



February 2010, Volume 22, Number 6

February chapter meeting

6:00 p.m. (5:45 registration and networking)

Note: new start time

February 2, 2010

Red River College
160 Princess Street

Writing for the Web
Kelly Thibodeau

Please confirm your attendance by noon, Friday, January 29, with Joanne Kusiak at meetingcoordinator@stcmanitoba.org

February chapter meeting

Writing for the Web—Smarter, Better, Faster, Stronger

Is your Web copy killing your customers? Are they left to fend for themselves, lost and alone in a tangled jungle of meaningless words, a sea of senseless categories and twisted paths of never-ending links?

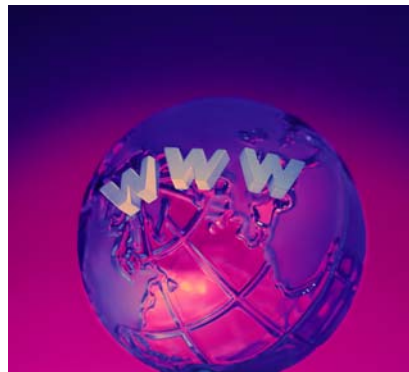
This workshop will teach you how to write headlines that grab attention, paragraphs that won't put you to sleep, and links that don't send your customers around in circles (or worse yet, to the competition).

Untwist the tangled mess and tame the beast! Learn how to look at your Web site with new eyes—your customers' eyes. Empower them. Engage them. Keep them coming back for more.

Want to create awesome Web sites that work? Then you will want to attend this event! Please join us for an informative and entertaining look at how we can improve our Web sites. We look forward to seeing you there!

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About the Presenter

Kelly Thibodeau is a Senior Member of the STC and has been working as a technical communicator for more than 17 years. She's worked on a wide range of online projects including developing online policy and procedure manuals, writing computer end-user help systems, managing, writing and editing intranet and Internet content and developing Web site information architecture. She has been an instructor of Online Documentation courses at Red River College and Simon Fraser University. She has been working in the Communication Services department at Great-West Life for over five years.



Creating and supporting a forum for communities of practice in the profession of technical communication

About *Manuscript*

Manuscript and its shorter sibling *Micro Manuscript* are the official newsletters of STC Manitoba. Together, they are published 10 times annually between September and June. The opinions expressed are those of the authors. Submissions, news, reviews, and other items of interest are welcome. Contributions may be edited for length. Deadline is the fifteenth of every month. For example, the deadline for the November issue is October 15.

Please make arrangements in advance with the editor. By submitting an article, you agree to its publication in *Manuscript* and for other STC publications to reprint it without permission. The writer holds copyright. When submitting an article, please let the editor know if it has been published or submitted elsewhere.

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Secretary, Vacant
Treasurer, Donald Nordman
Membership, Vacant
Public relations, Dorothy Davidson
Program, Vacant
Meeting coordinator, Joanne Kusiak

Members of Manitoba's STC chapter gather at the Annual General Meeting in May and elect members to the STC Chapter. Each member on the executive is elected for a term of one year.

From the President

STC Manitoba needs your help!

We are actively searching for candidates to serve on the executive for 2010–2011. Serving on the executive is a great way to expand your Manitoba network, and gain valuable experience working for a non-profit organization. It allows you to stay current, looks great on the résumé, and most importantly, will allow the Manitoba chapter to continue providing educational services and a common networking venue for local members.

I am currently operating as President and Program Chair. I have agreed to continue on as Program Chair as long as we can find a new President, but I just don't have the time or energy to take on both roles again. We are also looking for a Vice-President, Secretary, Membership Chair, Public Relations Chair, and Newsletter Editor. If we cannot fill these positions over the next several months, there may not be a chapter next year.

This year is an opportunity for change. The dynamics of STC Manitoba seem to be changing, and it's clear we need to diversify our offerings to continue attracting members. The monthly dinner meetings seem to be fizzling, and I think it would be beneficial to our club and refreshing to our members if we changed our approach to the chapter's program. This might take the form of replacing monthly chapter meetings with less frequent workshops, mini-conferences, and network-only events.

So if you care about the future of STC Manitoba, and want to lend a hand to make a difference, then I strongly urge you to volunteer. The total commitment is only a couple hours a month and you'll meet some great people, gain some valuable experience, and be able to say you contributed to the survival of STC Manitoba!

Ben

Around the STC

STC is offering the following events online. Visit www.stc.org for more details on the time and cost.

- February 3, 2010 Ten Things You Thought You Knew About Writing
- February 10, 2010 Quick Reference Guides
- February 17, 2010 Scenario-driven Information Architecture
- February 24, 2010 Managing Conflict on Global Teams

STC Technical Summit, Dallas 2010

May 2–5, 2010
Dallas, Texas
visit www.stc.org for more details



From the Editor

Well here we are, now in our second month of the new year. It's amazing how much faster time seems to go by as you get older. I ended 2009 feeling relaxed, but the new year seems to have started with a bang. As well as working fulltime, I am continuing education in an evening program, continuing volunteer work with STC Manitoba, and taking on the challenge of teaching a few hours per week in the Technical Communication Diploma program. Am I busy? Maybe a little ...

While we often find it easy to take on a lot more (some days more than others) than we should, it's important to find time for yourself and just take a few minutes, or if you can, a few hours to yourself.

Although things are hectic, when I can, I like to take the time to read a new book. I have a stack of books I've been meaning to read, but haven't found the time as of yet. I've started to read the latest book from Kathy Reichs, *206 Bones*. I was introduced to Kathy's books years ago and have been a fan ever since. I think it's a nice way to keep in touch with my former life as an archaeologist, even though her specialty is completely different from what I was doing, it's still a good form of escaping my daily life ... even if it's a few pages at a time.

Until next month,
Rachel

Periodical review

Has usability testing been and gone?

By Kevin Longfield

About 10 years ago, usability testing seemed to be the coming thing. A lot of us in technical communication saw it as a way to both improve the quality of the products we documented, and also to improve the documents that we produced. The STC journal published a lot of articles on usability testing (and still does). STC conferences have many sessions exploring usability testing. One the other hand, an article in the August 2009 *Technical Communication* journal has me wondering if usability testing time is almost done, or at the very least if it will be undergoing significant change.

Just what is agile development?

The article is "The Impact of Agile on User-centered Design: Two Surveys tell the Story." The authors are David Dayton and Carol Barnum, two prominent usability researchers associated with Southern Polytechnic State University in Atlanta Georgia. The "agile" that the article's title refers to is agile software development, a rapid development model that uses such techniques as sprints (short planning cycles of a few weeks) and scrums (short stand-up meetings to address issues and report progress). Teams are leaderless. This process makes it difficult to plan and execute realistic usability simulations.

Barnum and Dayton ask "with the rapidly growing interest in agile development cycles, how can we make the case for user-centered design processes when the development process has moved from fast to relentlessly fast-forward?"

The agile development model has become popular because of its team orientation, lack of documentation (software developers traditionally hate documenting) and rapid product development as compared to the traditional "waterfall" development process. Companies such as Microsoft and Hewlett-Packard are using the agile model. In their research into agile, the authors found that "none of the accounts cited discusses ways to build usability testing into the agile process."

A tale of two surveys

The bulk of the article discusses two surveys the authors conducted before and after a client of their university's Usability Center adopted agile methods. For two years between 2003 and 2005 this client used their usability labs extensively to assess their software products, and in 2004 the university conducted a survey to see how effective usability testing had been. Analysis of the responses to the 2004 survey showed that "a few

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developers were skeptical about the ultimate value of usability testing; however, the overwhelming majority were positive.”

Then in January of 2005 the company began to adopt agile methods, and its use of the Usability centre declined to nothing within a little over a year. Instead, the company adopted an informal testing method in which 10 company “employees not connected to product development would download, install, and use the product for at least 15 minutes.” The company did not observe the testers using the product, as formal usability testing would. The limitations to this type of testing might seem obvious, but what were the results?

In April 2007 the authors conducted a second survey to assess attitudes toward formal usability testing, the informal testing currently in use at the company, and “opinions toward the agile development method and its impact on usability testing.”

The authors noted that “the dominant opinion about agile’s impact on usability testing ...can be summed up this way: the company cares deeply about the usability of its products and thus believes that usability testing is vital ... However, informal usability testing and other informal methods ... are perceived by many to fit better

with the agile process and to be potentially just as effective as formal testing.” (I would say that the key word in that quotation is “potentially.”)

So, what next?

As the authors say, “making formal usability methods more agile presents a difficult challenge.” The biggest stumbling block seems to be the need to plan for usability testing well in advance, which is inimical to the agile process with its limited time horizons. The authors describe a method that a company called Autodesk uses, which involves two parallel agile development tracks, one called the interaction designer track and the other called the developer track. They say that “This process works by getting ahead of the designers by at least one cycle, as well as gathering requirements before cycle 0.”

In their recommendations the authors stress the need to become familiar with agile methods so that you can effectively plan to integrate usability testing into the process. They also stress the need to plan ahead so that you are ready to test the moment that the developers need feedback, and therefore you will not slow down the developers. Having a weekly usability test schedule will allow designers to schedule themselves into the testing process easily, and with any luck prevent them from thinking that they do not have time to schedule testing.

Professional development

Course	Date (2010)	Location
Manual writing and design		
Technical communication 1		
Editing plain language	Self-directed	Red River College
Preparing newsletters		
Business Opportunities and Ideas - Choosing the Right One!	Feb 18	
Selling your Product or Service to the City of Winnipeg		Canada/Manitoba Business Service Centre
Selling your Product or Service to the Province of	Feb 24	
Selling your Product or Service to the Government		

January chapter meeting

Making progress—report on the January progression meeting

By Dorothy Davidson, Rachel Ines, and Andrew Quarry

Well, it's that time of year again! You know it's a new year when the January progression roles around. This past month, four speakers shared their experience in various software programs and developing your identity through your professional portfolio.

At progressions, more than one presentation is made during the same session. The four topics featured in this year's progression were divided between two sessions. The progress referred to in the name of the event is the movement of parts of the audience from one table to another on the basis of personal preferences for hearing a particular presentation. Members of the audience were given time before each session to pick up coffee and snacks.

The audience for this meeting had an unusual composition. Proportionally, there were far fewer of the usual attendees and many new faces.

The four presentations addressed

- Using InDesign
- Using Social Networks: LinkedIn and Twitter
- Starting a Social Network: Ning
- Preparing a Portfolio

Rachel Ines [presenter]—The In's and Out's of InDesign

Rachel used a walkthrough on her laptop computer as a means for illustrating the points she made during her presentation about InDesign—the layout program in Adobe's Creative Suite (CS). Although Rachel's own experience with the program encompasses the CS2, CS3, and CS4 versions, most of her years of experience laying out newsletters is founded on her use of an easier-to-use but less powerful program—Microsoft Publisher.

Rachel pointed out that one of the key strengths of InDesign is the degree to which it shares tools and the general look and feel of its graphical user

interface with other programs in the Adobe Creative Suite.

Among the features that Rachel covered were

- creation of bleeding edges
- embedded conversion of units of measure so to avoid having to calculate the equivalents of units of measure
- use of master pages
- automatic resizing of images to frames
- the use of layers

Brad Friesen [presenter]—Using Social Networks: LinkedIn and Twitter

What do these strange terms relate to? They almost sound a little nefarious, as if they belong to the world of some mysterious counter-culture, but in reality they are some of the new vocabulary related to social networking sites.

Brad provided information on two social networking sites: LinkedIn and Twitter. A social networking site "is basically a group of individuals who share a common interest. Depending on that interest, the site can

help members to find new job opportunities, to seek a life partner, to look for business opportunities, or to locate new customers."

LinkedIn (www.linkedin.com) is a site for professionals, enabling "connections" with other professionals in a field or industry. It acts as a supportive link between groups of members who may be entrepreneurs, the unemployed, or various professionals, e.g., technical communicators or structural engineers. LinkedIn acts somewhat like a professional association in that it provides a forum for members to discuss issues pertaining to the industry or to get help with problems, but without the necessity of a face-to-face meeting.

Twitter (<https://twitter.com>), on the other hand, is a social networking and micro-blog site that is



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(“Making progress ...” continued from page 5)

more personally oriented. It enables members (“friends”) to connect with other members through messages of up to 140 characters (a tweet), either through direct messaging or on a public page. Twitter can be used merely to keep in touch with friends, but can also be used in marketing various products. Tweets can be categorized through the use of “hash tags” (category names).

Brad cautioned that any social network is a public forum, and a member has to be careful what information is posted. “Don’t say anything that you wouldn’t want your boss or significant other to see; this is not private,” he warned. This is also a concern with respect to personal information; one cannot assume that others will not use this information in undesirable ways. Caution is always the wisest course.

Nirdosh Ganske [presenter]—Starting a Social Network: Ning

Nirdosh introduced us to the world of Ning (www.ning.com) where like minded people come to share their interests. Launched in 2005, Ning is an online platform for people to create their own social networks. Like most social networking sites, Ning does not require users to know how to use software programs such as Java Script or HTML. As a blended learning site, it functions similar to a listserver.

Ning can be accessed by members in a public or private group. To participate, you have to sign up for the program or you are invited to join the group by a member. Functioning like a social networking site, users are provided with the tools needed to communicate with others. The latest user information is posted on the home page in a blog format.

Nirdosh pointed out you can have a private group; however, you will have to pay for this service. She chose to have a private group because the group wanted to keep their discussions private, allowing them to keep their information hidden from the public. Nirdosh cautioned that once a group ceases to operate their site privately, their information becomes publicly available. One way to work around this issue is being banned from the site. Once the site administrator bans a member, that person’s information is permanently deleted. After her group completed their time on Ning, they purposely banned themselves from their site to protect their personal information.

Susan Haire [presenter]—Everything You Ever Wanted to Know about Preparing a Portfolio But Were Afraid to Ask

Susan brought the master copy of her own very substantial and wide-ranging portfolio to illustrate the points she made about how to develop and use a professional portfolio as part of your approach to a job search.

Her presentation and the handout that she distributed included many tips for addressing issues likely to be faced by various members of the very mixed audience: for example

If you lack actual experience in an area that is likely to be of interest to a potential employer, prepare a sample that demonstrates that you recognize what the challenges are in a particular area and how you would address them. Such a sample might be a rewrite of an often mishandled area of communication such as a VCR manual.

If the relevant experience you have in an area involves confidential, proprietary information that you can’t get permission to show to other parties, either prepare a sample similar to the one you might use if you lacked the actual experience or, if the layout alone demonstrates the point you need to make, “Greek” the text and mask the images to maintain confidentiality.

Considering the 15-minute time constraint, the presentation was very rich with useful tips. For example, Susan had specific suggestions on matters to consider if you are asked to leave the portfolio behind and how diplomatically to ensure that it is returned to you.

Bring a guest contest

STC Manitoba’s Bring a guest contest is back for 2009–10.

Win a free membership worth roughly \$250.00. For more details, visit the STC Web site at www.stcmanitoba.org.



STC Manitoba chapter members

The first 15—Where are they now?

By Susan Haire

STC Manitoba became a chapter in January, 1989, after 15 people joined STC. But even though we were not officially a chapter, we had an executive and several meetings leading up to that momentous occasion. To mark our twentieth year as a chapter, *Manuscript* is running a series of articles about these first 15 members.

As this year's chapter Vice-President (and one of those first 15 members myself), I was asked to track down my fellow pioneers and find out what they're all doing now. I asked everyone the same five questions. This month we are interviewing James (Jamie) Conklin. Jamie was our fifteenth member, bringing us to chapter status in January 1989.

Q. How did you get involved with STC Manitoba back in 1988?

JC: From 1984 to 1988, I worked as a technical communicator and communications consultant in Toronto—first with a pioneering computer company called Teklogix Inc., and then with a consulting firm called The Wyatt Company. I realized that there were other technical communicators out there, somewhere, but was unable to make contact with them, so I tried to figure out how to “do” technical communications on my own, mostly through common sense and trial and error. In 1988, however, I became aware of the existence of the STC, though I was unable to track them down in Toronto. At about the same time I came across the books of Ron Blicq, and noticed that he lived and taught in Winnipeg. In 1988, when I moved to Winnipeg, it made sense to contact Ron to see if he could point me in the direction of a possible job, and it just happened that the effort to form a Manitoba STC chapter was in full flight at that very moment. Ron put me in touch with Alexa Campbell, Tony Rhodes-Marriott and Andrew Quarry, and I began attending meetings.

Q. What was your role at that time?

JC: I was the chapter's first Treasurer. It was a great way to meet people, and I believe I filled that role for two terms.

Q. What have you been doing over the past 20 years? Are you still involved with STC Manitoba and/or technical communication? Did your membership in the chapter help you in any way?

JC: My career has evolved in what I would call an organic manner, but it has taken me away from traditional technical communication work. My experience doing tech comm. work in Toronto led me to believe that it was important for technical communicators to become involved in projects right at the start, and not wait until a system or product was ready to launch—the common practice in the 80s and early 90s was to bring the TCer in at the end of the development cycle. I was convinced that a TC skill set would help to ensure that specifications were clearly documented and understood, and that all parties to a new system were able to come to a common understanding of what was to be delivered. It seemed very important to me that this common understanding be achieved at the start of development. For a TCer to work effectively at the beginning of a project, skills other than writing and formatting were needed – facilitation and team skills, in particular. Because of this, in the 90s I became more and more interested in the area of interpersonal communication. This also led me to become interested in the social systems that exist within organizations, and in group dynamics. To make a long story short, as a result of these evolving interests I ended up going back to school, and receiving an MA in Human Systems Intervention and finally, earlier this year, a Ph.D. I am now officially Dr. James Conklin, and I began a full-time position at Concordia University, teaching group dynamics and also teaching in the MA program, on July 1, 2009.

My membership in STC connected me to a world of people who shared my interests. I remain in close contact with people like Dr. Hillary Hart, Dr. Saul Carliner, Mary Wise, and Judy Glick-Smith. I am no longer active at a chapter level in STC, but I continue to focus some of my research and publishing on matters of interest to Tech Commers—I edited a special issue of *Technical Communication* that came out several months ago on qualitative research in technical communication, and Dr. George Hayhoe and I are

(“The first 15—Where are they now?” continued on page 8)

STC MANITOBA MESSAGE BOARD

Strong leader wanted!
Looking for chapter
President with bold ideas
to revitalize chapter!
Contact: Nominating
chair

Do you like bananas?
Needing a second
banana or Vice-
President to lead
chapter forward.

WANTED: individual with
strong listening skills and
attention to detail. Chapter
secretary contact
andrewquarry@gmail.com

Person with strong
counting skills needed.
No abacus required, just
the ability to count.
Contact Ben if
interested in Treasurer
position

Chair persons wanted.
Chairs provided—just
bring yourself:
Membership chair
Public relations chair
Program chair

Creative persons
needed to keep STC
Manitoba chapter
members informed.
Newsletter editor
needed, start Aug 2010.

("The first 15—Where are they now?" continued from page 5)

currently negotiating a book deal for a collection of essays on the same subject (watch for it next year).

Q. How do you see the chapter moving forward in the next few years?

JC: I am afraid that I am completely out of touch with chapter life. I wish you the best of luck, but it would be impertinent of me to offer advice.

Q. Any other comments or words of wisdom you would like to share with the chapter?

JC: I wish you a jolly time, celebrating the anniversary.

Q. You joined STC in January 1989, becoming our 15th member. I recall that you received a 'gift' from the chapter to celebrate that occasion. Do you remember what was in the gift?

JC: I certainly remember receiving a tongue-in-cheek gift from Alexa at the meeting when the chapter was formally constituted. I had joked that since my membership brought the chapter to the magic number of 15, I ought to receive a car. My recollection is that she presented me with a little toy car at the meeting.

Final note: Does anyone have an email address or telephone number for Denise Laporte-Dawes? If so, please contact me at susan_haire@hotmail.com. Thanks.

Susan Haire has been a technical communicator and member of STC for over 20 years. She was one of the 'first fifteen', and has served the chapter as President, Secretary, and Vice-President (this year).

2009–2010 presentation schedule

Speaker	Presentation title	Date
Kelly Thibodeau	Writing for the Web	February 2, 2010
Ron Blicq, Susan Haire	Technical Communication café Prairie Ink Café (Grant Park)	March 2, 2010
IMRIS	Tour of IMRIS	April 6, 2010
Sue Hemphill	Conflict resolution	May 4, 2010

STC [international] elections

Making change happen—your vote counts

STC members are asked to familiarize themselves with the candidates running for the 2010 STC elections. Voting for STC elections will be held March 9 to April 8, 2010. Voting instructions and ballots will be sent to members by mail or email. The STC encourages members to vote online instead. By doing so you will save time and postage, and ensure that your vote is received immediately. The last day for elections is **April 8, 2010** at Noon EDT.

Candidate information is available on the STC Manitoba forums (See other events): <http://stcmanitoba.org/forums/viewforum.php?f=18>

Election candidates

The 2010 slate of candidates for Society office, the STC Board of Directors voted during its August 24, 2009 meeting to amend the Society Bylaws to reflect the following position changes:

- Remove the Second Vice President position
- Remove one Director position
- Change Director terms to two years
- Allow Directors to serve two consecutive terms

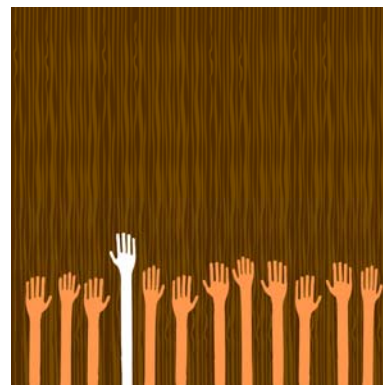
For President: Mike Hughes will automatically succeed from First Vice President.

For First Vice President: Hillary Hart will automatically succeed from Second Vice President.

Candidates on the slate for the 2010 STC election:

For Secretary:

- Rachel Houghton
- Steven Jong



For Director (three positions to be elected)*:

- Nicky Bleiel
- Al Hood
- Tricia Spayer
- Makarand (Mak) Pandit
- W.C. Wiese

*Lisa Pappas resigned from the STC Board effective November 23, 2009, which creates an additional position for someone to serve the one year remaining in her term. For Nominating Committee (two positions to be elected):

- Lory Hawkes
- Nathaniel Lim
- Linda Mikkelsen
- Preeti Mathu

If you have any questions, please contact Chief Operating Officer and Director of Community Relations, Diana Buttram, at diana.buttram@stc.org, or reply to stc_election@stc.org.

Don't forget your STC annual renewal!

Changes to society dues

The prorated dues amount is based only on Society dues. When starting or renewing your STC membership **please include STC Manitoba!** Our survival is at stake!

As part of the fourth step in your online renewal application, you may select chapter memberships. Please scroll down—way down—and make sure that there is a checkmark beside STC Manitoba!

This selection will add \$25 (USD) to your dues and significantly improve our chances of survival.

STC Membership Payment Policies

STC is offering the option with online renewals to pay for dues in four equal installments. The monthly installment payments will be automatically deducted from your credit card (or credit card backed debit card) and will begin the

first business day after your application has been processed. They will continue approximately every 30 days for the next three consecutive months.



Membership type and dues	Included in membership dues	Add printed copy of	
		Technical Communication	Intercom
Basic membership \$215 (USD)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Online publications • Other member benefits 	\$75 USD plus \$7.50 (USD) postage	\$30 USD plus \$7.50 (USD) postage
Gold membership \$395 (USD)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Online publications • 1 Chapter • 1 SIG • 7 Web Seminars • 1 online certificate course • Salary Database • Premium Listing (50-word description) in Online Buyers Guide & Consultant Directory 	\$75 USD plus \$7.50 (USD) postage	\$30 USD plus \$7.50 (USD) postage
SIG value package \$375 (USD)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Online publications • All SIGS 	\$75 USD plus \$7.50 (USD) postage	\$30 USD plus \$7.50 (USD) postage
Student membership \$75 (USD)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Online publications • 1 chapter • 1 SIG 	\$75 USD plus \$7.50 (USD) postage	\$30 USD plus \$7.50 (USD) postage
Retired membership* \$145 (USD)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Online publications • 1 chapter • 1 SIG 	\$75 USD plus \$7.50 (USD) postage	\$30 USD plus \$7.50 (USD) postage

*Contact STC Membership Department for eligibility