



April 2010, Volume 22, Number 7

**April chapter meeting**

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

Note: new start time

April 6, 2010

IMRIS—1370 Sony Place

Arrival at 5:45–6:00 PM

Refreshments: Courtesy of IMRIS

Please confirm your attendance by noon, Friday, April 2, with Joanne Kusiak at [meetingcoordinator@stcmanitoba.org](mailto:meetingcoordinator@stcmanitoba.org)

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**April chapter meeting**

**IMRIS: A local company leading the way in medical technology**

What images come to mind when you hear the term robotics? R2-D2? The CanadArm? Robots now come in all shapes and sizes, with practical applications in many different industries.

A Winnipeg company called IMRIS is leading the way in developing equipment, including robotics, for the medical field. STC Manitoba is pleased to offer a tour of the IMRIS facility for its April meeting.

IMRIS is an exciting new company now recognized as a “global leader in advanced surgical imaging solutions.” It specializes in interventional MR suites for cardiovascular and neuro-surgery.

David Graves, who founded the company in 2005, describes it as follows: “IMRIS is all about providing image-guided therapy solutions that allow physicians to ... improve decision making and improve outcomes for patients.” Some company achievements since its inception are as follows:

- The IMRISneuro enables MRIs to move into operating rooms world-wide to provide doctors with clear images of ongoing surgical procedures (the only company in the world that offers this technology).
- IMRIS continues to acquire and develop new equipment for robotic surgery, e.g. the neuroArm, an MR-compatible surgery robot technology.
- IMRIS is the only medical technology company in the history of Canada to produce a profit.

The IMRIS tour includes a company history, present and future initiatives, and a physical tour, including a fully functional demo suite.

Come out and learn more about this innovative Manitoba company!



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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2009–2010

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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

Ben is taking a well deserved break this month. Please check back next month to read Ben's column.

## From the Editor

Over the past few months I've been bookmarking some interesting Web sites and information shared on the techwr-l board. For those of you who don't subscribe to techwr-l, you might find these sites of interest.

If you've never heard of the comic Geek and Poke, now would be a good time to see what you've been missing. Dilbert isn't the only place to find issues that technical writers face:

<http://geekandpoke.typepad.com/geekandpoke/2010/02/geeks.html>

<http://geekandpoke.typepad.com/geekandpoke/2010/02/divide-et-impera.html>

<http://geekandpoke.typepad.com/geekandpoke/2010/02/project-management-made-easy.html>

<http://geekandpoke.typepad.com/geekandpoke/2010/02/10-reasons-why-good-documentation-has-to-be-huge.html>

Remember how back in the old days they used to design manuals? Why not review this amusing look back at some what to do and what not to do's:

[www.ironicsans.com/2010/02](http://www.ironicsans.com/2010/02)

Looking for a technical writing job? Well this might not be the place for you according to this FOX news article:

[www.foxnews.com/us/2010/02/17/exclusive-help-wanted-arrogant-americans-need-apply](http://www.foxnews.com/us/2010/02/17/exclusive-help-wanted-arrogant-americans-need-apply)

See an extreme case of callout usage. Although, I would feel safe on this plane:

[www.psfk.com/2010/02/kulula-airplane-rebranding.html](http://www.psfk.com/2010/02/kulula-airplane-rebranding.html)

Documenting software? How about this handy usage of keyboard clipart?

[www.techonthenet.com/clipart/keyboard](http://www.techonthenet.com/clipart/keyboard)

What were they thinking? See how these warning labels are erring a little more on the overly cautious side:

[www.forbes.com/2010/01/29/safety-caution-product-liability-entrepreneurs-law-warning-labels\\_slide](http://www.forbes.com/2010/01/29/safety-caution-product-liability-entrepreneurs-law-warning-labels_slide)

Until next month,  
Rachel

## March chapter meeting report

### Café what?

By Andrew Quarry

At the time of our regular March chapter meeting, ten of us met at the Prairie Ink Café in a variation on our normal format for meetings that is sometimes referred to as a café scientifique—or what one member of the group said, in the interest of clear communication, should be called a “discussion” format.

In the midst of ordering food and drinks and as part of the general hubbub of the busy restaurant, Susan Haire and Ron Blicq led a discussion on how their interest in writing fiction complemented their technical communication careers. They had prepared an exchange of questions starting with when and how they started writing fiction. After a few minutes, the rest of us joined in with questions for Susan and Ron including questions about how to get published.

The method of awarding of door prize books, which were provided by Susan and Ron, also was a departure from the usual format. Persons with correct answers to a series of quiz questions related to the topics we had been discussing were awarded a book.

There seemed to be consensus that it was a pleasant and worthwhile experience. Our thanks to Susan and Ron for their work in preparing for and delivering the event, and thanks as well to Rachel Ines for suggesting and promoting the format for the meeting during our program planning sessions.



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## Around the STC

STC is offering the following events online. Visit [www.stc.org](http://www.stc.org) for more details on the time and cost.

- March 30, 2010 Getting the news out—Writing news releases
- April 6, 2010 Improving software usability with embedded user assistance
- April 13, 2010 The doc side of agile

### STC Technical Summit, Dallas 2010

May 2–5, 2010

Dallas, Texas

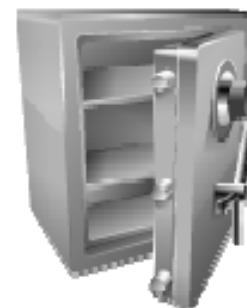
visit [www.stc.org](http://www.stc.org) for more details



## STC Manitoba Job Bank

Searching for that perfect job? Need a change in your career? Visit the STC Manitoba job bank online: [www.stcmanitoba.org/forums](http://www.stcmanitoba.org/forums) at **Employment > STC Manitoba Job Bank** to find the most recent jobs posted. STC members who have registered for the forums are able to view new postings for 10 days before the postings are made available to the general public.

Remember, if you haven't registered on the forums yet, please do so! You must register for the forums to be certain that you are viewing the most recent job postings. Don't be the last to know!



## 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 founding member, Joanne Blackwood (now O'Driscoll)

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

JB: I attended STC chapter meetings in Toronto in 1985 when I was working for Bell-Northern Research (Nortel Networks). In 1988, while working for Unisys Canada in Winnipeg, I was contacted about helping to start a local chapter.

#### Q. What was your role at that time?

JB: Caroline Ben-Ari and I formed a membership committee. I helped recruit members for a few years, and was the chapter President in 1995–1996. Through the years, I have really enjoyed meeting others in the same profession but in a variety of industries.

#### 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?

JB: I have had some great work experiences in companies both large and small—from Nortel (in the mid-eighties and again in the late nineties) to Ubitrex Corporation, a small high-tech company that developed a portable hand-held device for the health care field. I free-lanced for a few years with my own company, Word Design, and worked with

a variety of clients including Manitoba Industry Trade and Tourism (as they were called then). After my son was born in 1999 I focused on being a full-time mom but I have always maintained my STC membership. I am looking forward to getting back into the work world. I have missed it.



Original member Joanne Blackwood shares her insight on STC in the past and thoughts on the future

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

JB: I think the technical communications field as a whole faces its biggest challenge from technology. The form and delivery of information has changed remarkably the past few years. Need info? Google it. Need to contact someone? Use Facebook. People simply expect instant information—and not just by using their keyboards. For example, I see a time coming soon when instructions in a handbook will be replaced by video clips on an iPhone. The most exciting challenge we face today is designing information in clear and elegant ways for this new digital media.

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).

## Managing three mediation effects that influence PowerPoint deck authoring, by David K Farkas, February 2009

By Kevin Longfield

As someone who works with PowerPoint almost every day, either as an author or audience member, I am always on the lookout for advice on how to best use this controversial tool. Farkas' article is one of the most even-handed treatments of the subject I have seen, and it has the further advantage of offering some sound advice.

What are mediation effects? They are ways in which the communication tool affects the message that you are trying to deliver.

Farkas describes three closely related mediation effects and gives advice on how to handle them. The effects are as follows:

- **Content cutting:** anyone who has used PowerPoint or other deck authoring tools knows that there's a limit to how much information you can put on a slide. The font has to be a certain size for your audience member to be able to read your text, the slides are a fixed size, and these two constraints place a finite limit on the amount of information you can cram onto a slide.
- **Overflow distortion:** closely related to this problem is what to do with leftover information. An obvious solution is to let information spill onto the next slide, but this tactic can mask the importance of the information, by making it appear as a stand-alone point instead of a continuation. As Farkas puts it, you can "promote a bullet point to the level of a slide title."
- **Slide title flattening:** Generally we use a fixed style for all title slides, but this can mask hierarchy. Audiences must therefore be alert to shifts in hierarchy for which there is no visual cue.

### Content cutting

So what are the solutions? One is to be rigorous in editing. Often we can reduce text and simplify drawings without reducing the communication value of a slide. We can also use autofit, which will proportionally reduce text size until it fits on the slide. Both of these tactics carry with them disadvantages, though. As Farkas says, "sometimes a qualifying word is needed for clarity

and honesty, and you can reduce the size of text to illegibility."

Farkas offers a third way that our use of PowerPoint often discourages: continuation slides. If you have too many points to fit in a slide, and if you deem all of them to be vital, use two slides. Title the first slide "Advantages of not being seen," and the second "Advantages of not being seen—2" or Advantages of not being seen, continued."

### Overflow distortion

"Overflow distortion is the violation of logical subordination . . . that arises when unskilled handle [continuation slides] badly." You can solve this problem by either using a continuation slide properly (indicating in the title that the slide is a continuation) or by using forward and back keys.

The version of PowerPoint that comes with Microsoft Office 2007 has commands that create continuation slides automatically (Continue on a new slide or Split text between two slides) which should reduce the incidence of overflow distortion. Farkas also points out how incorporating a graphic can create overflow distortion if the graphic is large enough to crowd the text. The solution he suggests is using the forward and back features. With this solution you put the graphic on a separate slide and at the appropriate point click to the graphic, discuss it, and then click back to the main body of the presentation.

### Slide title flattening

As you move through a deck of slides, your titles may represent different levels of headings. Unfortunately, slide titles all tend to look the same, which can mask your carefully considered rhetorical hierarchy. Farkas offers what he calls global and local techniques. Global techniques apply to the whole deck, such as having an overview slide that shows the hierarchy. Section names can appear as headers at the top of slides, which further reinforces the hierarchy.

A local technique would be to use different weights of text for different hierarchy levels. This

*("Managing three mediation effects ... " continued on page 6)*

*("Managing three mediation effects ... " continued from page 5)*

might not be clear to viewers, so Farkas suggests careful editing of the titles to show subordination. The best way of explaining this is to look at the example he uses:

Level 1: Implementing the principle of respect:  
informed consent

Level 2: Informed consent by waiver

Level 2: Informed consent by proxy

Then you can add section slides throughout the deck that show your organization when a main topic changes. Another possibility is to use a numbering scheme, such as

Senior member Kevin Longfield joined the STC in 1991. Since then he has worked in a number of companies, and currently teaches Technical Communication at Red River College. When not involved in technical communication, Kevin and his daughter Eileen produce independent theatre through their company, Theatre Anywhere.

## 2.1 Informed consent

### 2.1.1 Informed consent by waiver

but this approach has the same drawbacks as changing fonts for title slides and the additional drawback of adding complexity to the slide design task.

Farkas' article offers some sound, simple-to-follow advice. I recommend it to anyone who faces the task of organizing a slide deck for a presentation.

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## Technical Communication Diploma Program presentations

### Meet the graduates

By Kevin Longfield

On April 12, 2010, our graduating students will be presenting their project reports in the multi-purpose room. You are all welcome to attend. The presentations will take place at

Red River College  
160 Princess Street  
P107 (multipurpose room)

The schedule is as follows:

- 1 PM: Sarah Brannan, Using social media for technical communication
- 2 PM: Patricia Payette: MAC vs. PC for technical communication
- 3 PM: Allan Rodkin: Using DITA to design software documentation

We will have a short reception afterwards.

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In years past, the Red River College (RRC) diploma program students presented their capstone presentations at the RRC/STC annual conference. We encourage our chapter members to come out and support the students as they deliver their presentations.



## 2009–2010 presentation schedule

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Speaker	Presentation title	Date
IMRIS	Tour of IMRIS	April 6, 2010
Sue Hemphill	Conflict resolution	May 4, 2010

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## 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](http://www.stcmanitoba.org).



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## Professional development

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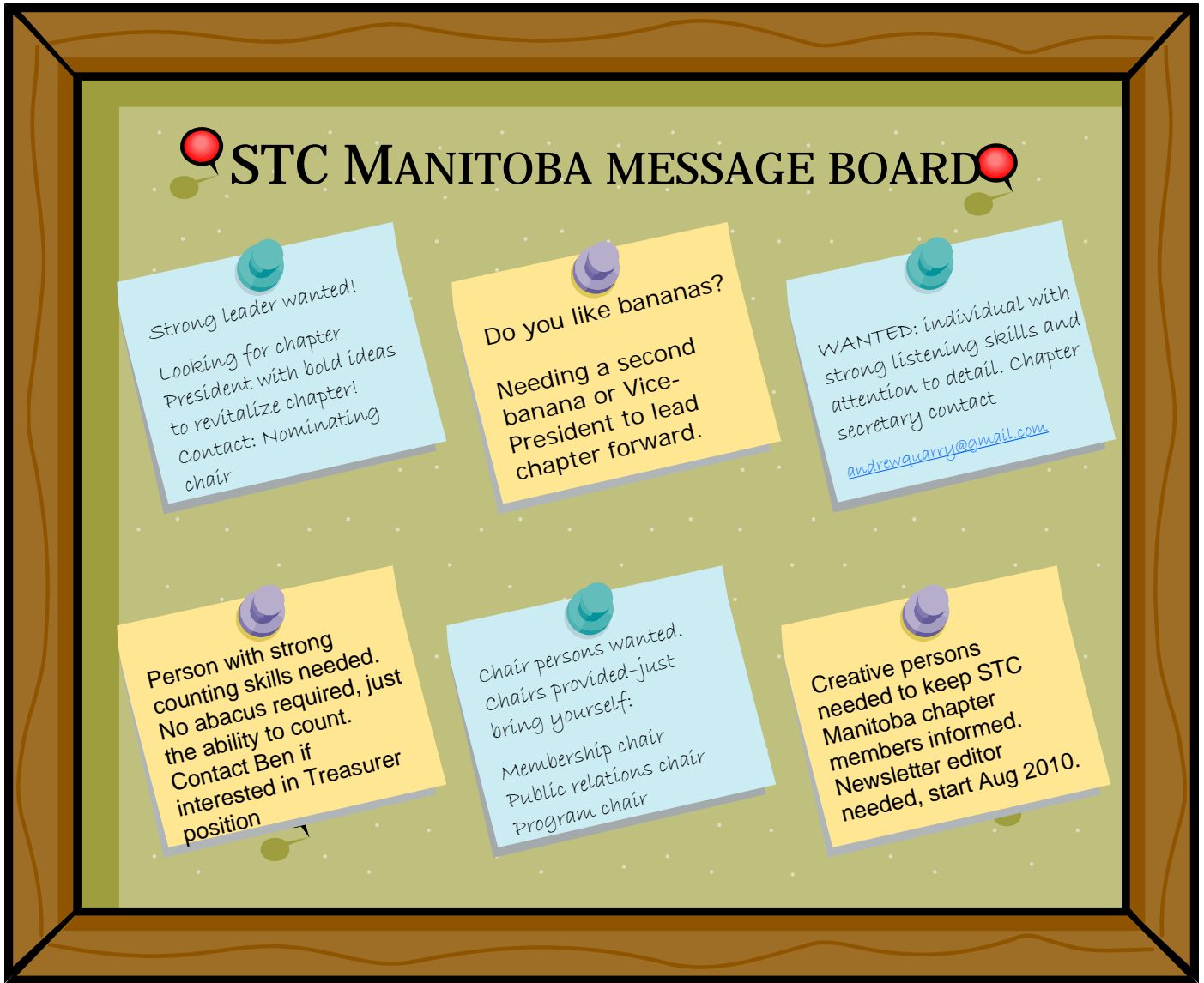
Course	Date (2010)	Location
<b>Effective oral communication</b>	April 6–June 15 April 7–June 16	University of Winnipeg
<b>Effective Written Communication</b>	April 6–June 15 April 8–June 17	
<b>Web Marketing Communications</b>	April 7–June 16	
<b>Project Management 1: Fundamentals</b>	April 8–June 17	University of Winnipeg
<b>Technical Communication 1</b>	Self-directed	Red River College
<b>Drawing and Illustration 1</b>	April 12–June 14	
<b>Proposal Writing</b>	April 13–June 15	
<b>Professional Photography 1</b>	April 13–June 3	
<b>Editing Plain Language</b>	April 14–June 16	
<b>Manual Writing and Design</b>	April 14–June 16	Red River College

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For more information on the programs, visit the institution's Web site

University of Winnipeg Continuing Education: [www.uwinnipeg.ca/index/dce-index](http://www.uwinnipeg.ca/index/dce-index)

Red River College Continuing Education: [www.rrc.mb.ca/continuinged](http://www.rrc.mb.ca/continuinged)



## STC [international] elections

### **Making change happen—your vote counts**

#### STC 2010 Election Ballot Access Information

Starting at 7:00 am EST on March 9, 2010, you may access the secure online ballot. When the election opens, please go to <https://eballot.votenet.com/stc> and log in by entering the user name and password submitted to you by email. Information about the candidates is included on the electronic ballot.

If you requested a paper ballot, one is being mailed to you. However, please consider voting online instead. By doing so you will save time and postage, and ensure that your vote is received immediately.

Online voting closes April 8, 2010 at 12:00 Noon EDT.

