



September 2009, Volume 22, Number 1

September dinner meeting

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

Note: new start time

September 8, 2009
Red River College
160 Princess Street

Forde Oliver

Video 101: Everything you wanted to know about video but were afraid to ask

Please confirm your attendance by noon, Friday, September 4, with Joanne Kusiak at meetingcoordinator@stcmanitoba.org

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State of STC

Letter from the President

Wow, has it been a busy summer for the STC Manitoba executive!

As some of you may be aware, the international STC organization is dealing with a very difficult financial situation resulting from the recent economic recession. Early projections show the STC being close to \$1.2 million dollars under-budget between now and the end of the 2009–2010 year.

There are several reasons for the financial shortfall, including a large drop in membership, a significant decrease in attendance at the annual STC Summit and international conference, and some unfortunate luck on the stock market with several large investments.

To deal with these issues, STC executives held conference calls with members from all over the world to discuss the situation, and brainstorm possible solutions.

For short term recovery, STC has asked every chapter to submit a zero-based budget for executive approval that covers the next 18 months of operation. They have asked every chapter to hand-over all leftover surplus money in addition to their budget, to try and make up for the lost \$1.2 million dollars. In addition, they are putting the chapter pass-through payments on hold, placing a hiring freeze on their office, and are looking at eliminating several unnecessary executive positions.

For long term recovery, STC plans on increasing membership dues, moving to electronic publications, and investigating the benefits of moving to a virtual office (which was something a lot of members felt was needed).

Unfortunately, our local chapter has been losing money at every dinner meeting for the last couple of years, and our primary means of survival is spending the interest from an investment that still makes money, and using the pass-through money provided by STC international. As you have probably already deduced, we cannot survive financially without our surplus or the pass-through funds, especially if we continue to operate in the same way we have been for the last couple years.

("Letter from the President" continued on page 2 ...)



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.

(“Letter from the President” continued from page 1 ...)

As a result, we have made some changes, specifically to the dinner meeting format. Chapter meetings will no longer be held at Place Louis Riel. The majority of meetings for 2009–2010 will be held at Red River College, Princess St. (rooms will vary). Instead of serving a formal dinner, we will be serving small snack/appetizer foods with coffee and punch during the presentation. For persons who used to buy the dinner, the cost will be lower: only \$10 for members and students, and \$15 for non-members.

The first meeting this year is on Tuesday, September 8th, at Red River College, 160 Princess St. Campus in room P107 – CGA Manitoba Room (formerly known as the multi-purpose room). The meeting starts at 6:00 p.m., but doors open at 5:45 p.m.

Hope to see you there!

Ben

Side note

In a surprising twist this summer, Canadian STC chapters started communicating with each other about the legality of STC international taking surplus money from chapters outside of the United States. Some interesting discussions and developments have come from this, and I have been participating in ongoing conference calls and discussions with the presidents from Quebec, Ontario, BC and Alberta to see where STC Canada stands with everything that's been happening. I plan on providing more details about these discussions in future newsletters, so stay tuned!

From the Editor

Welcome back! I hope everyone enjoyed their summer. While many of you have taken the time to relax, I've been working (not every day of course!) to prepare the upcoming year's issues.

In January 2009, the chapter celebrated its 20th anniversary. To commemorate this, *Manuscript* is doing a “Where are they now?” feature article series, tracking down the original 15 members responsible for Manitoba reinvigorating their STC chapter. Special thanks goes to Susan Haire for taking on this task.

As I enter my third year as newsletter editor, I will try to provide the membership with articles on issues that we as technical communicators face every day, literature and software reviews, and more ideas for professional self-development.

As always, I'm open to any article suggestions or contributions from the membership. *Manuscript* is a forum for sharing and educating our chapter. Feel free to contact me at rachines@hotmail.com with any story ideas you may have.

Until next month,
Rachel

September dinner meeting

Video 101: Everything you wanted to know about video but were afraid to ask

Ever wonder how you could create some excitement in your technical communications documents? We all accept that technical communications documents must, of necessity, be a little d-r-y at times, but I'm sure we're all pursuing subtle ways to pep things up a bit.

Digital multimedia creates interesting products that combine digital media and content forms such as text, audio, still images, animation, video, and interactivity. Doing so provides opportunities to



innovate, collaborate across distance, and personalize content—for example, photo galleries, simulations, and video productions. Content is live or recorded, and products can be

streamed.

So how can we use multimedia in technical communications? Obviously, some electronic formats such as websites, newsletters, and e-mail lend themselves well to this approach. This presentation will offer ideas for using video (Oliver's specialty) and other motion graphics. The topics to be covered will include:

- A general outline of digital multi-media and its uses
- An explanation of gathering, manipulating, and using video or other motion graphics
- A description of how to transfer video or motion graphics from multiformats into

everyday applications

- A demonstration of some useful software programs for either the Mac or PC (e.g. Final Cut Pro, DVD Studio Pro/IDVD, and Photoshop).

If you are NOT a technical communicator, but want to add some pizzazz to your presentations or writing, then you too may want to attend this event.

Please join us for what promises to be an entertaining and lively kick-off to STC's fall season. We are looking forward to catching up with old friends, enrolling new members, and meeting others who may be interested in our program. See you on September 8!

Speaker bio

Forde Oliver has been active in the communications industry in Manitoba for nearly twenty years. Since 2002, he has been employed as an Instructor in Creative Communications at Red River College's Princess Street campus, where his specialty areas include Digital Multimedia (video and audio) and Broadcast Journalism. Prior to that, he worked with companies such as Global, CKY and MTN-TV.

He has developed numerous independent productions such as CTV's "Backroads of Manitoba" and produced three years of live AHL Moose hockey. Always enthusiastic about his work and life in general, Forde is a true go-getter with a strong work ethic and a genuine feel for people. He holds a Bachelor of Arts degree from Moorhead State University (major Speech Communications) and is currently finishing up a Master's degree through Central Michigan University.



Changes to chapter meeting format

- Meetings will now be held at Red River College, 160 Princess Street
- Meeting times will now start at 6:00
- No dinner will be served but light refreshments and snacks will be offered
- Meeting costs have now changed: \$10 for members and students, \$15 for non-members

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.

Our newsletter editor wanted to mark our twentieth year as a chapter by running a series of articles about these first fifteen 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, and you will see their responses in the issues of the newsletter over the next year

Who were our first fifteen members? In no particular order:

Ron Blicq	Caroline Ben-Ari
Alexa Campbell	Penny Staples
Jamie Conklin	Andy Ratuszniak
Susan Haire	Ron Legere
Anne Parker	Denise Laporte-Dawes
Tony Rhodes-Marriott	Joanne Blackwood
Laurie Morgan	Jack Lee
Andrew Quarry	

I think it's appropriate to begin with our first chapter president, and the force behind restarting the chapter, Alexa Campbell.

M: How did you get involved with STC Manitoba back in 1988?

AC: I first found out about STC when I took a course with Edmund Weiss in 1986 in Toronto. I became a member of STC then. In 1988, I went to my first conference, in Philadelphia (in between the two events, my son was born). I came back eager to get STC going in Winnipeg. There were six members, I believe, and we held our first meeting during the summer of 1988. I was not aware I was "resurrecting" the chapter. Later, I found out one had run for a short time a few years previously, but there was no history from that

time. For all intents and purposes, we were a new chapter, full of energy and ideas.

M: What was your role at that time?

AC: I became the first president

M: 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?

AC: When I joined STC, I was working as a technical writer at Great-West Life. I left there to start my own business. My STC connections certainly helped keep me employed steadily for over seven years. I moved to the Canadian Grain Commission after that. When a job opened at Red River College, I joined the technical communication department there and was instrumental in establishing the Technical Communication Diploma program there.

M: How do you see the chapter moving forward in the next few years?

AC: I am pretty much out of touch. However, a boon to the energy in the early days of the chapter was the international connection—several of us became involved internationally, joined committees, attended conferences, and so on. I think those international connections are tremendously important. You learn what is happening in other parts of the world, and you get some great ideas for the chapter. The connections I made through the Canadian Issues Committee still endure.

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

AC: Just to reiterate—get involved in international activities. Get your company to send you to conferences. You will grow professionally in ways you cannot imagine.

Final note: Where is Jack Lee? I have been unable to find any contact information for Jack Lee. If anyone knows how to reach him, please contact me at susan_haire@hotmail.com.

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
Forde Oliver	Video 101: Everything you wanted to know ...	September 8, 2009
—	Meet the students night/Networking event	October 6, 2009
Andrew Quarry	Starting your own business	November 3, 2009
—	Technical Communication Q&A, Holiday networking event	December 1, 2009
Various speakers	Progression	January 12, 2010
Kelly Thibodeau	Writing for the web	February 2, 2010
Various speakers	Technical Communication café <i>held at Prairie Ink Café, Polo Park</i>	March 2, 2010
IMRIS	Tour of IMRIS	April 6, 2010
Sue Hemphill	Conflict resolution	May 4, 2010

STC international conference summary

The view from the summit—Part one

By Kevin Longfield

This is a two-part series. Kevin recounts his experiences, at his first STC international conference on his first trip to Atlanta, attending the 56th annual summit along with 700 other technical communicators. The conference had a very large international contingent. The people I spoke with, excluding Canada and the U.S., came from the following countries: Austria, Australia, Denmark, Finland, France, Israel, UK, and Qatar.

Keynote speaker David Pogue (MAC for Dummies author)

The theme of his address was the power of simplicity. He makes a large part of his living writing *For Dummies* books, and calls his home in Connecticut the house that dummies built. At the same time he took pains to explain that a lot of mistakes people make are not because they are dummies, but because communicators fail in their duty to make things simple. Simplicity gives users an early feeling of mastery that helps them to explore more complex features.

In his discussion of web pages and online help systems, he recommends “counting taps,” by which he means counting the number of times you

have to click on a mouse or tap a Blackberry to bring up new content. Too many taps means that you have to simplify the design.

He also cautions us that we have become so used to the complexity in our fields that we do not see the world through the users’ eyes any more. He cited an extreme example from an actual call to a PC manufacturer’s help line. The user couldn’t make an application work because the instructions said “click here” and when he put the mouse on the screen where the graphic was and clicked it, nothing happened.

Finally he spoke about some terms we use that make sense to us but confuse the average user, such as Content: What it actually is: music, document, picture, etc. Don’t say, “to add content” say “to add music, documents or pictures”; *enable*: turn on; *functionality*: use the real word: “features”; *LCD*: screen; and “*user*” (especially in Instructions): You. His final piece of advice was, “If it doesn’t work, it’s not you.”

(“The view from the summit” continued on page 6)

("The view from the summit" continued from page 5)

International and multicultural issues in technical communication

This was a strong theme at the conference, and with the rise of global marketing, an important topic. I attended a number of sessions relating to this topic.

International document design (Translations, inc.)

An interesting question the presenters asked at the beginning of the session was "How many of you write for print mainly?" followed by "How many of you write mainly on-line documents?" Many wrote online documents, with a large number of abstentions.

The presenters described two goals of international documents design. One was creating a source document that would be translated into one or more additional languages or for one of more additional cultures. The second was to develop a document that would be appropriate for a global audience. In both cases one needs to consider the writing, the overall document design, and the file construction (software used).

Following are some of the tips the presenters offered:

- Aim for cultural neutrality. Some people also use the term cultural agnosticism, but this term has two possible meanings, so he recommended neutrality instead. You achieve cultural neutrality by avoiding
 - Puns
 - Idioms
 - References to pop culture
 - Turns of phrase with complicated history, such as master and slave cylinders.
 - Paying attention to conventions around numbers. For instance, with long distance, 1 + area code versus 1 (space) area code.

He reminded us of the term throwing us to the wolves, and asked us to imagine how someone from another culture might react to the suggestion.

Perhaps the most useful aspect was the discussion of file construction. Things that might not matter when creating a unilingual document can become major problems when a file is processed through translation software. For instance, if numbered

steps are not coded (using the numbering function) the numbers will become separated when you feed the text into the translation template. Similarly text embedded into an illustration will not be captured.

When creating documents in English, allow at least 20 percent more space for the translated text, because English is denser than other languages. The rule about leaving plenty of white space applies doubly here.

Be careful with sequenced illustrations, because many languages read right to left. A vertical alignment is therefore better than a horizontal one.

Panel discussion: writing for international audiences

One of the panelists said that the main international language today was bad English, since it's the most common acquired language. He said that the serious lesson in that statement is that people manage to communicate effectively in what we would call bad English despite the errors in grammar and pronunciation.

In response to the question about where the opportunities for working are abroad, one panelist suggested something called the BRIC countries: Brazil, Russia, India, and China. It was a new term for me.

One panelist was the head of communications in Europe, a woman based in Austria. She mentioned a tendency towards negativity in Austrian discourse, such as the phrase "I don't disagree" instead of "I agree." Another panelist works in France and mentioned the importance of displaying critical thinking in documents.

The panel stressed the need to consider the document as part of the product. My favourite part of the panel was when a woman who works in Israel told a story to illustrate the concept that cultural differences can directly affect a product.

She had an international client for whom Israel represented the vast majority of warranty returns, although the company sold less than five percent of its product in Israel. Almost all the returns were because of contaminated gold contacts on the connectors. When the consultant read the instructions, she instantly knew why: an instruction read "Do not touch the gold contacts,"

("The view from the summit" continued on page 7)

("The view from the summit" continued from page 6)

which to an Israeli is tantamount to a direct order to touch the contacts. And when touching the contacts did not result in an injury, that was proof that you could ignore the instruction. When she changed the instruction to read "To prevent damage to the electrical connection, avoid touching the contacts" the warranty returns almost ceased.

Career-related sessions

Seven habits of highly successful technical communicators

The seven habits come out of a graphic model shown to the audience. The presenters say that if you are a successful technical communicator, you likely have developed the following seven habits:

1. You are confident in yourself

If you are self-confident, you are willing to try new things. On the job, you actively seek out the resources you need to do the job; you do not "drop tools" if you do not have a product sample or a login. Beyond that, you are willing to stand up for what you believe (no one knows what 'functionality' means. Let's use 'features' instead) and to advocate for the user.

2. You are passionate about the profession

As a passionate technical communicator, you take pride in your work and always strive for excellence. You see yourself as a professional who is uniquely qualified to be a user champion. You are not satisfied to have 'just a job'; you want to make a difference. In addition, you work with a community of practice to raise standards.

3. You are driven to explore

You have a natural curiosity and a desire to innovate. You are not afraid to try something different, and you do not wait for others to tell you the answers. In fact, you regularly take time to explain things to others. You are interested in all aspects of the technical communication business and take the time to stay up-to-date.

4. You are a creative problem solver

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. The Atlanta summit was his first, but he swears it will not be his last. He echoes Alexa Campbell in urging members to get involved at the international level. When not involved in technical communication, Kevin and his daughter Eileen produce independent theatre through their company, Theatre Anywhere.

You have the ability to identify problems and act independently to solve them. When faced with adversity, you see opportunity. You can identify and effectively explain issues before they become problems. For instance, you see long documents as design problems. You are persistent in solving problems. If one approach is not successful, you try another until you find a solution that works.

5. You engage in continuous learning

You develop and revise career goals to stretch beyond your current situation. You are willing to make your own investment in learning, and not rely exclusively on employer-funded training.

6. You have technical aptitude

You learn new technology quickly and can train others. You understand your technical domain and can explain it to others.

7. You have a high comfort level with chaos

You see change as opportunity and can move out of your comfort zone. You are adaptable and able to sort through conflicting priorities.

Beyond the seven traits

The presenters offered the following observations:

The field is changing in fundamental ways. Before, we would write about technology. Now the technology is embedded in what we write. We write less and manipulate text more.

According to one study, attributes that employers look for fall into five categories: work experience, subject area knowledge, technical writing skills, technical knowledge, and project management. Demand for subject area knowledge is about equal to the demand for technical writing skills, but the strongest demand is for experience writing about the subject matter. Less asked for are specific skills such as Robohelp or Photoshop. A growing trend is to look for project management skills such as interpersonal and collaborative, and oral communication skills.

Part Two of Kevin's conference summary will be published in the October issue of Manuscript.

Professional development courses

Course	Date	Offered through
Photoshop (Mac or PC) 1	Self directed	Red River College
Report writing	Sept 15 to Nov 5	
Digital video for the web	Sept 19 to Nov 28	
Photography 1	Sept 21 to Nov 30	
Web site development–Introduction	Sept 21 to Nov 30	
Writing for magazines	Sept 22 to Nov 17	
HTML/XHTML	Sept 23 to Dec 2	
Technical Communication 1	Sept 24 to Nov 26	
Writing skills–Intermediate	Sept 24 to Nov 26	
Effective oral communication	Sept 14 to Dec 7	University of Winnipeg
Effective written communication	Sept 15 to Dec 1	
Project management 1: Fundamentals	Sept 17 to Dec 3	
Writing for public relations 1	Sept 17 to Dec 3	

For more information about the courses listed, consult the institution's Web site.

Red River College Continuing and Distance Education: www.rrc.mb.ca

University of Winnipeg: www.uwinnipeg.ca

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 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!

