get more familiar with standards, the time you spend on the initial layout is reduced. Once the shell is finished, you can build new pages in less than 30 minutes each. When editing a standards-based site, you only have to modify the content area."

This example uses the transitional XHTML DOCTYPE. Transitional means that you can include some presentational information, plus simple layout tables. You can also use a strict DOCTYPE, which limits you to only classes and CSS for presentation.

When creating XHTML pages:

- Close all tags. Use `</p>` to close paragraphs. For single tags like ``, end the tag with `</>`.
- Enclose attributes in quotes. For example, use `<p class="content">` instead of `<p class=content>`.
- Use lowercase for all attributes.

The XHTML DOCTYPES are:

```
<!DOCTYPE html PUBLIC "-//W3C//
DTD XHTML 1.0 Strict//EN" "http://
www.w3.org/TR/xhtml1/DTD/xhtml1-
strict.dtd">
```

```
<!DOCTYPE html PUBLIC "-//W3C//
DTD XHTML 1.0 Transitional//EN"
"http://www.w3.org/TR/xhtml1/DTD/
xhtml1-transitional.dtd">
```

<html> The first tag in the file after DOCTYPE. It can be styled like any other tag in the CSS file and controls the overall page settings (canvas). It sets the top level of inheritance and is typically used for page settings, such as margin, padding, and background.

<head> This section includes "hidden" page information, which is parsed by the browser before the user sees the page content.

The following tags are contained in the **<head>** section.

- **<meta>** These tags are used for character encoding, description, keywords, and more.
- **<title>** Displayed in the browser's title bar. Used with bookmark references and in search results.
- **<style>** The CSS file applies styles or presentational attributes. As shown here, you can reference the CSS with the **<style>** tag. This example uses syntax that delivers the CSS to standards-enabled browsers, but not to older browsers, which get unstyled content. You can also use the **<link>** tag.
- **<script>** Include page **<script>** tags here. Use scripts that don't affect usability, such as breadcrumbs and framebusters (a script that guarantees your page will not be displayed inside someone else's frameset). Never use scripts to specify the CSS file, as scripts are not accessible to all. (Some people turn them off intentionally, while others use browsers or security settings that don't enable them.)

<body> This section includes the page content displayed to users. Do not use any style attributes on the **<body>** tag itself. Within the body, avoid deprecated attributes like **font** and use CSS classes instead. You can use **divs** instead of tables for layout.

Sample sites and information

Visit the CSS Zen Garden (<http://www.csszengarden.com>) for samples of CSS-based design sites.

The best place for information on Web standards is the W3C (<http://www.w3.org>). Other places are:

- [css-discuss](http://www.css-discuss.org/) (<http://www.css-discuss.org/>). Make sure you visit the Wiki.
- [meyerweb](http://www.meyerweb.com) (<http://www.meyerweb.com>)
- [zeldman.com](http://www.zeldman.com/) (<http://www.zeldman.com/>)

Also look for books written by Eric Meyer, Jeffrey Zeldman, 37 signals, and Carrie Bickner.

Char James-Tanny has more than 20 years of experience as a technical communicator and is well known in the Help community for her knowledge of online Help tools and concepts. Author of two books and numerous courses about Help, as well as several Help Authoring Tool tutorials, she speaks frequently at conferences around the world on Help topics, cross-browser issues, and tool-specific functionality.

Char has been a Microsoft Help MVP since 2002. She is an AuthorIT Certified Consultant, a member of RoboGurus, and a Senior Member of the Society for Technical Communication.

She has been an eHelp Certified RoboHelp Instructor (1997-2002) and a member of the RoboHelp Community Advisory Board (2000-2002). You can visit her Web site at <http://www.helpstuff.com>.

Book review

- Andrea Tappe

Power and Legitimacy in Technical Communication - Volume I

The Historical and Contemporary Struggle for Professional Status

Edited by Teresa Kynell-Hunt and Gerald J. Savage

Baywood publishing company is a boutique publishing company based in New York State. They offer a range of academic titles on health and psychology topics, and also publish the Journal of Technical Communication. They have recently begun a Technical Communication Series, of which this is the first.

This book is a collection of essays, grouped into three sections. The first group of essays deals with the history of technical communication. The second group covers our current status (or lack thereof) in the workplace, and the third group sets out some scenarios for our future.

There is very little here that is news to us – the second section in particular covers many issues (such as employers' lack of respect for us as professionals) that will sound familiar to you all. The value of this book lies in the way the issues are analysed. They are placed in their social and historical context, which immediately makes it clear that other professions have faced and overcome similar issues. Apparently, for example, an

(Continued on page 30)



Getting there with Google - Suchitra Govindarajan

My dad sincerely believes that Google *is* the Internet. This is completely my fault. As a technical communicator, I'm patient enough to explain technology to everyone except my own family. So when my dad got his first Internet connection a few years back, I set his browser's start page to Google and told him he could do everything from there. And he has. From magazines in our native language (Tamil) to articles about banking (he works with the Reserve Bank of India) and even ego-surfing, my dad navigates the Internet with ease. And all this without bothering about cumbersome things like URLs.

At the other end of the user spectrum, the geeks in my office rave about Google's technology and the fact that it is powered by one of the world's largest commercial Linux clusters. When I told them I was writing an article about Google, they enthusiastically informed me that they too loved using Google. (They also told me that Google's inventors were recently featured in Playboy magazine!)

In this article, I'll look at some of the reasons for this popularity of Google among all kinds of internet users. I'll also describe some of Google's advanced features that can help improve the relevancy of your search results.

Why Google is king

Not only is Google the world's favourite search engine, it's also one of the top global brands and a leader of what Nielson//NetRatings calls the Digital Media Universe. Here are some reasons for Google's success:

Volume

Google has the largest number of indexed web pages, currently 3 billion. As a result of Google acquiring Deja.com's Usenet archive in 2001, Google Groups also has an archive of over 800 million Usenet messages.

Usability

I know technical communicators love this one! Google's uncluttered and focussed user interface was one of the first things that set Google apart from the rest. When all the other search majors were busy becoming portals, Google quietly decided to focus on search. Admirably, even though the number of Google features has increased, the basic idea of the interface remains untouched.

Speed

Google returns search results in less than half a second. The speed is a result of not only the software, but also the hardware supporting it.

Relevancy of search results

Google uses the PageRank™ algorithm and HyperText Matching Analysis techniques to generate accurate and

relevant search results. While HyperText matching is used to analyse the content of a webpage, PageRank™ is an objective measurement that determines which web pages are more important.

Branding

Google has a very clearly defined and successful branding strategy. Google is very careful about always appearing as the nice guy—for example, one of Google's tenets is "You can make money without doing evil". To most of Google's fans, the way that the company works is evidence of this attitude. Of course, Google has, of late, come under fire for alleged privacy problems with Gmail, its new email service.

How Google works

Google's software uses two techniques to determine exactly which webpage appears at the top of your search results.

Google uses HyperText Matching to analyse the content of a webpage and ascertain the relevancy of the webpage for the search terms. Google looks at the size of the search terms on a webpage, the content of neighbouring pages and outgoing links to decide if they are related to the search term. But at the heart of Google's software is the PageRank™ algorithm that was developed by Sergey Brin and Larry Page, the founders of Google.

PageRank™ uses what Google calls

the democratic nature of the web to determine which web page should appear first in the search results. Google decides the importance of a webpage by looking at how many pages link to it. Google also looks at how important these *linking* pages are. The more important the pages are that link to a specific page, the higher the page rank.

What do these techniques mean to you?

Most traditional search engines use some form of HyperText Matching. However, reliance on only this technique would mean that someone could manipulate their webpage to make it seem relevant. That's the reason why, in the early ages of the Internet, you could have searched for say, chocolate cake, and found the webpage of an Elbonian (Elbonia is a mythical "foreign" country that attained fame in Scott Adams' Dilbert comics) company who published childrens' books. A quick look at their HTML source file would have revealed that they had added keywords relating to all the things that kids love (chocolate cake, candy, toys, balloons, etc).

With Google, all such obscure webpages that don't have useful information are banished to the lower ranks of the search results, simply because few good websites would link to them. Even if the Elbonian company managed to get 30 sites to link to its page, Google would look very closely at the popularity and value of these 30 sites. Overall, Google would give first place to a webpage devoted to chocolate cake that scored on both points—good, relevant content *and* votes from important web pages.

In the world of Google, you can't come first just because you want to—you have to do it the hard way. Make a website

with content good enough to have other good websites link to you.

When PageRank™ is too much of a good thing

Google's magic is not always what you need. Only the other day, I typed in "single source" into Google and was nonplussed to find that my first stop was FedEx! And all because FedEx calls itself the "single source" for all kinds of shipments, and is obviously linked to by many important websites. In such cases, you're not really looking for the most popular website for the term, and you'd rather that Google used PageRank™ as the second priority.

But this is more my fault than Google's. If I'd added "technical communication" or even "documents" along with "single source", I might have arrived at that TechWr-L article that I was really looking for. To get the best out of Google, we need to fine-tune our searches. And in the next section, I'll cover some techniques to do just that.

Better searches with Google

If you're like my dad, you just type in your search terms into Google and trust in its magic. It works for my dad because he's a leisure surfer. As technical communicators, we use the internet to understand and uncover information about a variety of subjects. The more familiar we are with the vast array of tools Google provides us, the easier it is to get where we want.

Using special operators

Google has a host of syntaxes and *operators* that you can use in Google's main interface. These are a useful

arsenal when you need to find something quickly. In this section, we look at some useful operators that you can use.

Including terms

By default, Google searches for all the terms that you enter, but it ignores common words like a, to, of, and the. These words are called *stop* words, and you'll need to specifically tell Google if you want these included. To include a stop word in your search, use a + sign just before the word. Remember *not* to leave a space after the sign.

For example, you could search for:

+the elements +of style

Google will now search for all the words, including **the** and **of**.

Excluding terms

To exclude a term from your search, use either a – sign or the Boolean **NOT** operator. If you use the – sign, remember not to leave a space after it.

For example, you could search for:

+the elements +of style -fashion

Google will now exclude all content dealing with the fashion industry.

Searching for phrases

Using double quotes around your search terms will tell Google that you want to search for a complete phrase.

For example, the best way to search for the classic book by Strunk and White would be:

"the elements of style"

Notice that we don't need the + sign now.

Searching for a choice of terms

You can also search for a choice of terms using the Boolean **OR** operator.

For example, you could search for:

grammar OR punctuation

Google will get you the top web pages that have either of these terms.

Searching for synonyms

One of the biggest problems with finding relevant webpages is that people use different words to express the same idea. My favourite Google trick is to use a ~ (tilde) sign before a word that could have synonyms. Again, remember *not* to leave a space after the sign.

For example, you could search for:

framemaker ~tips

Google will look not only for FrameMaker tips, but also tutorials, techniques, guides and help.

Using a wildcard

Google lets you use a wildcard in place of a search term. You can enter a * symbol in place of a term. This kind of wildcard search is best used within a phrase search (using double quotes).

For example, you could search for:

*"editing * documents"*

Google will find pages on editing online documents, editing technical documents, editing historical documents, and many such variations.

Note that you cannot use a wildcard in place of a character. However, keep in mind that Google automatically looks for plural forms of a word.

Searching within HTML titles

You can use the **intitle:** and **allintitle:** operators to restrict your search terms to the HTML title of the webpage. Remember *not* to leave a space after the operator.

For example, you could search for:

intitle:editing

This will restrict your search to only those webpages that have the word editing in their titles.

You could also search for:

allintitle:editing writing proofreading

This will restrict your search to only those webpages that have *all* three words in their titles.

Searching within a specific website or top-level domain

You can use the **site:** operator to search within a specific website. This is usually a quicker way than using the site's own search facility. Again, remember *not* to leave a space after the operator.

For example, you could search for:

editing site:www.techwr-l.com

Google will look only within the TechWr-L site.

You can also use the **site:** operator to restrict searches to top-level domains.

While searching for travel advice to Elbonia, for example, you could use:

elbonia travel advice site:gov

Google gets you results from government sites only (those sites that end in .gov), and disregards all commercial attempts to entice you to Elbonia.

Searching within URLs

The **inurl:** and **allinurl:** operators are useful for restricting your search to terms that appear in the URL of the webpage. Use these operators without a space after them.

For example, you could search for résumés of graphic designers using:

"graphic designer" inurl:resume

Google will only look for those webpages that have the word resume somewhere in the URL. So you could find pages like:

www.designoz.com/resume.html or
www.resume.html/johndoe/

You could also search for:

"graphic designer" inurl:resume design

Google will look for both the words (resume and design) in the URL. The first example above may surface, but not the second one.

Using number ranges

Google lets you use an ellipsis (...) to specify a number range. This is useful when you want to find a product within a certain price range. Be careful though, if the information you're searching for has more than one kind of number associated with it.

For example, I was recently searching for used cars between \$10000 and \$15000:

"toyota camry" 10000...15000

However, this brought up cars that had either the price or the distance within this range. A little tweaking and I got it right:

"toyota camry" \$10000...\$15000

Searching for glossary definitions

I use Google's **define:** operator (again, without a space after it) extensively to find out how people on the Internet have defined certain terms.

I've used searches like these to broaden my knowledge:

define:philistine

Google shows me a list of definitions from glossaries on the Internet that inform me that a philistine is someone ignorant of the arts and culture. I am not one.

Searching for different types of files

Many articles on search engine technology talk about the Invisible Web, which consists of information that lies hidden from search engines. Files other than html form part of this Invisible Web. However, Google, being Google, now has the capability to look for files other than HTML.

Most times, Google will automatically bring up these files if they are related to your search. You can also restrict your search to a particular file by using the **filetype:** operator.

Here are some of the major filetype operators you can use:

- `filetype:pdf`
- `filetype:doc`
- `filetype:ppt`
- `filetype:xls`
- `filetype:ps`

I find this useful when I'm looking for information that is usually tied to a specific kind of file.

A tax calculator, for example, is most likely to be in a spreadsheet format, and a presentation will most definitely be a PowerPoint or PDF file. Again, most document templates are in Word format.

For example, you could search for presentations about the role of XML in technical communication:

*technical communication xml
filetype:ppt*

Combining special operators

As you may have noticed with many of the examples, you can get excellent results if you combine one or more syntaxes. For example, you could search for résumés of graphic designers in Elbonia or Antarctica using something like:

"graphic designer" (elbonia OR antartica) (inurl:resume OR intitle:resume)

However, this kind of search will definitely get you scores of job sites. So you could refine it to something like:

"graphic designer" (elbonia OR antartica) (inurl:resume OR intitle:resume) --jobs

Google now ignores web pages that mention jobs or employment.

While combining search operators can be very useful, keep in mind that Google will not let you combine operators like **allintitle:** and **allinurl:** with other operators.

Using Google accessories

While refining your search using special operators can be useful, at other times you may need to use Google's tools and specialized searches.

- **Google Images**
(<http://images.google.com>)

Ever wondered what an armadillo looks like? Instead of wading through strange descriptions, see it for yourself by doing a search on Google Images.

- **Google Groups**
(<http://groups.google.com>)

Often the best information, especially for troubleshooting, lies in posts to newsgroups. Google Groups has a 20 year archive of Usenet messages that can be a goldmine of information.

- **Google News**
(<http://news.google.com>)

If you're looking for news articles, head straight to Google News.

- **Google Answers**
(<http://answers.google.com>)

Even the best of us can't always find what we're looking for. You can post a question on Google Answers and have professional researchers do the hard work for you.

While the minimum fee to post a question is US\$2.50, you can also quote what you'd be willing to pay if you got a satisfactory answer.

- **Froogle**
(<http://froogle.google.com>)

Retail therapy on the Web? Use Froogle to decide on the best way to spend your money.

- **Google Toolbar**
(<http://toolbar.google.com>)

Finally, what's a browser without a Google Toolbar?

Installing the Google toolbar can save you the trouble of going to Google's website every time you want to do a search. I personally like the fact that the Google Toolbar keeps a history of the searches I perform.

Be careful about enabling advanced features on the toolbar, as this means that the toolbar will send information about the site you're visiting to Google. If you're worried about your privacy, simply disable these features.

In the labs

The people at Google use Google Labs (<http://labs.google.com>) as an incubator for all the new ideas they come up with.

Google Labs is a great site to watch. Right now, you can have a go at the Personalized Web Search, or try Google Sets. If you're adventurous and prosperous enough, try Froogle Wireless as well.

Life beyond Google

Google is not the only search engine that's got it right. New contenders like Teoma, Wisenut, Vivisimo and a host of others are threatening to invade Google territory.

While I was amused to note that most of these search engines look a lot like Google, I was also impressed with their capabilities.

Teoma, for example, offers suggestions for refining your search, and also lists information resources separately. And Vivisimo's idea of clustering the results into different categories is a delight.

In summary, there is intelligent life beyond Google. And Google, for all its wonderful features, is not perfect. Someday, we may be using a completely new search engine to meet our needs. Until then, I hope the tools described in this article save you time and effort.

As for my dad, I promise I'll have a talk with him one of these days.



Suchitra Govindarajan works for a clinical research company in Melbourne, having moved to Australia last year from Chennai in the south of India. She has about four years experience in technical communication, and has worked in domains as diverse as oil-trading and gaming. Suchitra previously worked in Tech Support for the DTP industry. In her spare time, Suchitra writes poetry and reads Dilbert.

Did you know?

- **By default, Google searches for all the terms that you enter.**
 - **Google also doubles up as a calculator. Try typing a calculation into Google's main interface.**
 - **Google uses stemming to search for plural forms of a word.**
 - **Google's searches are not case-sensitive.**
 - **If you use a hyphenated search term, Google searches for both hyphenated and non-hyphenated forms.**
 - **Google has a limit of 10 search terms, but you can work around that by omitting needless words.**
 - **The order of your search terms can affect search results.**
 - **The name Google comes from the mathematical term *googol* which is the number 10 raised to the power of 100 (1 followed by 100 zeros).**
-



Information on the web - for everyone - Dr Sofia Celic

The web provides an ever-expanding range of information and services. For the technology-savvy, this can be accessed at any time of the day, saving time and effort. With the increasing number of devices and programs that access the web, this wealth of information and services is potentially at our fingertips whenever and wherever we want it.

The variety of devices and software available and the variable environments in which we may use them demands flexibility of the information to be accessed. For example, the device may have a big screen, small screen, or no screen at all. Similarly, environmental sun glare may render a screen effectively useless. A device may or may not have audio capabilities, and environmental factors can influence the effectiveness of any available audio. A

“The variety of devices and software available and the variable environments in which we may use them demands flexibility of the information to be accessed.”

device may or may not have a pointer interaction component (such as a mouse). The source of information on the web needs to be developed in such a way that can take advantage of the range of devices and their capabilities to provide information in any mode.

An important user group that benefits greatly from flexible web content is

people with disabilities or impairments that require a particular mode of access to the information. Web content that is accessible plays a major part in allowing people with disabilities or impairments to independently gain information and utilise services that they may otherwise be unable to access without help from others, such as shopping and banking.

This article aims to provide you with some techniques that enable flexibility in providing information in web pages. The focus of some of the techniques presented here is towards access by people utilising assistive technology. That is, people with disabilities or impairments, such as those who use the web with screen readers, their own special visual settings or without a mouse.

Techniques

1. Code your web pages with the appropriate structural elements.

Do not consider the presentational aspects of markup at this stage. Moreover, do not use markup just to create particular visual presentational effects, such as indentation or bold text.

Mark up headings with appropriate header elements, from ‘h1’ through to ‘h6’. Assign the appropriate header levels according to the structure of levels in the page, similar to the identification of heading levels in a Word document that generates an appropriately nested table of contents. Mark up the top level heading(s) as ‘h1’

elements, the next level within as ‘h2’ elements and so forth.

Example:

```
<h1>A paper on web accessibility research</h1>
<h2>Introduction</h2>
<p>...</p>
<h2>Methodology</h2>
<h3>Computers</h3>
<p>...</p>
<h3>Users</h3>
<p>...</p>
<h3>Tasks</h3>
<p>...</p>
<h2>Results</h2>
<h3>Task 1</h3>
<p>...</p>
<h3>Task 2</h3>
<p>...</p>
<h2>Summary</h2>
<p>...</p>
```

Mark up lists with list elements. Use the ‘ol’ element to specify an ordered list and ‘ul’ element for an unordered list. Each list item within these is marked up with an ‘li’ element. List markup can be used to separate a navigational list of links. For glossaries and related content, use the ‘dl’ element to specify a definition list. The term is marked up with a ‘dt’ element and the definition of the term is marked up with a ‘dd’ element.

Example:

```
<p>Required items: </p>
<ul>
<li>Pen</li>
<li>Pencil</li>
<li>Sharpener</li>
<li>Calculator</li>
<li>Scrap paper</li>
</ul>
<dl>
<dt>Hail</dt>
<dd>Frozen raindrops which fall from the sky in a shower.</dd>
<dt>Fog</dt>
<dd>A dense mass of water droplets suspended in the air.</dd>
</dl>
```

Also mark up quotes, emphasised content, acronyms and abbreviations.

2. Specify presentational aspects in a style sheet.

Use Cascading Style Sheets to control the presentational aspects of your web pages as much as possible. If desired, the default presentation of structural markup can be changed. For example, changes can be made to the presentation of various items such as headings; bullet points; text indentation; and font styles including size, weight, colour and padding.

See WebAIM's article at <http://www.webaim.org/techniques/css/>.

3. Provide a text alternative for every image, logo, Flash movie, applet, image map region and other non-text content.

The text alternative must be equivalent to the information being portrayed by the non-text content.

All images that convey important information should have alternative text. This will be most images of text and logos. The text alternative is provided by the 'alt' attribute of the image element ('img'). Note that images of text should be avoided because the text colour and size cannot be altered via the stylesheet.

Example:

```

```

Images that convey lots of important information, such as graphs, may need to have an extended textual description provided. Sometimes this can be

provided in the text content of the page, when it may benefit all users. Otherwise a separate page is needed just for this description. The link to the page containing the extended description is provided by the 'longdesc' attribute of the image element. Current best practice requires an additional standard link to the page, usually with the character "D" as the link phrase, because some technologies do not recognise the 'longdesc' attribute.

Example:

```
<a href="sales_dec03.htm">D</a>
```

The page "sales_dec03.htm" may contain this data in tabular format or as a text description. Images that are decorative or used for spacing do not convey important information. Provide "empty" text alternatives for these images. A space character is current best practice as the value for the 'alt' attribute because some technologies do not recognise a truly empty 'alt' attribute.

Example:

```

```



For examples of implementation and other elements that require text

alternatives, see WCAG 1.0 (<http://www.w3.org/WAI/wcag-currlic/>) Checkpoint 1.1 and the accompanying techniques document (<http://www.w3.org/TR/WCAG10-TECHS/>).

4. Use simple tables for tabular data whenever possible.

Simple tables have only one row or one column of heading cells. Complex tables (more than one row or column of heading cells) need more complex code that in practice is not well supported by all technologies. This may mean adjusting column or row headings, or it may mean splitting up a complex table into multiple simple tables.

Identify heading cells in data tables by using the 'th' element in the code instead of the standard table cell 'td' element.

Example:

```
<table>
<tr>
<th>Mon</th><th>Tue</
th><th>Wed</th><th>Thur</
th><th>Fri</th>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td><td>4</td><td>6</
td><td>0</td><td>6</td>
</tr>
</table>
```

For complex table markup see documents in the 'More Information' section and WebAIM's article at <http://www.webaim.org/techniques/tables/>.

5. Use link text phrases that clearly indicate their target.

The target of the link has to make sense when the link is out of context. This means avoiding phrases such as

“more...”, “click here” and .URLs. Also, provide warnings in the link phrase when the target is not an-HTML document (such as a PDF file or Word document) or if the target will open a new browser window.

Example:

For non-HTML documents, indicate the format type as well as the file size:

```
<a href="ann_rep02.pdf">Annual Report 2001-2002 [PDF 200kb]</a>
```

For new windows:

```
<a href="ann_rep02.htm" target="-blank">Annual Report 2001-2002 (new window)</a>
```

6. Make sure the pages are usable by keyboard as well as by mouse.

Put the mouse away and test the pages by using a keyboard alone. Make sure every link and button (and any other interactive component) can be reached and activated by keyboard.

Generally, this means coding all links with the standard link ‘a’ element and implementing keyboard events as well as mouse events.

“Use link text phrases that clearly indicate their target. The target of the link has to make sense when the link is out of context. This means avoiding phrases such as “more...”, “click here” and .URLs.”

Even though it is possible to make any element (such as a table cell) interactive, most current technologies do not yet recognise these for keyboard users.

Event handlers that are not specific for any particular device (these are called application-level event handlers) are currently not well recognised either, requiring implementation of both mouse-specific and keyboard-specific events, or mouse-specific and application-level events.

Some mouse-specific events do not have an equivalent keyboard event and should be avoided. See table below for event equivalents that are safe to use.

Mouse event	Application level event	Keyboard event
onclick	onselect	onkeypress
onmouseover	onfocus	
onmouseout	onblur	
onmousedown		onkeydown
onmouseup		onkeyup

More information

- Top 10 Accessible Web Authoring Practices
http://www.websavvy-access.org/resources/top_ten.shtml
- RNIB Accessible Web Design Advice
http://www.rnib.org.uk/xpedio/groups/public/documents/publicwebsite/public_webaccesscentre.hcsp
- The Web Content Accessibility Guidelines
<http://www.w3.org/TR/WAI-WEBCONTENT/>
- Frequently Asked Questions on Web Content
<http://www.w3.org/1999/05/WCAG-REC-fact>
- Quick Tips for Accessible Web Sites

<http://www.w3.org/WAI/References/QuickTips/>

- Curriculum on Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 1.0
<http://www.w3.org/WAI/wcag-curric/>
- Techniques for Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 1.0
<http://www.w3.org/TR/WCAG10-TECHS/>

Dr Sofia Celic is a Web Accessibility Consultant with the Accessible Information Solutions team at the National Information Library Service in Australia. Sofia moved to the computer field from medical research and gained the skills for web page development and programming. Sofia was first introduced to web accessibility in 2001 and is now a specialist in the field.

Her expertise and experience include:

- **accessibility testing and consulting across websites, online services and multimedia**
- **writing accessibility guidelines and other documentation**
- **accessibility for HTML, CSS, JavaScript, DHTML and Flash**
- **publishing and presenting research findings**
- **conducting user testing for accessibility and usability**
- **teaching accessibility techniques and concepts.**



Editing single-sourced projects - Jean Hollis Weber

The term "single-sourcing" describes situations where one file or database of information contains material that is reused for more than one product or more than one information deliverable.

Two common scenarios are:

- Two or more products having much in common, such as related models of microwave ovens or laptop computers or "light" and "pro" versions of software. Rather than maintaining two copies of the common information, one copy is reused. Writers use various techniques to merge the common information with the variable information.
- Two or more deliverables are produced for one product; for example, software often has a user's guide and online help. Much information is in common, but the way that information is combined and presented may vary quite a bit (and references to "page number x" must be removed in the help system or changed to something that makes sense in context).

To complicate a single-sourcing solution, many projects may include both conditions mentioned above: multiple related products, each delivered with more than one information deliverable.

This article does not address the (important) questions of when a single-sourcing methodology is a good solution to an information delivery problem ("good" here meaning saving time and money while maintaining or improving the quality of the resulting deliverables). Instead, I'm looking only at the editor's

involvement in the project.

I asked the HATT (Help Authors' Tools and Techniques) group (<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/hatt>) these questions: "How do successful single-sourcing projects handle the editing? At what stage are your editors involved? How do the editors deal with the material — with all the conditional material in the copy they edit, or with each output deliverable separately (seeing only the subset of stuff that goes into that deliverable), or both, but at different stages of the project? What are the good and bad points of the methods used?"

The answers, as expected, included "We don't have an editor." Other responses confirmed my experience that editing (whether done by an editor, the other writers, or someone else) occurs at these stages:

Editors review individual chunks of information for grammar, style, and so on, during development of the material, either before they are entered into the common database, or in conjunction with technical reviews of the same material.

At a later stage, editors review the chunks of information in files containing all the variations. With the right software, editors can look at the chunks of information in context (one deliverable at a time) by "turning on" only that deliverable's chunks or they can look at all the related chunks (for different deliverables) at once.

After changes from this editing pass and

the technical reviews have been made, editors (or someone in QA - Quality Assurance) are given the individual deliverables to review, to make sure the right chunks went into the right deliverables.

Few organisations do all three of these editing passes.

Editorial markup may involve PDFs, either writing on printouts or electronically marking up the PDFs. This is a common scenario in FrameMaker environments. Editors may electronically mark up Word files, help databases, or HTML files. My research suggests that writing on paper is still the most common method used, at least in departments with trained and experienced writers who are responsible for the final output.

Jean Hollis Weber has over 25 years of experience planning, writing, editing, indexing, and testing user manuals and online help for computer software and hardware.

Jean's Web site, The Technical Editors' Eyrie, <http://www.jeanweber.com>, won a Merit Award in the STC-Australia online communication competition in 2002.

Jean now spends much of her time writing books and articles about OpenOffice.org, an open-source rival to Microsoft Office, and maintains the Taming OpenOffice.org Web site, <http://www.taming-openoffice-org.com/>.



How are ISO standards made? - Richard Hodgkinson

This article has appeared in the ISTC magazine Communicator and is published here by kind permission of ISTC and the author.

ISO/IEC 18019 - Guidelines for the design and presentation of user documentation for application software, is currently undergoing FDIS ballot. I'm often asked about how international standards are produced — and what is an FDIS anyhow?

Who produces international standards?

Two of the main organisations are ISO (the International Organisation for Standardisation) and the IEC (International Electrotechnical Commission). For the production of information technology standards they have formed Joint Technical Committee 1. Within ISO/IEC JTC 1 are several Sub Committees (SCs) responsible for specific areas of IT standardisation (see www.jtc1.org). These SCs are divided into Working Groups (WGs). ISO/IEC JTC 1/SC 7/WG 2 is producing ISO/IEC 18019.

Via their national standards organisations (e.g. the BSI for the UK or ANSI for the USA) countries belong to these committees as either participating or observing members.

Apart from the very highest levels at ISO and the IEC, all the individuals and

experts who participate in the production of standards, work for businesses, academia or national standards organizations – their time and expenses being contributed freely by their employers. Frequently, individuals from competing companies work together for the benefit of their industry. I have worked alongside colleagues from Philips, Siemens, Fujitsu, Apple Computer, Sony, Canon, UNISYS, Oracle and Toshiba.

How is the work done?

Simply put, WGs hold meetings and prepare draft standards, which then undergo international ballots.

Meetings

WGs meet between two and four times each year typically for 3 to 5 days, each meeting being hosted in a different country. This enables experts who are unable to travel overseas to personally attend the occasional meeting. At these meetings, the votes and comments from ballots are reviewed and new drafts prepared for the next ballot cycle. It is not unusual to receive 400 comments from a ballot – all of which must be discussed and responses written. This work can continue between the face-to-face meetings via email and electronic conferencing. WG meetings are always planned to coincide with the ending of ballot cycles.

Ballots

The SC Secretariat distributes the drafts electronically to member national

standards organisations, who in turn circulate them to local experts for review, comment and voting recommendations. The comments and voting are agreed and compiled at national level, then sent back to the SC Secretariat for distribution to the WG. The ISO Directives set the times allowed for these ballots.

What are the stages?

Whilst there are "fast track" procedures for adopting existing national and industry standards as international standards, the stages for creating a new standard are as follows:

1. *NWI (New Work Item)*. A requirement for a new standard is identified and a justification, set of user requirements and basic draft undergo international ballot. When a minimum of 5 countries have approved the NWI proposal, committed to contribute experts plus a project editor, the project is allocated an ISO number and assigned to a WG.
2. *WD (Working Draft)*. The basic working draft is now developed further within the WG. Ballots are not conducted, but when the WD is considered ready, it progresses to the next stage.
3. *CD (Committee Draft)*. This is the next balloting stage. The Directives require that a minimum of 66% of the votes cast are positive. Comments are received, and categorised as "Technical High", "Technical Low" or "Editorial". Technical High comments are often conditional and if implemented can change a vote from "No" to "Yes".

If the ballot is unsuccessful, the WG has to prepare further CDs (2nd, 3rd, etc.), and the balloting cycles are repeated until the 66% approval requirement is met. For each new ballot a Disposition of National Body Comments must accompany the new draft.

4. *FCD (Final Committee Draft)*. By this stage the WG considers that the draft is complete and no further development is necessary. This is also the final opportunity for Technical Comments to be submitted. Again, at least 66% approval is required.
5. *FDIS (Final Draft International Standard)*. This is the final approval ballot and only Editorial comments are expected. If, however, there are insufficient positive votes, then the WG has to decide whether to revise the draft and go back to CD level or abandon it altogether.
6. *IS (International Standard)*. The draft has now successfully completed all of its ballot cycles and is published by ISO.

As you will appreciate, this process can take several years to complete.

Standards developers are always aware that their work must be relevant, address current technology and practices, but not inhibit or constrain the future development of products or technologies.

Richard Hodgkinson FISTC, works in User Technologies at IBM United Kingdom, Hursley Park, Winchester. He has been involved in the development of ISO IT standards since 1990 and represents the UK on three ISO and ISO/IEC committees. Richard is the editor of eleven standards addressing software icons, documentation and accessibility guidelines. Email: Richard_Hodgkinson@uk.ibm.com

International Standards – What is ISO/IEC FDIS 18019? - Richard Hodgkinson

In my previous articles on documentation standards activities, I've described the work of ISO/IEC JTC 1/SC 7/WG 2 – System software documentation, and the collection of standards that we are working upon.

Here I focus solely upon ISO/IEC 18019 – Guidelines for the design and preparation of user documentation for application software.

Once upon a time...

In the mid 1990s the British Standards Institution, published two documentation standards: BS 7649:1993 and BS 7830:1996, which address requirements for preparing printed and online documentation for application software.

These standards were "best sellers" and the BSI subsequently held seminars to promote them. Consequently, the national standards organisations of several countries considered adopting and re-publishing them.

ISO/IEC JTC 1/SC 7/WG 2 discussed this situation in 1998 and agreed to start the ISO process for creating a new international standard based upon the two BSs.

The ballot process took several months to complete and during this period WG 2 obtained the permission of the BSI to use their standards as a foundation, elected a project editor (myself), recruited an editing team

(includes several ISTC members and people who had worked on the BSs) and started the Working Draft.

The ISO Directives require that their standards use a customised Microsoft Word template and considerable effort was spent OCR scanning BS 7649 and converting BS 7830 from WordPerfect format to enable that material to be reused.

The international ballot for the new standard was successful and ISO/IEC 18019 has since progressed through the prescribed draft stages and ballots. During the development process WG 2 received almost a thousand technical and editorial comments, all of which had to be reviewed and responses provided.

WG 2 is about to issue the Final Draft International Standard (FDIS) for ballot, and if successful the standard should be published by ISO early next year. It is possible that 18019 could also be adopted as a British Standard to replace the two original BSs.

BS 7649 + BS 7830 = ISO/IEC 18019?

Some of the information within the two British Standards was duplicated, the two standards used differing clause structures and with advances in online information, accessibility developments, Web-based and CD delivery of information, updating was considered necessary.

17 STANDARDS

After much discussion the decision was taken to produce 18019 as a single part standard that would address “embedded” and “separate” documentation, rather than online and printed documentation. “Embedded” documentation is delivered as part of the software (for example, on-screen help), whilst “separate” information is provided independently of the software (for example, in printed form).

WG 2 also agreed that the new standard would focus primarily upon preparing the documentation irrespective of the delivery mechanism, and guidelines specifically for producing printed documentation would be placed in an annex. In addition, the BS guidelines on writing for English audiences would be moved to separate annex (after all, 18019 is an international standard!).

ISO/IEC 18019 today

The current 140 page FDIS draft provides both process and design guidelines. The clause structure is as follows:

1. **Scope.** Describes the purpose and audience of the standard.
2. **Terms and definitions.** Here any special terms used in the standard are defined.
3. **Overview.** Forms of documentation, guidance on deciding upon the appropriate documentation to use and the types of guidance to be provided.
4. **The objectives phase.** Addresses the collection of the project requirements (usability, accessibility, translation, packaging, standards, legal, costs, quality, approvals, resources...) and the documentation proposal.

5. **The planning phase.** Documentation plan creation and review.
6. **The analysis and design phase.** Audiences, tasks, information, usability, document suite and individual document structures, and writing style guides.
7. **The development and review phase.** Draft preparation, review and updating. Preparation of the document masters, localisation, customisation and archiving.
8. **The evaluation and updating phase.** Evaluation and updating of the documentation.
9. **Guidelines for the design of documentation.** Copyright and version details, documentation overview, process and task descriptions, explanations, messages, definitions, concepts, navigation, presentation, icons and presentation of illustrations.

Annex A. Process checklists:

Objectives, planning, analysis, design and implementation.

Annex B. Design checklists: Content, navigation, style and presentation.

Annex C. Evaluation of the documentation: Procedure, viewpoints, quality characteristics and evaluation methods.

Annex D. Document writing style and techniques: Conventions, vocabulary, terminology, writing styles and techniques, lists, tables and illustrations.

Annex E. Design and preparation of printed information.

Annex F. Writing style guides.

Annex G. ISO/IEC 18019 and other related standards.

Bibliography. List of referenced standards and other documents.

Word Tip - Gary Bunker

I often find it's handy to paste text in an unformatted way, especially when copying to Word from a web page.

The following simple macro is an excellent shortcut. Create a new macro with the code below, and then assign it to an easy to remember key stroke. I use Ctrl+Alt+V, as it's close enough to Ctrl+V (standard paste) to always remember:

```
Sub PasteUnformat()  
'  
' PasteUnformat Macro, to paste  
text into word in plain text format  
'  
    Selection.PasteSpecial  
Link: =False,  
DataType: =wdPasteText,  
Placement: = _  
            wdInLine,  
DisplayAsIcon: =False  
End Sub
```

Letter to the editors

Dear Editors

I have before me a copy of ASTC News, dated May 1992. It was edited by Bruce Wallace, who was President of ASTC (Vic) at the time, and David Green, who was secretary, and it ran to four pages. The newsletter contained amongst other things a report on a presentation to one of the meetings, several book reviews, and the results of a survey of Australian Technical Communication Societies, conducted by Julie Fisher, another former President.

The survey showed that ASTC (Vic)

(Continued on page 29)



How to plane your English - Deb Doyle

As writers, we can choose to make ‘peace’ or ‘war’ with our readers. If we make peace, the writing is pleasant, effective, alive, clear and enduring; if we make war, the writing is waffly, ambiguous and ridiculous. No matter how intrinsically dry or unengaging our topic is, we can honour the reader by, as much as possible, choosing to write in the active voice; using ‘first-person plural’ or, better still, ‘first-person singular’ pronouns; placing the subject at the start of the sentence; and using as many verbs and as few words as possible.

Which of the following four sentences would you rather read?

1. It is a continuing truism that the strategy for information provision is as of great importance as the strategy for service enhancement.
2. Confirmed is the truism that the strategy formed for how information is provided is equal in importance to the strategy formed for how service is enhanced.
3. It remains true that how we provide information is as important as how we improve service.
4. We must always inform and serve people as best we can.

Sentence 1 contains 22 words and eight of them are abstract nouns, as underlined. Two of them, *information* and *service*, are acting as adjectives. Can you visualise a *truism*, a *strategy*, *some information*, a *provision*, a sense

of *importance*, a *service* and *enhancement*? We find it difficult to form a mental picture of something abstract rather than something concrete.

Sentence 1 contains only two verbs, *is* and *is*. The grammatical term for using nouns instead of verbs is ‘nominalisation’.

The subject of any sentence is the person, thing or idea that performs the action, doing, being or having – the thing that goes before the verb. For the subject of Sentence 1, the writer has used the ‘third-person singular’ pronoun ‘it’ and ‘third-person singular’ nouns. In making this choice, the writer has distanced himself or herself from the action, meaning and message of the communication, and therefore from the responsibility for what he or she is telling the reader. The writer has used ‘active voice’, which means that the subject ‘does’, ‘did’ or ‘will do’ the action, doing, being or having.

“We’re all suffering from ‘information overload’ (a nominalised phrase in itself!), and words such as these are nails in the coffin of the plain-English corpse.”

Sentence 2 contains 26 words, and six of them are abstract nouns, as underlined.

The writer has used ‘passive voice’, which means that the subject ‘receives’ the action, doing, being or having. The preposition ‘by’ is either included or implied in the sentence. In making this choice, the writer has placed more importance on the thing done than on the doer of it. Passive voice is the more common form that academic, scientific

and technical communicators use. In Sentence 2, the writer has used nine verbs: *confirmed*, *is*, *formed*, *is*, *provided*, *is*, *formed*, *is* and *enhanced*. The reader can therefore more easily visualise the action, but the writer has dragged the action backwards and added four words. In using ‘third-person singular’ nouns but no personal pronouns, the writer has distanced himself or herself even more from responsibility for the communication’s action, meaning and message.

Sentence 3 contains only 16 words, and four of them are verbs, as underlined. The writer has used active voice and retained the meaning by replacing the abstract nouns with active verbs. He or she has started the sentence with the impersonal ‘third-person singular’ pronoun ‘it’ but chosen the more engaging ‘first-person plural’ pronoun ‘we’. He or she has therefore told the reader that ‘we’ are responsible for the communication’s action, meaning and message. The reader can now more easily visualise ‘it’ remaining true, ‘us’ providing information, ‘it’ being equally important and ‘us’ improving service.

Also, the writer of Sentence 3 has correctly chosen the verb *improve* rather than *enhance* to precede the noun *service*. To enhance means to intensify or highlight whereas to improve means to introduce change for the better. *Enhance* has become an ambiguous verb that many writers use to mean *improve* or *augment*

whereas they should use *improve* because it means one thing only.

Sentence 4 contains only 11 words, and four of them are verbs, as underlined.

The writer has started the sentence with the 'first-person plural' pronoun 'we'. He or she repeats the pronoun to reinforce the fact that 'we' are responsible for the communication's action, meaning and message: 'we' are responsible for informing and serving people to the best of 'our' ability. When 'we' is the subject of the sentence, the reader knows immediately who is responsible for the action signified through the verb or verbs.

When we write words such as *strategy*, *information*, *provision*, *importance*, *service* and *enhancement*, we do so for one or two reasons: we want to mystify the meaning or we simply can't write any better. When readers encounter these words, they switch off, their eyes glaze over and they might start thinking about their washing. We're all suffering from 'information overload' (a nominalised phrase in itself!), and words such as these are nails in the coffin of the plain-English corpse.

Deb Doyle and her family recently moved from Melbourne to Sydney. She operates under the business names Editorial Training Services, Living Proof – Book Editing, and Draw On. As well as training, editing and illustrating, she does writing and proofreading. She's the author of Grey Areas and Gremlins: A Grammar and Punctuation Refresher. To request the order form for the book or more information about Deb's services, please e-mail her at deb@hotlinks.net.au.

Book reviews

Eats, Shoots & Leaves - Lynne Truss

A witty, entertaining, impassioned guide to perfect punctuation, for everyone who cares about precise writing. Not a primer but a 'zero tolerance' manual for direct action.

A panda walked into a cafe. He ordered a sandwich, ate it, then pulled out a gun and shot the waiter. 'Why?' groaned the injured man. The panda shrugged, tossed him a badly punctuated wildlife manual and walked out. And sure enough, when the waiter consulted the book, he found an explanation. 'Panda,' ran the entry for his assailant. 'Large black and white mammal native to China. Eats, shoots and leaves.'

We see signs in shops every day for "Banana's" and even "Gateaux's". Competition rules remind us: "The judges decision is final." Now, many punctuation guides already exist explaining the principles of the apostrophe; the comma; the semi-colon. These books do their job but somehow punctuation abuse does not diminish. Why? Because people who can't punctuate don't read those books! Of course they don't! They laugh at books like those!

Eats, Shoots & Leaves adopts a more militant approach and attempts to recruit an army of punctuation vigilantes: send letters back with the punctuation corrected. Do not accept sloppy emails. Climb ladders at dead of night with a pot of paint to remove the redundant apostrophe in "Video's sold here".

ISBN 1861976127 \$29.95

How to write and illustrate a scientific paper

- Bjorn Gustavii

Easy to read and up-to-date, this guide will help both first-time writers and experienced contributors in authoring research papers. Although the examples are extracted mainly from the medical and biological sciences, the principles described apply to virtually every branch of science.

The book provides step-by-step information on how to prepare every aspect of a scientific paper and examples of both good and bad writing illuminate the author's advice in this accessible and informative handbook.

ISBN 0521530245 \$47.95

As part of their sponsorship of the ASTC (Vic), the Technical Bookshop provides us with reviews of books of interest to technical communicators. Books can be ordered through their web site - www.techbooks.com.au



A new website for Salisbury District Council

- Dr Tom James

Every organisation of any size has a website these days. But what happens if the Web site just evolves, with no clear sense of purpose or ownership? And where do you start when you are asked to “sort out the website” and left to get on with it?

This was exactly the situation I was placed in some months ago: this is a “survivor’s report”. If it stops someone in a similar position making some of the mistakes we did, it will have served its purpose!

Why change the website?

Why change? After all, Salisbury District Council had had a website for about three years. A group of web administrators within the various council services were trained to make updates to their own content. It would have been quite simple to have left it alone and concentrated on more eye-catching initiatives.

Against that view there were some powerful arguments.

Firstly, the UK’s e-Government targets required local councils to “carry out 100% of council services electronically”. Clearly the website would be a major factor in this drive. The website was already a major “face” of the council, and usage was predicted to rise dramatically – indeed, the website usage has doubled in the last year.

Secondly, there were major structural, usability and procedural problems with the old site. For example:

- The website structure was based around our internal service unit boundaries – fine if you happened to know that concerts in the district’s parks are organised by our Environmental Services Unit.
- The site content was provided and maintained according to the enthusiasm of the web administrator within each service unit. The result was that some core council services had no content (or worse, the dreaded phrase “under construction”), sometimes for years on end.
- There was no clear mechanism for deciding where new content would fit, or how particular services could be developed online, with the result that certain services were starting to break away and set up their own “rogue” internet sites.
- And – not the least important – the site didn’t meet mandatory guidelines for web accessibility.

Redesign principles

Clearly the site needed a fundamental redesign. Tinkering at the edges would not solve the major problems outlined above.

A fundamental redesign needs some fundamental principles to guide it. Ours were as follows:

- Utility: Does the site provide information or a service that is useful to our customers?
- Usability: Can our customers use the site to accomplish their objectives?
- Accessibility: Will our site work for all our users?
- Scalability: Will the structure work as the site and our services develop?

Everything we did to the site as it developed was done with these principles in mind.

To start with, we conducted an audit of all the services that the council provided. This helped us decide what information we needed to be on the site.

Having done so, we ruthlessly stripped out content about each service to get down to the “what does the customer need to know?” level. This is not an exercise in secrecy: in fact quite the opposite – we aimed to make everything explicit and easy to find. After reading my twentieth page beginning “The strategic aim of the xx service is to provide...”, it was pretty clear that much of our old website was written to make the council feel important, rather than to be useful to our customers – who, after all, also pay our salaries through the local council tax.

Once our core principles were clear,

we started to redevelop the site in earnest. This redevelopment comprised three main strands:

- Information architecture
- Technical standards
- Visual design

We really did look at them in that order. It wasn't easy, as you can quickly get sucked into visual design questions – especially since design is an issue on which everyone has an instant opinion, whereas information architecture is a seemingly abstruse subject and technical standards are largely invisible. However, with our focus on the core principals outlined above, concentrating on the information architecture first was clearly the correct decision.

Information architecture

Our information architecture was derived “bottom up”: that is, we worked out a list of what should be on the site, and then looked at how that content should be grouped. Users have two primary navigation routes through the site: by “theme” or by “action”. (In addition, they can search and there is a full site A to Z). The aim was to focus on how users would expect to see our information, rather than replicate how we are structured. This led us to break down service unit boundaries: why should a user be expected to know that car parks are actually provided by our Forward Planning unit?

“Themes” group related information from different service units. Each theme could have content from several service units, and a service unit could contribute to several themes. There are seven themes within the site. They emerged from a workshop with a large group of

information owners and contributors within the council. This process ensured that we had broad support for the proposed structure before extensively redeveloping the site.

“Actions” relate to actual services that the public can obtain: for example, applying for a licence or booking a course. There are four main actions: users can apply for something, pay for something, book something or report something to us.

Each action has quite a tightly defined structure, meeting our “usefulness” principle. What would a user want to do when they visit a web page? Ideally they should be able to do the action online (such as paying for a service). But if not, the page should tell them the basics: what the service does, how much (if anything) it costs and how they can do it – whether by phone, email or face to face.

Anything else is additional information: we might include it as supplementary information on a linked page, but it isn't strictly necessary for a user to complete the action. Not only does this structure help focus on the usefulness of information, but it helps with our scalability principle as well: the structure defines where additional pages (such as online forms) will fit as they are developed. And the consistency helps with usability.

Technical standards

Once we had a structure, we looked at technical standards. The site is XHTML v1.0 Strict, with the visual layout achieved using cascading style sheets (that is, with no tables). There are separate print and screen style sheets. We aim towards Web Content

Accessibility Guidelines Level AA, though we make no specific claim for the site.

Despite some quirks in implementation that took a little work to iron out, these choices proved ultimately uncontroversial. For example, people often equate “accessible” with “plain and boring”. When we demonstrated that this didn't have to be the case, opposition melted away. The fact that the site loads quickly and users get straight to the content is now so popular that moving to a bloated, “old-school” design would be unthinkable.

Visual design

Only when the above aspects were sorted out did we start to think about a visual design. Our experience here was less happy: despite a clear brief, we received disappointing results from a design agency we selected to design the site.

In the end, we implemented a simple, no-frills design in-house – which at least meant we could concentrate rigorously on our principles of accessibility and usability without having to argue about whether “grey text on grey” (or whatever the latest design “*quirk du jour*” was) was strictly necessary for a council site.

That said, the council is currently committed to a review of its entire corporate identity, and it is quite likely that the visual design of the site will change as a result – though sticking to our core principles, of course!

Highs and lows...

The redesign work started with awareness-raising and initial design

thoughts around a year ago, and with most of the content migration and development during a rather hectic two weeks around the 2003 / 2004 New Year. So eight months on, what lessons can be learnt?

Firstly the highs: a month after relaunch, the site leapt from 288th to 1st in a survey of UK local authority websites (out of a total of 460 sites). No one complains about the accessibility, the visually plain design or the paring down of content, though all were initially contentious. Defining our design principles first, and concentrating hard on information architecture, were clearly important in the overall success of the project.

Some of the background management issues – such as concentrating information provision and approval in the hands of a small communications team – has clearly benefited the site. The consistency of style and depth of coverage for different services is much improved.

Against that, some things we could have done better. We now have a draft style guide for the site, but it would have been better to have written it first and edited content to match, rather than leaving it implicit for eight months. And although we have implemented a form of authoring workflow, we still haven't cracked the biggest headache for ourselves and I suspect many other

organisations: who “owns” the information, in terms of its accuracy and relevance. This is the challenge to come!

Tom James is the Salisbury District Council's e-Government programme manager. This role involves the e-enabling of over 100 distinct services offered by the council to residents, businesses and visitors. His previous experience was as a consultant specialising in providing accessible, usable and easily maintained content for large organisations.

Web accessibility toolbar

The Web Accessibility Toolbar is provided by the Accessible Information Solutions (AIS) team at the National Information and Library Service (NILS), Australia.

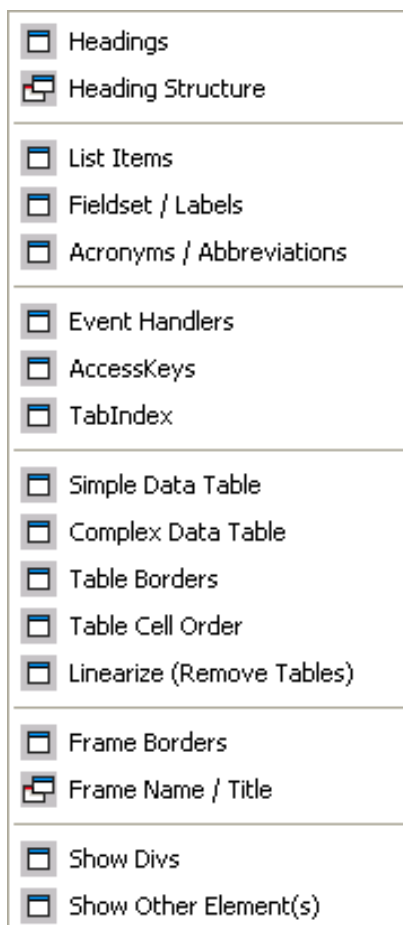
The Web Accessibility Toolbar has been developed to aid manual examination of web pages for a variety of aspects of accessibility. It consists of a range of functions that:

- identify components of a web page
- facilitate the use of 3rd party online applications
- simulate user experiences
- provide links to references and additional resources.

The toolbar can be downloaded from:

http://www.nils.org.au/ais/web/resources/toolbar/documentation_v2en.html

The screen capture shows the extensive features available on the Document Structure menu. The toolbar is a very useful resource for anyone involved in web design.





Why they leave without buying - Gary Bunker

Why do so many people leave websites without buying the items they came to look at?

There are of course many reasons – sometimes the price isn't right, sometimes they can't find it, sometimes they may just be window shopping; but often it's because one key element is missing - trust.

When a visitor arrives at your web site, there are a number of factors that make the difference between staying and interacting with you or leaving before that happens. Those factors mean the difference between making a sale or conversion, and just building up so much useless web traffic. One of the most important factors for visitors is 'trust'.

Why don't you buy products from spam emails you receive? Assuming they offer something you need – let's assume 'mortgage' for now– why don't you click on those links and buy? The product is there, the price usually looks good.

The answer, of course, is trust – I wouldn't trust any site mentioned in spam with my personal details, let alone a mortgage application, and neither should you. Product, service, cost, delivery – they can all be present but without trust no transaction will ever occur.

Usability by Design has recently been researching what makes trust on websites, and how it can be increased.

In reviewing dozens of large and small-scale e-commerce and transactional web sites we've found that trust basically consists of four elements, each of which needs to be carefully honed if sales are to be maximized. The four are Promise, Investment, Delivery and Guarantee.

Promise

First, the 'promise'. This is what is offered to the visitor, the pot of gold should they decide to transact. The promise has to be clear and concise, attractive yet not overstated. People have to be able to see what they are going to get, should they decide to stay longer.

"When a visitor arrives at your web site, there are a number of factors that make the difference between staying and interacting with you or leaving before that happens. Those factors mean the difference between making a sale or conversion, and just building up so much useless web traffic."

The promise is what visitors immediately start looking for when they enter a site, and it's embodied by questions such as 'why am I here?' and 'what can this site do for me?' If the site quickly responds to these questions and makes the answer clear, then visitors are likely to stay longer.

The most common problems we see here are over-crowded/over-complicated sites. Where too much information is

presented it becomes difficult to work through the site and to understand what's relevant to the visitor. One participant in a recent usability test said to us **"It's a bit like having ten salesmen stood in different parts of the shop all screaming at me to come over here and see this."**

We also see the flip side, sites that hint at the promise but don't provide enough information. Again, this is frustrating to visitors as they are forced to make their investment before they really know if that's worthwhile. For example, many sites hide pricing or other key decision-making details behind a registration process or some other 'contact us' mechanism. Trust hasn't formed yet, and so this is the point at which many visitors leave.

Investment

Once the promise is clear, the visitors next need to understand the 'investment'. This is the investment in time, information and perhaps money that needs to be made in order to progress. For example, this may mean that a registration process is required in order to access information.

The problems our research has uncovered here fall into two categories. Firstly, asking for too high an investment and secondly not making the investment clear enough.

In terms of getting the investment right, this depends very strongly on a number of factors: who the visitor is,

what they are after, what is being 'promised' to them, and what their current state of mind is. For example, an experienced internet user browsing for a specific piece of software is probably quite happy to provide their address details and email during the purchase process – but might be put off by more personal questions such as date of birth, hobbies and other software owned. The human brain is an excellent 'fairness calculator', and visitors to a site quickly weigh up what is a fair exchange of information and what is really 'over the top'; tip the scales too far, and trust evaporates.

Time is also an important factor, and is highly attuned to the specifics of the individual and their situation. For example, in one test that we ran, participants (professionals testing an online service for their profession) became frustrated after only three minutes in the registration process. In another (consumers with an online retail site) participants averaged nearly ten minutes each for registration, and felt this was 'fair'. Since this was an application accessed in the evening at home (and possibly with a glass of wine in hand), the investment in time became far less important.

The clarity of the investment also leads to problems and a lack of trust. If the investment is not made clear up front, then visitors feel they have been cheated when it comes to paying. A good example of this was an online gaming site that we tested recently. The entryway to the site was covered with the word 'free' and 'play now', and indeed the first few games could be played instantly and without investment. However, to play all further games the visitor had to

register. Even though registration was free and actually quite painless, the reaction from visitors was very negative and a high proportion of them said they'd leave and not return. They felt betrayed, and even went so far as to say that the site was going to 'trick them out of money' at some future point. That 'fairness calculator' had been triggered, and they felt that this was no longer a trustworthy site.

"For many sites, delivery starts immediately upon the investment in time/information. For example, visitors expect an instantaneous confirmation page upon completing a contact or registration form, telling them that this was received (and ideally what will happen next)."

The solution – making it clear up-front that registration was required (but still free), solved the problem. Visitors knew immediately what they could get and what their investment would be, and the trust issue was settled.

Delivery

The next element in forming trust is 'delivery', which is where the investment has been made and the interface makes good. For product or service-based sites, delivery is quite easy to define – it's the item that has been paid for (though there is more to it, read on!) For informational and other transactional sites, it can be more nebulous, with the delivery being seen by visitors as "the way the site behaves and helps me".

For example, recently we were asked to run a usability test on a site that provided access to multiple archives of historical data. In this case the promise was

relatively clear, and the investment was merely in time – no registration required. But as visitors used the site to track down information, they had a tough time using what was (in this prototype) an overly complex access and search mechanism. In their eyes the promise of 'good information, easily accessible' was not being met, and their view of the site dropped – as did their likelihood to return again another day.

For many sites, delivery starts immediately upon the investment in time/information. For example, visitors expect an instantaneous confirmation page upon completing a contact or registration form, telling them that this was received (and ideally what will happen next). They expect a fast (in most cases automated) email response, to confirm that the website has handed their information to the organization, and that action will commence.

Delivery covers every aspect of the visitors' interaction with the site and your organization, from phone calls to emails to product or service. Any area that lets them down detracts eventually from trust.

Guarantee

The final element of trust-forming is 'guarantee'. Our research has shown that the guarantee is evaluated at every stage of the initial visit to the site, running in parallel to the other three trust elements.

According to our research this is potentially the most critical element of virtual trust, and the one where the highest number of problems occur. The guarantee is any element that

helps to prove:

- you are who you say you are
- you will deliver what you say you will deliver
- you know what you're doing
- you will behave well and not abuse the customer
- any problems that occur will be solved.

A wide range of factors are used by visitors to answer these concerns, and the more factors there are, the higher their confidence in the guarantee on offer. These factors include:

Site URL (does it match what they typed/where they entered/what they are expecting?)

Logos/company names/About us page (who are they really?)

Security policy, HTTPS address and padlock feedback on the page (is it really secure?)

Privacy policy (what will they do with my information? How safe will they keep it?)

Returns policy (what happens if something goes wrong or I don't get my item?)

Links to trust schemes/security schemes (does someone else guarantee them?)

Links to industry bodies/associations (do they really know their stuff?)

Links to press articles/well-known sites that link back (are they real?)

Site visitors are well aware that anybody can set up on the web and look grand

and important, and they can say anything they like on their sites – therefore it is partly 'other trusted sites' that help to grow trust.

“The final element of trust-forming is ‘guarantee’. Our research has shown that the guarantee is evaluated at every stage of the initial visit to the site, running in parallel to the other three trust elements.

The more you can show you are real (external links, especially if they link back) and state clearly how well you will behave (policies), the more they are likely to trust you.

At the end of the day, our research shows that visitors take all four elements of trust and weigh it up in a complex internal algorithm – the promise and delivery against the investment and guarantee. Trust is not of course the only element, the product, price and service are obviously key decision makers – but when the site is not well known to the visitor, trust becomes far more important.

Gary is an industry-leading developer of Usability and Performance Support designs with sixteen years of experience in the industry. He has specialised in both the application of usability to performance support interfaces (such as web interfaces and Computer Based Training), and the integration of performance support into traditional software designs. As a Director of Usability by Design Gary brings expertise from many market sectors, from local government and amenities to software development and internet design. He also talks publicly to promote usability.
www.usabilitybydesign.com.au

Word Tip

- Gary Bunker

MACROS can be really handy for improving the power of Word and reducing the time it takes to perform core tasks. But getting into your macros and remembering what each one does can sometimes take time.

You can easily create a new menu for your macros in Word, and have them all easily to hand.

1. Select Tools > Customize from within Word.
2. Scroll down the list of Categories on the Commands tab, and choose New Menu.
3. Pick up the menu from the box on the right, and drag it to wherever you want it on your menu bar. Make sure that *Normal.dot* is selected if you want the menu to appear in all documents.
4. Right-click on the new menu, and you can give it a name (such as 'My macros').
5. Now select Macros from the list of Categories, and you can drag and drop your macros onto your new menu.

You can easily rename them to give them easy to remember titles, as well as assigning icons if you wish.





The marketing of technical authors - Ellis Pratt

Introduction

In May 2004, I did a presentation to the London group of the Institute of Scientific and Technical Communicators on the future for technical authors. This article expands one of the topics discussed - how to promote and market technical authors.

Avoiding the death of the technical author

In the article *The Death of the Technical Author* (published in the June 2004 edition of *Tech Talk*, the ASTC (Vic) newsletter), I said "Technical authors do not have high prominence in the workplace, and they don't have the best of images (as can be seen by the movie 'The Technical Writer'). Today, there are a number of technical authors struggling to find new employment in the current IT sector, and one can find messages on Internet newsgroups questioning the future employment prospects for technical authors in North America and Europe. Some wonder whether the role of the technical author will disappear, like other careers have in the past."

I believe technical authoring needs to be marketed in order to resolve these concerns.

The seven Ps of marketing

Marketing theories and processes can be applied to technical authors and the work they do, just as they are to other goods and services. Marketing experts talk about the "Seven Ps" for services (Position, Promotion, Place, Price, People, Process, Proof). Technical authors can look at these concepts for guidance on how to improve their lot.

"Is the competition made up of programmers, trainers and testers? Should we position the output from technical authors in comparison to other user support systems, or should we position the professional skills against other job functions? Should we do both?"

I'd like to look at one aspect - positioning. According to marketing strategist Max Blumberg, the real reason why organisations (and professions) are not winning more clients is because they have not positioned themselves properly.

Positioning technical authoring

So what is positioning, exactly? According to Blumberg, your position is the impression of your business (or in this case, profession) left in the minds of your clients and prospective clients.

Often people extend its meaning to include your USP (unique selling proposition or what makes you different from your competitors) and your value propositions (the benefits you offer to your clients):

[your business position] =
[the needs of your market] –
[your competitors' positions]

"In other words, choose a position for yourself that meets the needs of your prospective clients, but has not yet been taken by your competitors."

Using this formula to create a market position for technical authors leads to some interesting choices.

Who are the competitors, exactly?

There are lots of ways the competition can be defined. For example:

1. Is it the alternatives to traditional authored output?

Are "clients" choosing to focus on e-learning/CBT instead? Are they choosing to provide more telephone support and training?

2. Is it the other professions?

Is the competition made up of programmers, trainers and testers?

Should we position the output from technical authors in comparison to other user-support systems, or should we position the professional skills against other job functions? Should we do both?

What is the market?

As with competitors, there are a number of ways "the market" can be defined. It could be, for example, the end user or the internal project manager. They may well have

different needs or perhaps the same needs in a different order of priority.

This isn't easy

Marketing is, in part, about the image we want to create in the mind of the "clients" - showing how technical authors can meet their needs and stand out against the competition. This isn't a quick or simple exercise, but it is one that is important to do to promote the profession.



Ellis Pratt is the Sales and Marketing manager for Cherryleaf Limited, a documentation company based in the United Kingdom. He has ten years experience working on documentation projects and has provided account management for central government intranet roll-outs, documentation for SAP implementations, as well as countless Help files and user manuals for software packages. He has a BA in Business Studies. He is an accomplished speaker on topics such as the future trends in documentation, trends in online Help and diabolical documents. He has spoken at the Online Help Conference Europe and the tekomp (Germany) conference. He has also had articles published in journals such as *The Communicator*.

Accreditation - an update

- Andrea Tappe

In the March issue of the ASTC (Vic) newsletter, Tech Talk, Allan Charlton and Sue Woolley discussed the issue of professional accreditation for ASTC (NSW) and ASTC (Vic) members. The development of an accreditation scheme would be a significant step towards gaining general acceptance of technical communication as a profession, rather than as an unusual secretarial skill.

However, there are a number of questions to be resolved before any type of program can be implemented. For example, how will it work? Who will run it? How much will it cost? What sort of rights and obligations would we have as assessors and/or assessees under the program? And many more.

The ASTC (Vic) is working with the Swinburne University School of Social and Behavioural Science to find answers to some of these questions. Each year, the best of the Swinburne Sociology undergraduates are invited to participate in a research internship. The ASTC (Vic) submitted a proposal for the intern program in May, and, with the kind assistance of Dr Katharine Betts, secured the assistance of Ms Amy Veerman. Amy is currently studying Communications at Swinburne, and has both an excellent academic background and some practical experience of the types of issues we currently face.

Between August and November 2004, Amy will conduct a preliminary study to find out where we stand on these issues. From her findings, we can begin to develop a strategy for moving towards professional recognition. Details of how you can participate in this study will be available shortly, and the results will be published in the next issue.

Spelling tips

- Craig Hadden

- To differentiate "licence" (noun) and "license" (verb), think of the words "advice" (noun) and "advise" (verb).
- To differentiate "stationery" and "stationary", think of E for "envelopes" (or A for "at rest").

Have you got any more of these handy hints that we could publish? Send them in to anzjournal@astcvic.org.au.

Introducing the editorial team - Sue Woolley

For the last two years, Andrea Tappe, Penelope Goward and myself have been editing the ASTC (Vic) quarterly newsletter. We took over in July 2002 after a few months with no editor and no newsletter. With three of us working together it has been a thoroughly enjoyable task, and we have been able to do things that a single editor found difficult. We started off quite humbly, and in our initial enthusiasm wrote a lot of the articles ourselves. As time went on, we managed to persuade an array of people to write for us, and were over the moon when the first unsolicited article arrived.

At the AODC conference in Sydney in April this year, I met Margery Watson, the President of TCANZ and INTECOM. She mentioned that TCANZ were considering resurrecting their

newsletter, and over a few wines overlooking the ocean at Manly, we decided to look at the possibility of collaborating on a journal. My fellow editors were both excited by the possibilities, and so the ANZ Journal of Technical Communication was born. Hasib Shakoor offered to co-ordinate the NZ side of the operation, with editorial assistance from Steve Moss.

Recently ASTC (NSW) came on board, with *keyword* editor, Matilda Reich volunteering to co-ordinate the contributions from NSW.

I am looking forward to continuing to work with Andrea and Penelope, and to developing a strong working relationship with Hasib, Steve and Matilda.



SUE WOOLLEY is a freelance technical communicator who has worked on a range of IT, engineering and business projects for numerous different clients. Prior to changing careers to become a technical communicator, Sue worked for 10 years in IT technical support and programming.

In her spare time, Sue runs the taxi service for her two daughters, reads, walks, does crosswords, and is trying to find the time to develop her interest in photography.

Sue is currently the President of the ASTC (Vic).



ANDREA TAPPE is a freelance technical communicator. She has worked in the software development, retail, finance and government sectors, producing online help, procedure manuals, training documentation and web copy.

In 2001, she received two Merit awards from the STC for the user documentation for QSR's NVivo 2.0 software.

In her spare time, Andrea can generally be found performing with one of Melbourne's amateur theatre companies.

Andrea is currently the webmaster for the ASTC (Vic).



PENELOPE GOWARD works as a lecturer in the School of IT at Deakin University in Melbourne, where she teaches the human aspects of computing, including communication skills for IT, multimedia design and theory, and writing for research.

Prior to her lecturing career, Penelope worked for 10 years writing in the public health and education area.



HASIB SHAKOOR, a qualified journalist, strayed into technical communication in 1993 after doing some free-lance work for a firm contracted to write procedure documentation for Hitachi Engineering.

Since then he has written computer-based training modules to acquaint users with Hyundai Motor Company's complex computer system and worked as part of a team, in the UK and USA, developing online help for McAfee's software solutions. He migrated to New Zealand in 2001, and after completing a contractual stint with Fuji Xerox New Zealand, joined Zeacom as a Technical Writer. Hasib's main area of expertise lies in developing online help systems and he has worked extensively with RoboHelp and AuthorIT. Hasib is currently the Secretary of TCANZ.



STEVE MOSS has been a Director of TechWrite Services, a documentation consultancy company in Auckland, since 1988. He qualified as a mechanical engineer in 1975 at Heriot-Watt University in Edinburgh. Since then he has held various positions including Computer Applications Engineer, Chief Programmer/Analyst, Software Engineer, Senior Education Instructor and Documentation Consultant in large organisations in Australasia and the UK. Steve is an Information Mapping® certified instructor and also runs training courses on a number of areas relating to the development of effective documentation. He has extensive experience in the creation of Microsoft Word templates and is also an experienced editor. In 2001, Steve published a book "Documenting Your Business" (Pearson Education) which provides practical advice on recording your business processes, procedures and policies.

Steve is a senior member of the US Society for Technical Communication (STC) and is also Vice President and webmaster for the Technical Communicators Association of New Zealand (<http://www.tcanz.org.nz/>).

MATILDA REICH is based in Sydney and alternates between technical communication and her specialty - business process analysis for the telecommunication industry (10 years). She has a BA (Communication) from the University of Technology, Sydney, and is currently doing a Graduate Diploma in Information Design from the Christchurch Polytechnic Institute of Technology. Being married with a preschool age daughter means that she is very interested in 'time management'. Her hobbies are reading (Saturday broadsheet newspapers), walking, swimming, skiing. Favourite book is "The Power of Your Subconscious Mind" by Joseph Murphy and favourite film is "Contact" based on the late astronomer, Carl Sagan's, novel.

(Continued from page 17) - Letter to the editors

had 81 members and membership cost \$30 per year.

It also showed there were ASTC societies in New South Wales (approx 80 members), Queensland (approx 40 members), and South Australia (approx 30 members).

The newsletter advertised a couple of forthcoming presentations - 'What technical writers actually do' and 'Plain English in practice'.

Since that time, our newsletter has had several changes of name, several different editors, and a wide range of contributors.

Publication of the first edition of the ANZ Journal heralds a new and exciting era for technical communicators in this corner of the world. We welcome the fact that our fellow societies in NSW and New Zealand are joining in the venture and are contributing to the journal.

It is a good time to thank Sue, Andrea

and Penelope, whose enthusiasm and perseverance have brought us to this first edition of the Journal, and to pay tribute to all those who have dedicated their time and expertise to our past newsletters.

John Commin
Melbourne

Letters to the editors are always welcome, and can be e-mailed to anzjournal@astcvc.org.au. We look forward to reading your thoughts and ideas.

(Continued from page 5) - Power and Legitimacy...

'engineer' was once considered to be roughly equivalent to a 'skilled manual labourer' – in much the same way that a 'technical writer' is now seen more or less as a 'secretary'. This is a collection of academic papers, and I must admit at times I felt that the issues had been analysed to a thread! However, as several of the essays point out, academia and business will need to work together if technical communication is ever to achieve the status of a respected profession. Certainly this book has given me a new perspective on problems which I almost took for granted.

Volume II

In their first volume, Kynell-Hunt and Savage gave a very well considered review of the history of technical communication, of the current status of the profession and of strategies for the

future. This second volume deals with the same issue – the struggle for recognition as a legitimate profession with valuable skills to contribute to the workplace and to society – in a similar format.

Section one gives a historical overview of technical communication as a profession. I was particularly impressed by the essays from Kynell-Hunt and Tebeaux, which refer to our origins to remind us that, first and foremost, our purpose is to communicate with our audience. It is not to provide a showcase for the latest technology, not to write works of outstanding academic merit, but to communicate in the most effective manner possible with a group of people nominated as the target audience for our product or service.

Also of interest to me were the essays by Davis and Johnson in the second section, which deals with current

practise. Davis identifies several issues which she believes must be addressed for technical communication to take on the status of a profession. She believes there must be academic research into current areas of practice, an accreditation scheme and some form of licensing for practitioners. Johnson investigates a rarely discussed area – professional ethics for technical communicators.

Overall, another well-chosen selection of essays, offering valuable insights into our profession.

Copies of all Baywood's publications can be ordered via their website, www.baywood.com.

Andrea reviewed the first volume in the March 2004 issue of Tech Talk, the ASTC (Vic) quarterly newsletter. The review is repeated here for completeness.

Submission guidelines

We welcome articles on all aspects of technical communication and related matters.

If you have not submitted an article before, please send a photograph and a short biography of yourself to include with the article.

Contributors are responsible for obtaining permission to reproduce any third-party copyright material used in their articles.

Articles may be edited for space considerations or to meet other publication requirements.

Please submit articles in Microsoft Word format, with minimum formatting, to:
anzjournal@astcvic.org.au

Subscriptions

Southern Communicator is published four times a year.

If you are a member of ASTC (Vic), TCANZ, or ASTC (NSW) you receive this journal as one of the benefits of membership.

Visit the organisations' web sites for information on joining.

Please direct subscription enquiries to:
anzjournal@astcvic.org.au

Themes

Each journal will have a theme, and we will include one or more key articles relating to that theme. Articles for a particular issue do not necessarily have to be related to the theme, although the editors may choose to hold back

articles that they feel might fit better in another issue. The themes for the next few issues are:

December 2004: Business and professional issues

Deadline: Friday 12th November

March 2005: Printing and publishing

Deadline: Friday 11th February

June 2005: Tools and technology

Deadline: Friday 13th May

Advertising

Advertising rates:

Full page: \$AUD 200

Half page: \$AUD 100

Quarter page: \$AUD 50

Business card size: \$AUD 25.

Please direct advertising enquiries to:
anzjournal@astcvic.org.au