



November 2008, Volume 21, Number 3

November dinner meeting

5:45 p.m.
 Tuesday, November 4, 2008
 Place Louis Riel
 190 Smith Street

Everything's on the Internet ... isn't it? Doing research in a Web 2.0 world
 Betty Braaksma

Please confirm your attendance by noon, Friday, October 31, with Joanne Kusiak at meetingcoordinator@stcmanitoba.org

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**2008 STC
 Community of Excellence**

STC November dinner meeting

Everything's on the Internet ... isn't it?
 Doing research in a Web 2.0 world

Ever had the feeling that you were drowning in information? In today's fast-paced, technological world, information is available at our fingertips through the World Wide Web. With a few keystrokes, we can visit China to explore the Ming dynasty or NASA to get the latest in space technology. However, navigating the web to ensure that we get the most accurate, up-to-date, and non-biased information can sometimes be a challenge. Information literacy has emerged as an engaging new field that is developing strategies to meet this challenge.

In this presentation, Betty Braaksma will clarify some basic concepts of information literacy and recommend ways of improving our ability to access the information we need. In business, at home, or just for fun, information literacy can make our lives more satisfying and enjoyable.

About the speaker

Betty Braaksma is responsible for promoting information literacy skills development at the U of M, through contacts with faculty, librarians and students.

Upcoming presentations

Date	Speaker	Topic
December 2, 2008	Kevin Longfield	Shakespeare as a persuasive writer
January 12, 2009	Various speakers	Progression

Changes for dinner meeting

Meal price increases effective November

At the October dinner meeting, the executive committee asked for opinions on increasing the meal prices after a 15-year price freeze. We encountered surprising support for such a raise. Several persons spoke in favour of an increase of as much as five dollars and nobody opposed an increase.

("Meal price" continued on page 2)

STC Manitoba is a chapter of



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.

Rachel Ines
Newsletter Editor
rachines@hotmail.com

Andrew Quarry
Editorial Assistant
andrewquarry@gmail.com
Printed copies of documents can be mailed to the address below:

STC Manitoba
c/o Andrew Quarry
135 Lawndale Avenue
Winnipeg MB R2H 1T2

For more information about STC Manitoba, please visit our Web site at www.stcmanitoba.org/.



President [Interim], Andrew Quarry
andrewquarry@gmail.com

Vice-President, Margaret LeSage
margaretl@caamanitoba.com

Past President, Brad Friesen
Secretary, Holly Steele
Treasurer, Donald Nordman
Membership, Vacant
Public relations, Dorothy Davidson
Program, Lauren Bailey
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 (Interim) President

Democracy in action



In last month's letter, I promised that we'd be discussing the charges for our dinner meetings at the October meeting, because rising costs were leading to a shortfall in revenue at most meetings.

Everybody who voiced an opinion at the meeting was in favour of an increase. At the following executive committee meeting, we made it official. The charges for the dinners are being increased by \$5.00 in all categories.

The box has developed a bulge

The folks running the international STC have decided that it's time to update our logo (See page 8). The result is bulging blue box containing the letters STC. Some of us are going to be going through our cyan and yellow ink and toner cartridges at a higher rate than used to be the case.

There are likely to be consequences for the presentation of our own chapter logo, but the rules are not yet available.

We will, I'm sure, be hearing more about this.

Andrew

Andrew's note of the month on a matter of style

We shall will hear more ...

In a previous note on distinctions in the proper use of shall and will, I failed to consult a favourite source—I will now correct this oversight. Bryson's Dictionary of Troublesome Words: A Writer's Guide to Getting It Right can be a fun read, because Bill Bryson loves to play with words. He sums up the 20 pages that the Fowlers wrote in The King's English with these words: "... either you understand the distinctions instinctively or you do not; ... if you don't, you probably never will; ... if you do, you don't need to be told anyway." In this case, as in many others, he includes famous quotations from the likes of Churchill and MacArthur getting it wrong.

("Meal price" continued from page 1)

	Member	Non-member	Student
Presentation only [unchanged]	5	10	5
Presentation and dinner [new]	20	25	20

After an executive committee decision to increase the prices for meals, Andrew Quarry, Interim President of the chapter, said that "We are pleased that we won't be raising the prices for persons who choose the option for attending the presentations without staying for dinner. And we are pleased that we won't be depleting our reserves."

From the editor

Like some of you, I am a regular subscriber to techwr-l. I bookmarked several funny Web sites that have been shared on the forum and thought I would pass these along to the regular readers of Manuscript.

The language expert

I found an interesting cartoon, although set in the days of yore, which focuses on grammar policeman Larry the Language Nerd.

<http://wondermark.blogspot.com/2008/08/434-in-which-there-is-taunting.html>

Classic manuals

Manuals. Classic ones at that. Something only technical communicators can truly appreciate.

www.wired.com/culture/design/multimedia/2008/10/ff_manuals

October dinner meeting summary

Storytelling with Ron Blicq

By Lauren Bailey

Make your readers laugh,
Make them cry,
But make them wait
—W. Somerset Maugham

On October 7, Ron Blicq reminded the members of STC Manitoba of the above quote in his presentation, *Storytelling as a Corporate Communication Medium*. Ron's presentation included videos, slides and professional anecdotes to illustrate his point: people remember information if it's presented in an interesting and relatable way.

At no point was this sentiment more evident than when Ron spoke of a woman who came running up to him yelling "shredded wheat!" Some time earlier, the woman had attended a class Ron taught and remembered his shredded wheat analogy for paragraph length. Paragraphs longer than seven lines, she remembered, were the large, stodgy bricks of wheat that no one could digest quickly. Short, to-the-point paragraphs were Spoon Size mini wheats—quick to prepare,

Viral video

In case you were out this summer, you may have missed out on the font conference. Here's a recap:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=i3k5oY9AHHM

Newspapers needs a spell checker

If your job is to report the news—isn't it the role of the editor to ... , I don't know, spell check? What could be more embarrassing than misspelling the name of your own newspaper or a State?

www.telegraph.co.uk/news/newsttopics/howaboutthat/2449342/Newspaper-misspells-name-on-front-page.html

www.nbc.com/The_Tonight_Show_with_Jay_Leno/headlines/H_2955/10.shtml

Hope you enjoyed them,
Rachel

easy to digest, and, in the case of a story or analogy, frosted!

Ron also gave the audience some pointers for creating story-based presentations in a corporate setting. He recommended

- Planning your story—determine who your audience is, what they already know and what you need to describe to them.
- Organizing your information—develop a storyline to get your audience's attention.
- Showing, not just telling—use specifics, not generalizations and make your presentation a story, when possible.
- Telling your story three times—tell them what you're going to tell them, tell them, and tell them what you've told them.

Slipping nearly seamlessly between slides and video clips that illustrated his points, Ron kept the audience's attention rapt. *Storytelling as a Corporate Communications Medium* has set the bar for presentations this season.

Lauren Bailey is a 2007 graduate of the Technical Communication Diploma program. She is currently dabbling in freelance work while also employed outside of the industry.

Bringing users around the world together

World Usability Day

By Kevin Longfield

November 13 is World Usability Day. What does that mean? According to the World Usability day Web site (www.worldusabilityday.org/) "It's about making our world work better. It's about 'Making Life Easy' and user friendly." This year's theme is transportation.

In 2005 the Usability Professionals' Association set aside the second Thursday in November to draw attention to the need for vital services and products to be easy to access and simple to use. World Usability Day's purpose is to encourage us to provide good user experiences to the people who use the products and services that we create.

Another way of looking at the user experience is by exploring the opposite. When we lock a club onto the steering wheel of our car, we are trying to give a thief a bad user experience. We want to make stealing our car difficult and risky enough that the thief will look for a better user experience down the street.

As communication professionals, we should ask ourselves how we can avoid putting a club on the steering wheel of our products. It means that we must strive for a higher level of professionalism. Sometimes we think that we've done a good job if our information materials are grammatical, spelled correctly, and comply with the principles of good

document layout and design. It's easy to lose sight of the *raison d'être* of our products: we are trying to help people meet their goals by explaining technology to them.

We can help to ensure that we are building positive user experience by seeking out the messy experience of getting to know our users. I learned this the hard way when the company I was working for started selling its products in China and Singapore. I thought that I was doing a good job because I was applying the lessons that I had learned in technical communication to the manuals I was developing. Our Asian customers kept giving feedback that the instructions were not detailed enough, and I spent some frustrating weeks adding layers of detail and more illustrations to the instruction steps.

Then I read an article in an STC publication about doing business in China. I learned that unlike in North America, Chinese users like to study the theory of operation and design philosophy of a product before using a product. Only then will they start reading instructions, the exact opposite of North American practice, where people read instructions only after trying a product and failing. I inserted the information that North American experience told me that users never read, and the complaints stopped.

Kevin Longfield teaches Technical Communication at Red River College. He also wrote *From Fire to Flood, a History of Theatre in Manitoba*. *From Fire to Flood* won the Margaret McWilliams award for local history in 2002.

Make your voice heard!

Got something to say but you're not sure where to say it? STC Manitoba provides its members with many opportunities to be heard, you can make your voice heard by

- participating on the STC Manitoba forums
- writing a letter to the editor (I can always find space for members opinions!)
- submitting an article to the newsletter

So don't be left out, speak your mind today!

Where the jobs are—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!

A tale of two photoshop books

By Rachel Ines

In a previous letter from the editor column, I lamented wasting the summer by not developing my Photoshop skills. It's amazing what one can do with a little focus and discipline. I finally got around to building on my Photoshop skills—once I got started, it took me less than a week to accomplish this task.

To aid in my self development, I purchased two books: Adobe Photoshop CS2 Classroom in a Book and Photoshop CS2 for Windows and Macintosh. While Photoshop has moved on to CS3, my review is based more from a usability perspective.

Adobe Photoshop

I was first introduced to the Adobe Classroom series (FrameMaker) and Visual Quickstart Guide (HTML) as a student in the Technical Communication Diploma program. Upon my initial selection of the Photoshop CS2 textbooks, I drew upon my user experiences with using both texts and overall content.

While I had some familiarity with using the different tools in Photoshop—the initial chapters were easy to complete. I like how the steps were, for the most part, easy to follow, and the CD provided actual samples that I could work with. The visuals included generally followed the instructions and were a combination of screen shots and icons. I was able to complete the lessons in less than the stated time which allowed me to quickly navigate through the lessons. I came away with understanding the program better, but the text book was not without its faults.

Issues encountered

I encountered situations where steps were missing. In some cases, I had to back track to make sure that it was the book and not me who made the error. My copy of the program seemed to be acting up as I was unable to access the online help feature.

Adobe doesn't take into account that there are people out in the real world who use old, small

monitors. More than once I couldn't finish a part of the lesson because I was unable to view the entire screen because the accompanying window was too large for my screen.

The book also lacks background information that could be useful. When using certain tools, I was directed to input values; unfortunately, the book didn't describe why those values were chosen which leaves me to wonder.

Photoshop CS2 for Windows and Macintosh

In contrast to Adobe Photoshop CS2 Classroom in a Book, the Photoshop CS2 for Windows and Macintosh is all about detail. At a whopping 600+ pages, this book provides more than enough information. From a review of the interface to customizing the workspace and software settings to using and understanding the tools and accompanying programs—this book has it all! It takes into account the perspective of the novice to the intermediate/expert. The authors even discuss how to select a digital camera while using Photoshop as your output for printing!

Issues encountered

For someone who is more than a novice but less than an intermediate user, it's a case of too much information! I found myself skipping over a lot of the first section of the textbook. While there is a lot of detail, it would've been nice to have access to some of the files they used in the examples to test things out for myself. Although I have access to other personal pictures I could use as a substitute, as a visual person, I like to compare and contrast with my lessons for reassurance that I'm on the right track.

Overall thoughts

Both textbooks serve their purpose. The Adobe series provides me with the step-by-step instructions I need and the exercises to complete them. Overall, I would recommend using both these textbooks together.

Rachel Ines is actively involved in the Manitoba chapter and has been an STC member for over two years. Rachel graduated from the Technical Communication Diploma program at Red River College.

The view from Philadelphia

By Alexa Campbell

Editor's note: This article is part three of a three part series; the original report has been edited for space.

The 55th annual STC conference was held June 4–6, 2008. Senior chapter member Alexa Campbell shares her thoughts on some of the sessions she attended.

Writing as an asynchronous conversation

Whenever I am at an STC conference, there are a few speakers I try to see. Ginny Redish is one of them. She does excellent research, she is a good presenter, and she puts diverse bits of information and research together in innovative and thought-provoking ways. This session was no different.

This presentation she based on her research in linguistics. Linguists, among other things, determine rules for conversation. This study is pragmatics, the study of language in use. (The other branches include syntax and semantics.)

Successful Web sites, such as Amazon.com, communicate with visitors by anticipating questions the visitors might have.

We participate in asynchronous communication in many ways everyday: email, blogging, SMS (short message service, aka text messaging), listservs, Facebook, forums, collaborative tools, etc. Our communication with Web sites is also asynchronous.

And why do we go to a Web site? Usually, to ask a question of the site: What is? How do I? Why do I? Conversation implies taking turns—so the Web site must anticipate what turns the visitor's conversation might take. The conversation is not computer-human, but human-human. (She notes—we don't talk about telephone-human interaction, although it is another form of communication using technology. Why are computers different?)

She refers to the work of Paul Grice and of Deborah Tannen.

Her paper is available at www.stc.org/edu/55thConf/index.asp.

In other words, we have seen the future, and it isn't in textbooks for students. It is about providing links, creating simulations, and assigning problems to solve.

Pictures and profits

Another speaker I have heard before, with enjoyment, is Patrick Hoffman, formerly of Waterloo, now with Google in Australia. Hoffman specializes in wordless instructions. His solutions to documentation problems are innovative.

His presentation was fully entitled, Pictures and Profits: Innovations in visual instruction and multi-ethnic usability research.

One of the driving forces behind wordless (or at least less wordy) instructions is translation. Translating and printing in multi-languages is costly.

Hoffman offered insights into how he constructs wordless instructions. He works with the writers to create a small story board with small spaces for text. Using minimal text leads, at least for him, easily into wordless instructions.

He offered insights into usability testing.

- Any feedback is better than none.
- Test any way you can, using friends, family, and so on.
- Don't rely on questionnaires. Watch how people use your instructions. Interview.
- Get the builders to use their own products. Hoffman reported on asking engineers to assemble a product, and the engineers found that they injured themselves—only slightly, but there was blood. Product redesign followed.
- Use temp agencies, such as Adecco, Manpower, to recruit usability subjects. They catalogue the backgrounds of their employees, so it is possible to recruit people of specified age, education, language, etc. It is fairly cheap to pay their wages.

Hoffman's presentation is available at www.stc.org/edu/55thConf/index.asp. It's worthwhile looking at these just to see his use of PowerPoint.

The Philadelphia experience

This is a hodgepodge of impressions and experiences during my travel to and time spent in Philadelphia.

(“The Philadelphia experience” continued on page 7)

("The view from Philadelphia continued from page 6)

Communicating in Philadelphia

I had an enlightening experience with translation issues before I even reached my hotel. My plane from Toronto had been delayed, so it was late and I was tired. After being misdirected several times, I finally reached the appropriate counter to get the shuttle to the Marriott. (The signs said shuttles were in Zone 4. Turns out, the Marriott shuttles were Zone 7.) The woman at the counter gave detailed directions, in a thick Philadelphia accent, and I couldn't understand anything except the last two syllables—nine, eight. I apologized and said I couldn't understand. She repeated herself more loudly with badly disguised impatience. We continued this exchange several times until finally she wrote the numbers on a piece of paper, picked up the phone (which she had been, mysteriously, tapping), handed it to me, and said "Dial." A young man who had joined my quest for the shuttle (and who looked Asian and demonstrated shaky English skills) looked even more bewildered than I. Eventually, the shuttle arrived. As we disembarked, he nodded a very polite "Thank you."

The Wanamaker Organ

I read in some of the hotel materials about the Wanamaker Organ at Macy's. Macy's is adjacent to the Marriott, so Monday at lunch, I thought I'd wander through and see what I could find out. (My son just graduated from the Faculty of Music, as an organ major.)

The cafeteria, to my surprise, overlooks the Grand Court, where the organ is installed. So I gathered some information about the organ, and settled in for the 12:00 noon concert.

This is a six-manual organ (six keyboards) and over 28,000 pipes, making it one of the largest in the world. (See a picture at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wanamaker_Organ.)

The Grand Court is an atrium of sorts carved out of the centre of Macy's, which is in the Wanamaker Building, a block-square, seven-story building. The Court reaches the full seven stories. See a picture at www.waymarking.com/waymarks/WM1VEH. This was my view at lunch. From the cafeteria, I overlooked the first floor of Macy's, where people went about buying shoes while the organist played.

On June 6, there was a celebration of the anniversary of the organ's installation, in 1904.

You can hear samples at www.wanamakerorgan.com/index1.html.

Reading Terminal Market

Although it sounds like a place where old Monopoly players go to die, the Reading Terminal Market is a block-square farmer's market right next to the Marriott. One of my fellow Winnipeggers called it "The Forks on steroids."

Maggiano's

After grabbing fruit, cheese, and chicken pad thai at the Reading Terminal Market, I went with a fellow conference attendee to Maggiano's Little Italy, a chain family Italian restaurant located across from the Marriot. This restaurant actually features family dining—you can order bowls of meatballs or pasta or lasagna to be served at your table, family-style. The food was excellent.

What was amazing is that this was Monday night in downtown Philadelphia, and the place was packed, with several family groups taking two or three tables each.

Parking

You think we have it bad. I saw a sign for parking, \$5.00. Impressed, I looked again. The small print said, \$5.00 for each half hour.

Alexa Campbell has been at Red River College since 1998 as an instructor of technical communication. She was the founding president of STC Manitoba, the founding manager of the Canadian Issues SIG, and became a Fellow of the Society for Technical Communication in 2001. She has also been a member of the IEEE Professional Communication Society, the Association of Teachers of Technical Writing, and the Canadian Association of Teachers of Technical Writing.



Looking at the numbers

STC membership numbers to date:

Manitoba	41*
Canada	1255**
Worldwide	13 541**

* Manitoba membership as of October 2008

**STC membership as of October 2008

Professional development courses



The year may be drawing to a close, but there's still time for professional development! Here are some courses that may be of interest to you.

Course	Date (2008)	Offered through
Managing projects for better results	Nov. 6 and 13	University of Winnipeg
Web design level : XHTML Introduction	Nov. 25–Dec. 6	
Designing and delivering dynamic workshops	Nov. 13–Nov. 14	University of Manitoba
Internet: Tech edge in business and education	Self directed	Red River College

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

Red River College Continuing and Distance Education: www.rrc.mb.ca/index.php?pid=4633

University of Winnipeg Continuing Education: www.uwinnipeg.ca/index/cms-filesystem-action?file=dce/uofwdcetimetable2008-2009.pdf

University of Manitoba Continuing Education: www.umanitoba.ca/faculties/con_ed/mpcp/calendar/request/ce_guide08-09.pdf

Around the STC—I heard the news today, oh boy ...

STC unveils new logo

If you haven't visited the STC international site, you just might have missed something. On October 15, 2008, the Society issued a news release showcasing the new logo.



Society for
Technical
Communication

Kudos goes to our fellow Canadian member Patrick Hofmann, of Teeswater, Ontario, who created the new design as a contribution to the Society.

As a chapter, STC Manitoba will adopt the new logo to its current publications to maintain the standards set by STC Headquarters.

What do you think of the new logo? Share your thoughts on the STC Manitoba forum! www.stcmanitoba.org/forums

Alberta chapter

While some time has passed since the Manitoba chapter has done a salary survey and with STC international revising their annual salary survey, you may wonder where you rank amongst your peers. STC Alberta has published their own salary survey for 2007 which may be of interest for some of our chapter members. Visit www.stc-alberta.org/Publications/publications.php

STC webinars

The next webinar is scheduled for

Wednesday, 19 November
1:00–2:30 pm ET

[How to Avoid Common Graphical Mistakes that Technical Communicators Make](#)

Presented by Naomi Robbins

Visit www.stc.org/edu/seminars01.asp for more information and to register for the webinar.

STC conference 2009

STC's 2009 Technical Communication Summit will be held May 3-6, 2009 in Atlanta, Georgia. The preconference sessions will be held on May 2-3 and Leadership Day will be Sunday, May 3, 2009.