



M A N U S C R I P T

January 2007, Volume 19, Number 5

January dinner meeting

5:45 p.m.
 Tuesday, January 9, 2007
 Place Louis Riel
 190 Smith Street

Progression evening

Please confirm your attendance by noon on Friday, January 5, with Leslie McKendry-Smith at lmckendry@gmail.com



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Word 2007—designed with users in mind

by Lydia Klassen, edited by Nirdosh Ganske

Imagine yourself returning to your work desk after a coffee break and the commands and toolbars have disappeared from your Word document. Conan Kezema, our guest speaker at the STC meeting on December 5, 2006, surprised his wife by installing Word 2007 on her computer without her knowledge. Shortly after she started her computer that day, she called out to Conan, “Where are all my toolbars?”

New Microsoft Office user interface

The top design goals for Microsoft Office were to make the software easier to use and help people save time. One of the most significant changes to Word 2007 that Microsoft Office decided to make was cutting down on the 31 toolbars and creating a new user interface. The new user interface is laid out with only a few toolbars that are called *Quick Access Toolbars*, and an object-oriented *ribbon area* where you find tabs related to specific tasks. If you are working on a table for example, you will find all table related tabs appearing in the ribbon area. As soon as you click outside the table, the standard tabs return.

New Office XML file formats

Why are the new Office XML file formats important? They address reliability issues. Graphics are especially susceptible to corruption. The new component-based structure, where all features such as styles, graphics, and comments will be plug-ins to the document, will facilitate better management of such issues. The ZIP container provides up to 75 percent smaller file size.

Previous versions of Word will require a compatibility pack to read Word 2007 documents. Word 2007 will be able to read and work with older-version documents by operating in compatibility mode, or by converting it; however, conversion will result in the old software being unable to read the document until the compatibility pack is installed.

Continued on page 2...

Manuscript

Manuscript and its shorter sibling *Micro Manuscript* are the official newsletters of STC-Manitoba Chapter. 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.

Submissions and ideas are welcome. 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.

Steve Bagel
Newsletter Editor
sbagel@shaw.ca

Printed copies of documents can be mailed to the address below:

Steve Bagel
2-481 Corydon Avenue
Winnipeg, MB R3L 0N9

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

For more information about STC-Manitoba, please visit our Web site at <http://www.stc-manitoba.org/>.

Executive Committee 2006-2007



President, Nirdosh Ganske, nganske@rrc.mb.ca
Vice-President, Brad Friesen, Brad.I.Friesen@gmail.com
Past President, Stephen McKendry-Smith
Secretary, Rachel Ines
Treasurer, Ron Blicq
Co-treasurer, Charlene Silla
Membership, Henry Shorr
Public Relations, Ted Anderson
Program, Ben Davies
Newsletter, Steve Bagel
Meetings, Leslie McKendry-Smith
Web site, Ben Dorge
Job bank, Bev Shafirka

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

*Word 2007—designed with users in mind
continued from page 1...*

Integration with Office SharePoint Server 2007

SharePoint technology, a totally new feature, provides a bridge between isolated desktop applications and centralized services.

This feature will be useful for people who work on collaborative projects.

Conan's favourite top five new features

Conan named his five favourite new features, but said there are many more:

- Quick styles and document themes—offer packaged style sets and live previews before making changes
- Building blocks—make it easier to put in headers, footers and title/cover pages
- Document inspector—checks properties, revisions, comments, and hidden text
- Tri-pane review panel—enables the user to simultaneously view the original, revised, and comparison documents
- Save as PDF or XPS—saves/sends documents as PDF or XPS files

Prepare for Word 2007

Conan's first advice about how to prepare for Word 2007 was to install all High-Priority updates from Microsoft Update. Conan also encouraged the audience to install the Microsoft Office Compatibility Pack for Word, Excel and PowerPoint 2007 file formats.

Conan noted that the versions feature has been removed from Word 2007; however, users can download a version extraction tool. The email routing feature has also been deleted, its function moved to the SharePoint server package. For people interested in Word 2007, Conan suggested they try the program at Microsoft's Virtual Lab at <http://rss.microsoftvirtuallabs.com/Office2007/rss.aspx>.

Happy New Year

Happy New Year from the president, Nirdosh

Thanks to the efforts of our executive and membership, we've enjoyed an autumn filled with good programming and camaraderie. We've enjoyed reconnecting with our old friends and meeting new friends. A sincere and heartfelt "Thank you" to all our speakers, guests, and members who made our presentation and dinner meetings a success.

The new year promises continued quality programming, as we look forward to our annual progression dinner meeting in January. For those of you unfamiliar with a progression, it gives you the opportunity to enjoy three or four brief presentations on technical topics, all within one hour! This month, we look forward to learning about questionnaires, graphics, open source software, PDAs, digital cameras, and user-interface testing.

We are also looking forward to two conferences—our own fourth annual RRC/STC conference *Technology and teamwork* on April 12 and 13 and the 54th international STC conference in Minneapolis, May 13 to 16.

We look forward to the continued assistance of Lydia Klassen, a Youth Serves Manitoba bursary student who writes up the monthly dinner meeting presentations for the newsletter; our Job Bank Coordinator, Bev Shafirka; our Editor Steve Bagel, who is working hard to make our newsletter the best it can be; and our Web site Coordinator, Ben Dorge, who uncomplainingly responds to all our requests to post this and that, and then change it. Many thanks to our Meeting Facilitator, Leslie McKendry-Smith, for making sure we all got fed! Unfortunately, Leslie will be unable to continue after March.

Finally, we are looking forward to the safe repository of all the important STC records, as the Archives Committee winds up their activities. Many thanks to Rachel Ines, who facilitated the committee, and committee members Andrew Quarry, Susan Haire, and Alexa Campbell. Many thanks to Andrew Quarry, STC archivist, who housed 12 boxes of STC materials for many, many years!

My sincere thanks to the executive and members, who have made so much possible this year. I truly look forward to working with you all in the New Year.

From the Editor

By the time you receive this newsletter, you'll have drunk enough eggnog, eaten enough turkey, and opened enough presents to last a lifetime (assuming you live the average life expectancy for a Canadian).

You should also be well rested enough to get excited about our upcoming slate of speakers. The first meeting in the new year will be a progression, a repeat of last year's successful January meeting. You'll have the opportunity to choose between six presenters and an array of topics.

As Nirdosh continues to mention in the president's message, the executive is working hard to promote both the profession of

technical communication and the Technical Communication Diploma program at Red River College.

Reply to a letter

In the November issue of *Manuscript*, Lauren Bailey, a student in the RRC program, asked if a membership with STC would help with her schooling and post-graduation. Indeed, it would. Membership would give you access to three important resources: fellow members, many of whom have years of experience, *Technical Communication* journal, and *Intercom* magazine. You would also have access to STC-Manitoba's job bank and many opportunities to network.

Technical Communication Diploma program at five!

by Rachel Ines

Alexa Campbell

Alexa Campbell is the lead instructor of the Technical Communication Diploma program. She has been a member of the STC for 20 years and, in 2001, was made an STC Fellow. Alexa was the founding president of the Manitoba STC chapter and of the Canadian Issues SIG. She recently stepped down from managing the rechartered Canadian STC Community.

Technical communication has played a role in Alexa's entire professional career. One of her first teaching jobs was to teach technical writing to a group of high school "tech" boys. Before returning to teaching, this time at RRC, she worked many years as a technical communicator, both as a private consultant and in the public and private sectors.

What was your motivation for starting the technical communication program?

"I was made aware of the need for training in technical communication in Canada, specifically in Manitoba, through my involvement in a survey done by the Canadian Issues Committee in the early 1990s. The Technical Communication certificate program at Red River College started in 1994, but it was clear we needed more training for technical communicators."

How would you evaluate the program so far?

"We have an excellent program that stands up to any other two-year program in technical communication anywhere. We incorporate many features recommended by educators as well—for example, we have a project-based curriculum, assignments that simulate work assignments, and a co-operative education component."

What is the greatest challenge the program is facing?

"Enrolment in the program remains our biggest challenge. We have a good program; our graduates get jobs; people are starting to ask about our program. But not enough students are enrolling in the program. It's a problem that we are working with the College to address."

How beneficial has the program been to its graduates?

"You'd have to ask the graduates, of course, but I'd like to think that they have had an opportunity in our program to develop skills that will help them get jobs, keep jobs, and advance professionally."

Ben Dorge

Ben graduated with the first class of technical communication students in 2004. He has been an STC member since 2004. He previously served as the Membership Chair and is currently the Manitoba Chapter's Web site coordinator.

Before entering the program, Ben worked as a cellular service coordinator for AirSource Rogers AT&T, creating policies and procedures for the service department, although it was not the main part of his job. Through this experience, Ben realized "that technical communications was a field that I could get into and gain meaningful employment," and it led to his interest in the program.

Ben is currently working as a technical communicator at Emerging Information Systems Inc. (EISI), a financial planning software company. He is primarily responsible for writing and updating user guides and online help, managing and resolving help feedback issues, and recently Ben has been working closely with software developers to create dynamic help that shows or hides content and search results without rebuilding the help files.

How do you feel the technical communication program has benefited you?

“The Technical Communication program provided me with a solid foundation for building my career. The cooperative education allowed me to transition into the workplace very quickly. Without this experience, I think securing a technical writing position would have been a greater challenge.”

How has the technical communication program helped you in your job?

“Write. Revise. Revise again. I learned these three steps in the program. Although simple, I found that by repeating these steps, I could improve my writing over time and have the confidence to stay in the profession.”

What aspects of your job relate directly to technical communication?

“Almost every aspect of my job could be related to technical communication. My goal is to either communicate my message in the simplest possible way or to find the best solution (sometimes complex) for making communicating simple.”

Ben has worked as a technical communicator for two years and what are his thoughts on the technical communication profession? “What intrigues me the most about the profession is the variety of disciplines involved. I know that no matter where I go or what career I pursue, I will always draw from my technical communication experience.”

Meet our newest member Larry Simonson: a man of precision

Larry Simonson has been self-employed since he retired about two years ago. Currently, Larry is working under contract with MacDon, an agricultural equipment manufacturer that produces mostly harvesting equipment such as swathers, and headers that fit combines of all makes. The new generation of equipment, fitted with sophisticated electronics and operator controls, requires the skills of a writer like Larry to produce operating manuals that are precise and specific. The issues of liability and safety in the agricultural equipment manufacturing industry demand that an accurately documented operating manual leave the factory with every piece of equipment, and require that Larry have skills in accurately analyzing his audiences and avoiding vagueness.

Larry’s technical writing career began at Atomic Energy of Canada, where he wrote test reports for components that would have to withstand nuclear reactor operating environments. Larry’s next career stop, at Bristol Aerospace, saw him writing more test reports as well as proposals, but he later became involved in documenting installation instructions for helicopter wire cutters. Created primarily for military helicopters, this

safety device enabled low flight paths without the risk of entanglement in hydro lines and other wire obstacles. Larry’s job, verifying the installation instructions, taught him to keep an open mind as he came to realize that everyone installs equipment differently. He learned the value of emphasizing results over approach.

Larry was introduced to STC through a meeting notification passed on to him by his documentation manager at MacDon. Larry thought that the STC had something to offer him, so he applied for membership and began attending meetings with our local chapter. He would like to become familiar with people who are involved in the same type of work as he, and he would like to stay current on writing and communication tools and techniques.

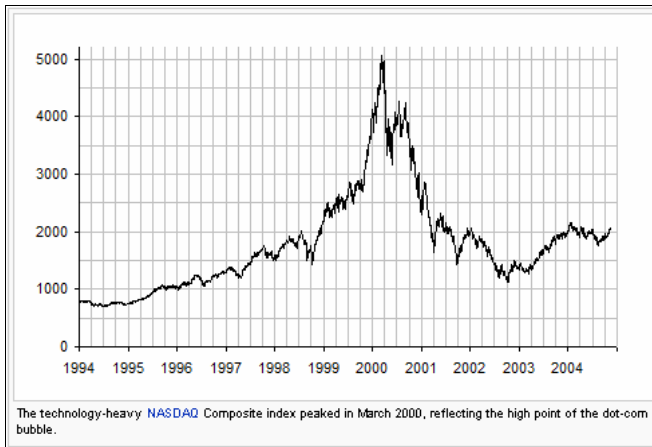
Larry shares a pet peeve with his new-found colleagues in STC—badly-written instructions. Larry would like to communicate to industry the importance of excellence in technical communication. He would like the field of technical communication to have more exposure to the public, to manufacturing and to industry.

Plenty of jobs in Canadian market despite high-tech meltdown

by Lyndsey Amott

The 1990s were great years for technical writers. The rise of the dot-com businesses created a need for network-enabled offices, and companies making and selling this equipment needed people to write installation and configuration instructions for their field technicians, as well as system-administration guides for their users. Global networks for telecommunications and third-generation wireless technologies were seen as the wave of the future and communications companies spent huge amounts of money developing the infrastructure for these. Finally, preparation for Y2K also created a need not only for engineers and software developers, but also for talented writers.

Unfortunately, this economic boom ended.



Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dot-com_boom

The expected disasters of Y2K did not materialize on January 1, 2000, but the preparation for Y2K meant that companies had all the equipment they needed for the next several years. Telecommunications companies got into debt building equipment that, despite predictions, no one wanted. The dot-coms were nothing more than castles in the air. Moreover, many companies relocated their business processes to countries where work could be done at a fraction of the local cost. This last phenomenon—known as offshoring—

is often seen by technical writers, engineers, and software developers as being the one problem that has been most injurious to their careers, perhaps because it has been the most obvious and sustained problem. Compared with the problems associated with offshoring, Y2K, the dot-com bust, and the excess of equipment are mere bubbles, even though it could be argued that offshoring is a result of the latter.

So, what is a technical writer, engineer, or software developer to do in such a market? It is certainly true that many of us, particularly those in telecommunications, lost our jobs in the years between 2000 and 2003. Those let go during the first round of layoffs suffered the most and often had to retrain for different careers.

But did offshoring depress the market to the point that there are no jobs to find? No indeed. There are plenty of jobs for technical writers, but not, I believe, in the high-tech industries. These industries tend to be based on global standards, which means that the work is the same wherever it is done. A fibre-optic cable, for example, must be built and installed according to standards that are the same the world over. Why pay North-American rates when the work can be done elsewhere for an eighth of the cost?

“But,” I hear you cry, “even standards-based products need to be well documented!” Certainly, some members of TECHWR-L believe that the frequently poor quality of writing from offshore markets will eventually bring the writing back to North America, but I am not one of them. Field technicians and other users of standards-based products tend to be highly technical people who pride themselves on their ability to figure out how things work. If the manual is poorly written, they are in seventh heaven.

That said, work can be found in other areas. Industries governed by federal, provincial, or municipal laws—insurance, banking, and finance, for instance—have plenty of documentation that must be updated whenever new laws and addenda come into

effect. Also, companies that market their products and services locally will always need writers to keep their documentation up to date. Again, insurance, banking, and finance come to mind, as well as manufacturers of hard goods.

If you are looking for full-time work (as opposed to contract work), contact small, start-up software development companies and let them know the kinds of documentation you can provide. Focus on companies that provide a product rather than a service. Small companies do not usually pay well, but, if you get a job, you will probably be acting as a lone technical writer, which means you will be doing everything from templates, instruction manuals, web sites, and online help, to press releases and other marketing communications.

An interesting development for technical writers is that many companies are finding that the software and the processes and procedures they implemented twenty years ago have become unwieldy and out of date. These companies are now having to develop new software for their internal processes and this software must be documented not only for the users of the new systems, but also for the people who must maintain these systems. Opportunities exist for writers who know how to use newer single-sourcing tools such as Quadralay, WebWorks, and AuthorIT.

Every market changes over time, creating or reducing the need for certain skills. We no longer need elevator operators to take us from the first floor to the seventh, and I'm guessing that checkout clerks will soon become a thing of the past. Nevertheless, the need for talented and skilled writers will always exist, but the manner in which writing services are provided will always evolve. Successful writers will keep an eye on the markets and adapt to its changes.

Lyndsey Amott has succeeded and suffered through two booms and two busts. During the last bust, she took advantage of an 18-month bout of unemployment to create <http://www.docsymmetry.com/>, which currently receives over 5000 visits per month.

Sorting the past: archives update

by Rachel Ines, STC Manitoba Archivist

In January 1989, STC Manitoba received its charter marking the beginning of the chapter's history. As the chapter grew, so too did the historical documentation of the chapter's activities. Over the years, volunteer chapter members have managed the archives. Not only was the archivist responsible for keeping records for the archives, but also for physically keeping the archival collection.

After 17 years, the archives need to be manageable for the chapter archivist, particularly when there is no permanent home for the archives. To manage our growing collection and our chapter history, the executive committee has tasked me with chairing a committee to assess the archives. The committee members include Andrew Quarry, Alexa Campbell, Susan Haire, and me. Our first two meetings involved determining what to keep: hardcopies of chapter minutes and agendas, newsletters, special events (which includes a variety of materials), and interesting items which could be used to create a complete chapter history.

The committee has completed an initial cull of the archival records. Through our assessment, we found materials that were interesting but not relevant to our collection—this included duplicate materials and materials from other chapters or organizations. Our goal is to maintain materials related only to the Manitoba chapter and to keep the archives manageable and accessible.

On behalf of the chapter members, I thank Andrew for his diligence in keeping all those boxes in his home over the past few years. Additionally, I would like to thank the committee members for their assistance and guidance with the archives. I will continue to keep chapter members updated on the archive committee's activities in future issues of *Manuscript*. If you have any questions about the Manitoba STC archives, contact me at rachines@hotmail.com.

Resources for technical communicators

In the October issue of *Manuscript*, we started a listing of resources for technical writers. Feel free to contribute your favourite online resources for inclusion in this listing!

The first resource listed this month, the Word MVP site, is courtesy of Jim Martin. Jim indicated that he used this resource extensively in researching his academic capstone project on Word master documents. More recently, Jim found valuable information on this site about macros, for a company documentation template he's working on.

The second resource listed this month, a Western Economic Diversification site, is courtesy of Alexa Campbell. This federal government site organizes a wealth of information under FAQ headings. Topics that will be of interest to the entrepreneurial technical communicator include *How do I start a business?*, *How do I register my business?*, and *How do I get a Business number, business license and information on GST?*

The third resource, also contributed by Alexa Campbell, is a site that contains examples of better ways to use PowerPoint. All you Tufte fans, take note!

Description	URL
Word MVP site, maintained by volunteers who have been awarded Microsoft's Most Valuable Professional (MVP) award; topics include graphics, macros, formatting, numbering, and cross-application development	http://word.mvps.org/
Western Economic Diversification site	http://www.wd.gc.ca/faq_e.asp
<i>Rethinking the design of presentation slides</i>	http://www.writing.eng.vt.edu/slides.html

News from across Canada



West Coast Chapter

Legal Issues in Technical Communication

Presenter: Mark Yang

When: January 16, 2007

Where: Downtown YWCA Fitness Building,
535 Hornby St., Vancouver, BC

Time: Networking: 6:30 p.m. to 7:00 p.m.

Presentation: 7:00 p.m. to 8:30 p.m.

Montréal Chapter

Visual Design Principles for Writers:

Enhancing Usability and Readability

Presenter: David Deskin, President of Adage
Media

When: January 29, 2007

Where: Ruby Foo's Hotel, 7655 Decarie

Time: 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

Toronto Chapter

*The Top 10 Mistakes Writers Make When
Looking for Work*

Presenter: Jack Molisani

When: January 9, 2007

Where: North York Memorial Community
Hall—Gold Room, North York Central
Public Library, 5110 Yonge St., North
York, ON

Time: 7:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m.