IDeaL: Design for Learning

The Newsletter of the STC's Instructional Design and Learning SIG

From the Manager

by Jeanette Rogers, IDL SIG Manager

As I prepare to step out of the IDL SIG manager role, I have of course been reflecting on my time as SIG manager. It has been a great privilege to be SIG manager for a couple of years, as it means that I get the pleasure of hearing great compliments about the things our team of SIG volunteers do. Our team gets a lot of recognition; we are one of the larger SIGs, but we also do a large number of activities to support our members. The IDL SIG has an amazing group of volunteers who do great work and make things happen, making being the manager rewarding and fun.

Webinars: For many years now we have maintained a great webinar program and we continuously receive recognition for it.

Because the IDL SIG is a leader in these activities, many other SIGs look to us for ideas on how to implement a program like ours. The IDL SIG programs committee is a committed group doing a fantastic job delivering a solid program every year; any manager would be lucky to have such a self-driven team.

Scholarships: Over the last couple of years our scholarships committee has expanded our offerings and, listening to our members, we're now offering conference scholarships in addition to college scholarships. This team is always looking for new ways to support our members and their innovative ideas are keeping our long-time scholarships program new.

Newsletter: An award-winning newsletter, need I say more? If it was possible to nominate a volunteer for the Distinguished SIG Service Award more than once our editor would be lining the walls with awards. Every year we continue to see great articles in a well-designed layout.

In This Issue...

Society for Technical Communication

From the Manager, continued...

Social Media: In the last year you may have noticed periodic posts to LinkedIn and we've started tweeting. We're still developing our presence in this area, but it is exciting to see it beginning to occur due to a volunteer who makes things happen with little direction.

Volunteers behind the scenes: In addition to our core committees, there are many more volunteers who help us behind the scenes. We have monthly calls that additional volunteers help make happen, keeping us on task with budget information, membership statistics, meeting minutes, periodic surveys, and more.

Any praise for any of our SIG efforts is always a direct result of this amazing (and fun!) team I've had the privilege of working with through the years.

I've also been lucky to have two fabulous assistant managers who have recently been transitioning into the role of SIG co-manager. Jamye Sagan and Maralee Sautter have boundless energy and I'm certain that together the two of them will bring great leadership to the IDL SIG in the coming years.

A huge thank you to the IDL team of volunteers for making my tenure easy, enjoyable, and full of rewards. As Garrison Keillor would say, "Be well, do good work, and keep in touch."

Jeanette Rogers

About to Pass the IDL SIG Management Torch

IDeaL: Design for Learning

Publication Policy
We encourage letters, articles, book reviews, and other items for publication. Articles can include up to 1,000 words. Picture formats: JPGs, GIFs, PNGs; Text format: Word, RTF, or ASCII. Send items to Robert Hershenow at newsletter@stcidlsig.org

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We encourage advertising as long as it follows the STC guidelines and promotes services to the Instructional Design & Learning SIG members.

Ad sizes and rates are:

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- Business Card (3.5x2): $25 (1 issue); $100 (4 issues)

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SIG Web Site: http://stcidlsig.org

SIG Newsletter Archives: http://stcidlsig.org/wp/?page_id=743

SIG E-mail List: Open to all members. Click here to join.

SIG Mission Statement
To help STC members identify and develop knowledge and practical skills for designing, developing, and implementing technical instruction in electronic and traditional classroom settings. The SIG strives to promote sound design practices, provide information, and educate about instructional theory and research.

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STC Mission

The Society for Technical Communication advances the theory and practice of technical communication across all user abilities and media.

The Editor's Word

by Robert Hershenow,
Managing Editor

It's hard to believe that 2011 is already upon us, but here we are in January. I hope you enjoyed a festive holiday season.

SIG Manager Jeanette Rogers is about to pass the baton to Maralee Sautter and Jamye Sagan, our new Co-Managers. Don't miss her review of her last two years as SIG Manager, on page 1.

Also in this issue:

- Jane MacKenzie-Smith's story of the conferences she attended last year

- Mary Ryba Knepper's review of the 2010 SLATE Conference in Chicago

- Part 1 of Angela Velez' lineup of tools to enhance online learning

- Bill Pacino's Ten Proven Reasons for Certification

- News about FREE Virtual Training Evaluation Workshops conducted by the IDL SIG

- Sylvia Miller's recounting of the impressive benefits she has enjoyed as an STC member

- Learning opportunities—webinars from the IDL SIG and the STC

- News about Scholarships to the 2011 Summit on Sacramento

I hope you enjoy this issue of *IDeaL: Design for Learning.* As always we welcome submissions in the form of articles, photos, and letters; please see guidelines on page 2.

Here's to a peaceful, prosperous and educational new year,

Robert Hershenow
Managing Editor, *IDeaL: Design for Learning*

Increase your Webinar skills

We are seeking STC IDL SIG volunteers to help promote, coordinate, and conduct our SIG's webinars.

The many benefits of joining our team include networking, attending our SIG webinars at no cost, and gaining real Webinar experience.

Please look through our website to learn more about our current and past offerings. If you are interested, we would love to hear from you!

Write to us: programs@stcidlsig.org

SIG Meeting CALENDAR

The IDL SIG Managers will meet on
**January 26th,
February 23rd,
and March 23rd**

They await your input.

Join the

IDL SIG
LinkedIn Group

http://www.linkedin.com/groupRegistration?
gid=2298157

Conferences, Conferences

by Jane McKenzie-Smith

STC Conference—The Summit 2010

While I always enjoy the STC Conference, this year I decided to branch out to other organizations and check out different conferences as well.

To start, though, let me tell you about the most enjoyable session I attended at the STC Conference, the session in which each of us received a package of Legos and built Lego models that addressed questions about "Motivating without Authority." Each time we had two minutes to build and ten minutes to share in our table groups what our Lego construct meant to us.

First, we built one that described "Motivating without Authority."

Next, we built one that represented what motivated or inspired us.

Third, we built a model that showed what we needed from others to motivate us.

And last, we built one that represented a real challenge facing us today and what we bring to that situation as well as what we could bring to it to help with change.

I enjoyed this session very much, learning from others as well as learning about myself. I still reflect on what it means to motivate without authority and how it occurs. Is motivating without authority self-appointed? Does it occur naturally arising from natural leadership qualities? Is motivating the same as leading? What makes one person inspirational and another not? What makes one person motivating in one situation and not in another? And so on. I won't suggest answers; however, the questions are worthy of contemplation in one's own time.

SALT Conference—August 2010

After attending only STC conferences for many years, I decided to check out other organizations. The Society for Applied Learning Technologies (SALT) hosts two conferences each year, both focused on learning technologies. Session topics include mobile learning, training via virtual worlds, and simulation games. Attendees and presenters seemed to be predominantly from companies that worked on government and military contracts.

There was a belief among many that the younger generation learns differently, and that games and virtual worlds are more engaging for this generation. Yet, embedded within each of these approaches are some age-old standards, such as:

- Make the training scenario driven, using real-world realistic situations
- Focus on thinking and cognitive and decision-making skills where possible (the basic cognitive apprenticeship approach)
- Use collaboration where appropriate and possible
- Give ample opportunities for practice in a variety of situations with a range of difficulty

Conferences, continued

In one session, the presenters gave some figures on the cost of developing simulation games, both role-playing and tactical:

- $400,000 - $1,000,000 to develop one hour of customized simulation game based training
- Six months to one year to develop
- Team of six to 10 people

In the last session I attended, "Generational Differences and Learning Styles: Do They Matter?" two educational psychologists presented the findings from their research which supported two basic, once again time-honored, principles:

People learn not by modality but by the context in which we put the learning. The brain works by putting new information in context of old, and 90% of what the brain processes is images.

There are two predictors of learning success:

- Prior knowledge
- Intrinsic motivation

They decided to test the theory of generational differences in learning styles, but they found no difference in learning based on styles. In fact, their research continued to reinforce the two ideas stated above as being the primary determinants of learning.

I found these fellows to be very down to earth and reality-based in their thinking and research. I also found that many of the conference presenters were saying what we've always said; however, the buzzwords they use have changed. Perhaps that's where the generational differences come in – the jargon we use to describe and discuss learning approaches may vary based on our own prior experience and generational orientation. Yet, the tried and true are still the tried and true, when we peel off the layers and trappings of language.

ASTD Conference—October 2010

Then in October, I was asked to participate on a panel on best webinar practices at an ASTD conference in Phoenix. This conference was

smaller than either of the others; however, I found the focus on basic training approaches and solid instructional design and facilitation to be a breath of fresh air. I first attended a session by a former colleague, Brent Slenker, who also reinforced much of my conclusions from SALT and went beyond those to say that mobile training is still in its infancy.

Long ago, I left the purely technical world of training for software systems and went on to design training for such "softer" areas as:

- Sales
- Customer Service
- Financial services and sales
- Business process improvement
- New Hire Orientation

I considered these areas of greater challenge to me, in that they required a broader range of instructional methods and approaches than training for software wherein the "tell me, show me, try it" approach is tried and true. I experimented with various ways of telling the story to make business processes real. I was able to bring retail stores to life in e-Learning, and I found that providing information about financial products through conversations and stories to be both interesting and successful. Couple that interest with my interest in the spiritual side of life, and the result was that I truly enjoyed the two keynote speakers, one of whom was from Franklin-Covey and the other a noted motivational speaker. One addressed the challenge of changing management styles for the knowledge age, as opposed to the predominant "tell" style used in the industrial age. The other challenged us as individuals to handle changes in both our personal and work lives and lead the way for others. These two speakers were an awesome end to the day and to my year of conferences.

New from the IDL SIG: Free Virtual Training Evaluation Workshops

At the annual STC conference, the IDL SIG offers Training Evaluation sessions in which experts review your training materials and discuss them with you.

We are now offering the same opportunity online, as a free service to IDL SIG members. You submit your training materials, one of our IDL experts will evaluate them, and you will receive both written and verbal feedback. We'll evaluate finished courses, drafts, and storyboards for both classroom and e-Learning courses.

Process and Requirements
To participate in the session, submit a completed Evaluation Submission Form (available online, see below) by the 15th of the month. Each month we will match submissions with evaluators, who will then contact each participant to coordinate sharing the materials for evaluation.

Using our IDL Training Evaluation Form, your evaluator will spend up to two hours reviewing your content for core instructional design components. Then the two of you will discuss

the evaluation feedback. Evaluations are expected to be completed within a month.

Important notes

- You must be an IDL SIG member to participate.
- You may submit one evaluation request per year.
- While the evaluation is free of charge, you must coordinate and pay for any costs incurred. These might include phone calls, web tools, or shipping of materials.
- Depending on its size of your course, the evaluation may not comprehensively cover it in its entirety.

See "Virtual Training Evaluation Workshop" on the IDL SIG website for additional information and Evaluation Submission forms: http://www.stcidlsig.org/wp/?page_id=105

If you'd like to be an evaluator, please submit an Evaluator Application (which can also be found on the IDL SIG Website at the link above). Evaluators are asked to volunteer approximately 4-5 hours several times a year.

ATTENTION IDL SIG MEMBERS!
Here's Another Way to Reach the Summit

The STC Technical Communications Summit (our annual conference) provides technical communicators with an opportunity to network and to learn more about their profession—whether it be new techniques or theories.

Sometimes it is difficult for members to allocate funds to attend such an event, especially during these tough economic times.

Therefore, we are offering scholarships for two IDL SIG members. Each recipient will receive one fully-paid registration to the STC Summit in Sacramento, California, May 15-18, 2011. Although this scholarship does not cover travel or lodging expenses to the Summit, it does cover the most expensive aspect of attendance.

See the Summit Scholarships for Members page on the IDL SIG website for details.

My Experience at SLATE

*by **Mary Ryba Knepper***

8th Annual SLATE Conference

Build it Better

October 21-22, 2010
Hosted by: The University of Chicago

I attended the SLATE conference in Chicago, October 21–22, 2010, and was impressed, delighted, informed, energized, and well fed. Not an inconsequential detail, that last point.

SLATE is an acronym for "Supporting Learning and Technology in Education," a great pun for a ubiquitous teacher's tool—the slate blackboard—appropriately named for a conference about the Blackboard application and its complementary products. (The first SLATE conference occurred in May 2002 and was held at the University of Chicago, with a core of eight other Illinois institutions of higher learning.)

The key WOW factor was the level of community interaction, intellectual energy, and dedication I witnessed. The content itself was a close WOW runner-up. What a rich display of product functionality! Attendees came away encouraged to teach more and better, by using wonderful technology.

I did feel, however, that having left the mainstream of academe a couple of decades ago, I might be the last bird on the telephone line to get the message. How had I not heretofore encountered Blackboard? Someone said that the best time to plant a tree is 20 years ago; the second best time is today. So I planted my feet firmly into the conference and dove into the sessions.

What it is: Blackboard is one great big learning management application that many colleges and universities have adopted, and businesses are now adopting—which is where I now live, not in academe—and for which entrepreneurs are developing complementary applications.

To clarify, this article is not a commercial for Blackboard. Rather, it is (1) a recommendation to consider attending a SLATE conference for mind expansion and spiritual jazz and (2) a random list of ideas, facts, and resources gleaned from sessions and interaction with venders who sponsored the Blackboard conference.

Key Take-away from the Conference: All the powerful applications in the world do not make up for weak content or poor design[10]. That 10 is not a misprint: I put "to the 10th power" after that statement for emphasis. There is no substitute for content and design. I know I underscore the obvious; however, it can seem as if in STC we emphasize tools over all else, perhaps because we assume a core grounding in and mastery of content and design. Learning about the software, however, did have the effect of stimulating my design bone and seeing new ways of presenting content, of interacting with learners, and of elevating one's instructional game. An aside: Last night at our chapter holiday party, a member told me she took biology online and dissected a frog virtually—with a mouse. The advantages are mind-blowing, not to mention her being spared the smell of formaldehyde. We live in the Age of Continuous Amazement. If we aren't amazed, we aren't paying attention.

Case from University of Kentucky: Toshi Urata said that three PhDs in ID technologies tutor faculty and TAs on how to use Blackboard. The number of Blackboard courses has increased from 171 in 2000 to 2443 in 2010. A key feature of Blackboard is interactivity: blended learning opportunities and a place to chat. In one example, the professor asked students to watch lectures online and use class time for discussion.

Softchalk: Steve Saltzberg defined Softchalk as "an open education resource" that is an easy-to-learn course authoring tool. Its features include

SLATE, continued

basic text editing, addition of images and media, interactive self-check questions; learning games and activities; widget enhancements; publishing to Blackboard; and tracking student scores.

Wimba and Elluminate: This was only my third session and I started to mind-choke on seeing all the great options for e-learning. I wanted to get the 30-day free trial on everything and just go to work. Dogs, cats, husband, godson, house, job— all gone to the wayside while I explored the candy store. So what are Wimba and Elluminate? They are course management tools, fueled by Blackboard, that help educators and students coordinate and collaborate with each other and peer to peer. They allow formal or informal, synchronous or asynchronous, instant or planned educational experiences. They can scale content to mobile devices and integrate with a person's preferred LMS platform.

Free Tools to Make Your Course Fun, Interesting, and Engaging: Angela Velez had more freebie resources to suggest than I could keep up with in taking notes. I sent her a request for a list, and true to her word, she came through. I copied it in the following article, under her name. She is a true e-goddess—knowledgeable, generous, and fun. Two freebies to get started include Lastpass.com to keep track of passwords and Polleverywhere.com, which allows cell phone responses.

Supporting Learning Technology in Education: Ray Henderson described how Barnes & Noble and Follett publishers are collaborating with Blackboard to have books flow into an e-learning environment. Implications for students include up to 40% off the price of a book and immediate access to the book.

Sprint Collaboration: Sprint is collaborating with Blackboard to allow learning via a mobile phone. Talk about "just in time"! imagine this short tutorial: "Correct. You put the car in park and shut off the ignition before you opened the door. Very good!"

Web 3.0: Living in the Future of the Web: Levy Prukpitikul from the Moody Bible Institute talked about the transition into the world of Web 3.0, and even 4.0. Again, mind blowing for this last

bird on the wire. He characterized the progression as follows: Web 1.0—Information flood; Web 2.0—Interactive and social; Web 3.0—a paradigm shift to Intelligence with linked, reusable, open data, and more productive in information gathering that is understood, critically assessed, and creatively expanded; Web 4.0—Pervasive, an information experience that guides us and our choices, a la "Pandora" for music selection. An aside: Levy used Prezi for his presentation. Another last-bird comment: It is quite the presentation tool and is on a long list of how to update my skills.

The New Social Learning, by T. Bingham and Marcia Conner: For a quick overview, see http://www.bkconnection.com/ProdDetails.asp?ID=9781605097022. The authors make a case for using social media for training. They claim it helps solve the issues of distance learning, cross-generational learning, and multiple learning styles. I guess a mere tweet can be a cerebral blast. It just takes some imagination and a dash of experience.

Mindful Communication: Nancy Norman from the University of Illinois, Chicago, distinguished between instruction designer and instructional technologist, quoting Walter Ong, who boggled my mind in 1963 and would again today. At Nancy's suggestion, I looked up "logical learning theory" online, hoping for Wikipedia clarity, but finding none, I clicked Logical learning theory: A human teleology and its empirical support by JF Rychlak, 1994, and got the whole text, causing this bird to fall off the wire and go get a hot chocolate with a peppermint stir stick.

Mary Ryba Knepper is an STC Associate Fellow, a founding member of the Chicago STC Chapter's Institute for Professional Development, and former secretary of the IDL SIG. She is president and owner of Ryba Associates, Inc., a group that designs and delivers custom training and documentation to corporations, scientific communities, and universities.

Give me the Bells & Whistles!

Tools to Enhance Teaching and Learning—Part 1

*by **Angela Velez, Ph.D.***
Northeastern Illinois University

Audacity: This free tool allows you to create audio files that you can embed in your course, add to presentations, and so forth. Windows & Mac based. http://audacity.sourceforge.net

How to narrate a Power Point using Audacity and put it in your course.

Voki: A really fun tool that allows you to create crazy avatars and record up to a 1 minute message using any of their voices (accents from all over the world), or by recording your own voice. Easily embeds in your Blackboard course. http://www.voki.com/

Elluminate: This one is not free, but has a free trial. This too is a Web-based conferencing tool that has a lot of capabilities, such as hand raises. I found this to be one of the best out there. Elluminate.com

Get a free 3-seat meeting room here: http://www.learncentral.org

Skype: This has been touted as one of the best tools for the internet many years in a row. It is basically a free internet-based phone with conferencing, chat, and video chat capabilities. http://www.skype.com

Fonomo: This website is similar to Skype in its capabilities. These tools can be used to have virtual office hours or conference with online students. Nothing to download and students access this through a weblink you share with them. http://www.fonomo.com/

Gogrok: An internet collaboration platform that allows you to screen share (you can take control of their screen), real-time collaboration and editing with others, and allows for internet voice and calling features too. In order to have voice, users must use Skype or MSN messenger. I have used this personally… and found it to be FABULOUS. Windows-based. http://www.gogrok.com

Livestream: Students or professors can create their own live broadcast across the internet for free!! It's like having your own TV station. Uses a webcam and microphone. http://www.livestream.com/

Screenstream: This program allows you to share your desktop with others via a web link. Windows. http://www.nchsoftware.com/screen/index.html

Palbee: A free online service to set up video meetings, record presentations, store them online and use them elsewhere, such as in your course as video lectures, etc. http://www.makeuseof.com/dir/palbee/

Vyew: This website allows you to create meetings and share your desktop during this meeting. Browser-based, so no downloads. Do not seem to be able to use archived webinars elsewhere like with Palbee. http://vyew.com/s/

Wiziq: This is an interactive online classroom experience that is free. It is similar to dimdim and other online conferencing tools as it allows for video, audio, and live chat. Students can speak if they have a microphone. You can also search for content that you can embed in your own Blackboard class. http://www.wiziq.com/

Blogger: Free online blog tool. Blogger.com.

bluwiki: A wiki is a website that you or your students can create; people who visit the site have the ability to edit and add content. Authors decide who can edit their pages. http://bluwiki.com/go/Main_Page

voicethread: this program allows students and professors to create voice-based posts based on a document, picture, or other type of document. http://voicethread.com/

Vocaroo: You won't believe how easy this site makes recording your voice. No account necessary. Works well in Windows; Mac users may find it useful despite somewhat limited functionality on their platform. http://vocaroo.com/

Prezi is nothing like you've ever seen before. It is a presentation software that creates amazingly stimulating visual presentations. http://prezi.com/

Thanks to Mary Knepper for bringing this article to the IDL SIG. Check our next issue for Part 2!

Ten Proven Reasons for Certification

by Bill Pacino

The effort to create a voluntary certification program for STC continues to move along eight months after its first announcement in May 2010. The goal is to have a working program of certification granted by evaluators within a year, followed by the replacement of evaluators with an exam-based certification in five years. The exam-based certification in the future would use a STC Body of Knowledge, in the same way the Project Management Institute uses its PMBOK (Project Management Book of Knowledge).

There are many steps in front of STC to meet these ambitious goals, goals worth the effort – for the profession, for the Society and for the individual.

Among the professional organizations that have made a success of certification are: ISPI (International Society for Performance Improvement); Data Warehousing Institute; ASTD (American Society for Training and Development); Human Factors International; IEEE; IIBA (International Institute of Business Analysts); PMI (Project Management); Accreditation in Public Relations; ASQ (American Society for Quality); BELS (Board of Editors in Life Sciences), to mention just a few.

Each of the professional associations listed above have many strong words on the value of their certification programs. Go to the individual websites of these professional associations – they are no different than STC – to see the value that they are providing for their membership and the economic environment that their membership makes its money in.

Why it won't work

There are many reasons why STC certification will work. Let's examine first the negative comments about this STC program.

My "portfolio" is proprietary/military/ defense

The portfolio submitted to the evaluators is not a forklift load of work you have done, but samples demonstrating specific knowledge, skills, and abilities. It certainly can be work just like that submitted to STC Competitions. But it also can be an original representative piece of work. Yes, this is more preparation, more assembly of your work, but this gets around the problem of getting permissions for proprietary or confidential publications work.

What about those who have no body of work for assessment?

When you go on a job interview, what do you use for a portfolio? How do you show prospective employers what can you do? Yes, there are people who can articulate very well who they are and what they can do. Just like there are speakers who can engage an audience successfully without PowerPoint slides. But a body of personal work is needed. It does not have to be finished products that a company paid you to do. It could be a case study, or an academic piece of work that demonstrates your skills and knowledge of technical communications.

The technical writing field is too broad for certification

Colleges grant technical communications degrees. These colleges must have figured out some order to the profession. Another example is project management, a very broad field. PMI has designed criteria for success in this field.

How will certification become relevant in technical communications?

Certification will become relevant when hiring managers understand what skills are represented by the certification and trust that the skills are held by the practitioner.

Certification programs become publicized when certified practitioners list the certification on their resumes and cover letters and make a point to tell interviewers about it. Yes, the professional association will create white papers and seek publicity about its professional certification program. But, as the individual practitioner did the most work to earn the certification, the individual practitioner, at the grass roots level and by individual action, will do the most work to publicize the certification.

Benefits of STC certification

The certification effort by other professional associations serves two audiences. Employers and clients need standards and criteria to help them distinguish individual practitioners who have proven they can produce results using a systematic process. At the same time, these individual practitioners can make good use of a credential that would help them assess their ability, focus their professional development efforts, and recognize their capabilities.

Here are more reasons why STC certification benefits you (and the companies who hire you).

1. Certification demonstrates your commitment to the profession. Receiving your certification shows your peers, supervisors and, in turn, the general public your commitment to your chosen career and your ability to perform to set standards.

2. Certification enhances the profession's image. Association certification programs seek to grow, promote, and develop certified professionals, who can stand "out in front" as examples of excellence in the industry or field. Association certification programs also provide money to the association. All the professional associations listed above are making money on the fees for exams.

3. Certification reflects personal achievement. Certified professionals display excellence in their field by meeting set standards and requirements.

4. Certification builds self-esteem. Association certification programs create a standard for a particular profession, complete with performance standards, ethics, and career paths. You'll begin to define yourself beyond a job description or academic degree. You'll see yourself as a certified professional who can control his or her own professional destiny and find a deep sense of personal satisfaction.

5. Certification establishes professional credentials. Since it recognizes your individual accomplishments, certification stands above your resume, serving as an impartial, third-party endorsement of your knowledge and experience. And when the public looks for individuals qualified to perform services, they seek individuals-like you-who have achieved certification.

6. Certification improves career opportunities and advancement. Certification gives you the "edge" when being considered for a promotion or other career opportunities. Certification clearly identifies you as an employee who can adapt to changes in work, technology, business practices, and innovation.

7. Certification prepares you for greater on-the-job responsibilities. Since certification is a voluntary professional commitment to an industry or field of knowledge, it is a clear indicator of your willingness to invest in your own professional development. Certified professionals are aware of the constantly

Certification, continued

changing environment around their profession and possess the needed tools to anticipate and respond to change.

8. Certification provides for greater earnings potential. As a certified professional, you can expect many benefits, but for today's down-sized, right-sized, topsy-turvy working world, salary increases speak for themselves.

9. Certification improves skills and knowledge. Ideally, achieving certification shows your individual competence by confirming proficiency and career involvement and assuring knowledge.

10. Certification offers greater professional recognition from co-workers and peers. As a certified professional you can expect increased recognition for taking that extra step in your professional development.

More Reading

To give credit where is it due, the benefit list was rewritten from one published by the Virginia Nursery & Landscape Association:

http://www.vnla.org/Certification/
TopTenReasonsCertification.htm

Another good write-up on the growth of certification programs as a reaction to the changing employment market is the Professional Certification entry in Wikipedia:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/
Professional_certification

Bill Pacino is a Senior member of STC-Boston and STC-NNE (Northern New England) who serves on the STC Certification Committee.

Your IDL SIG
is a
Community of Distinction

Please join the team.

volunteers@stcidlsig.org

How Do I Love Thee, STC?
...Let Me Count the Ways

(with apologies to Elizabeth Barrett Browning)

*by **Sylvia Miller**, Fellow*

As someone who transitioned from teaching high school English to Technical Communication, I've found that STC has meant a lot to me over the past 20 years. That's why I wouldn't consider not renewing my membership, even though the cost comes entirely out of my pocket.

My first hint of the value of STC came in 1992 when I was working for a consulting firm and the client requested e-learning products (called CBTs back then). As a former teacher, I knew how to logically present information in an interesting way, write learning objectives, assess learning, and so on, but I had never designed and developed CBT. At that time, STC didn't have special interest groups (SIGs) with listservs for posting questions. So I networked by asking some STC acquaintances if they knew any chapter members who'd done CBT work. Then I sat at my kitchen table one evening and called some fellow chapter members to pick their brains. I got some great advice and direction and ended up winning awards in our chapter competition and from APEX. Without the encouragement and advice from those STC members, I would have floundered and perhaps not been successful. Indeed, my employer would not have benefited from a long-term, four-CBT client engagement.

Likewise, two years ago when I was using Captivate to develop e-learning, I reached out to some fellow IDL SIG buddies and cried, "Help! How do I …" We exchanged emails, phone calls, and even sent files back and forth for troubleshooting. Because of my involvement in the SIG, I had a pretty good idea who used what software and who I could call for help (one of the many fringe benefits of active involvement in a SIG). I also posted a question on the IDL SIG listserv. Although the online user forums of a software company have their place, nothing beats talking to someone you've actually met, smacking your forehead a la Bart Simpson, getting the "why" to an explanation, exchanging a few friendly words (especially as a lone writer), and then getting back to work. Doing this decreased my frustration and saved me time, which meant an ultimate savings for my employer.

Early in my career, STC competitions provided me with reinforcement of what I was doing well. As I mentioned, I won some chapter-level awards, which showed me and my clients or employers how my work rated in the eyes of my peers. I also gained constructive criticism for improving my work. If you've never entered your work in an STC competition, you're missing out on a terrific confidence builder. With one award, when my client (whose permission I'd received to enter the piece) found out it had won an award, they were as proud and excited as I was, and their use of the consulting firm I worked for was reinforced for them. Do you see the chain reaction—my work won the award, which made my client happy, which made my consulting firm employer happy—do you call this a win-win-win?

Eventually, I judged in local competitions and was accepted to judge in STC's annual international competitions at least twice. Again, I gained more than I contributed. By looking at the entries and discussing them with the other judges during consensus judging, I gathered new techniques and ideas to try, added to my tech

Welcome, New SIG Members!

Susan Jane Andrews

Karen Jo Beverley

Julie Breen

Chivas Crawford

Amy Cyr

Ousmane Dieng

Jackie Lee Doehling

Bonnie R. Doyle

Anne Bolender Edwards

Dan Martin Ens

Keshia Garnett

Derek P. Harmon

Tony Haynes

Mike Jones

Stephanie Jones

Steven Ira Kaufman

Sharada Kotcherlakota

Karen LeMoine

Anne Martinez

George Edward Massey

Trish Robertson

Tiwoni Ross

Eva Sitzman

Heather Utendorf

Susan Vance

Danielle Marie Villegas

Pauline Wong

Jean Zartner

comm list of do's and don'ts, and garnered some PR for my employers whose names appeared in the judges' biographies (more win-win-wins). But the benefits didn't end there. During my first job as a department manager at a small company, I sent around a job aid for review, and several SMEs replied that I needed to change the piece to all passive voice (small company, a little behind the times). I very nicely explained that I couldn't do that in good conscience—that I had judged technical publications at the international level, and the standard today called for using active voice in a job aid such as this one. No one at this company again questioned me on the use of active voice, and if they did have a question about a something written by me or a staff member, they asked if such-and-such was the current tech comm. standard before insisting that I change the item in question. I played the "judging-experience-at-international-level" card several other times throughout my career, so I'm talking long-term benefit here!

Judging in competitions—seeing examples of excellent online and printed publications (and less than excellent)—has been only one of the many ways STC has afforded me opportunities for professional development. The monthly chapter meetings with profession-related topics, SIG

listservs, monthly and quarterly STC publications, webinars, and annual conferences have meant so much to me in my professional growth and staying current in the field. In fact, when I have been in a position to hire technical communicators, I have always listed STC membership in the job description as a highly desirable candidate trait. Why, you ask? Doesn't a non-member with an equal amount of experience rate the same as the tech communicator who's an STC member? Possibly, but no team can afford a member with an attitude of "I already got my degree/certificate, and I don't need any further professional development." Just browse through Intercom article titles and you'll find how our field continues to change. And if you're relying on your current employment experiences to keep you current through on-the-job exposure, well, that's just plain misguided and risky. What happens when your employer has to downsize and you're one of the unlucky ones? If all you've done for the past six to nine years is X and Y, then without professional publications, it's doubtful that you have the breadth of exposure to be able to intelligently discuss new trends and technologies with prospective new employers, and you'll be frantically researching to catch up.

How Do I love Thee? continued...

A few years into my STC membership, I looked at how very much I was getting from the organization, and I felt I should try to give back to the organization. Before STC I had some leadership experience in a multi-level marketing organization, and I served as president one year of my local community theatre association. But in STC I've had ample opportunities to really hone my leadership skills. In the mid-90s our chapter president asked if I'd like to meet for a sandwich with some other chapter members to brainstorm some ideas for meeting topics and speakers for the next year. "Why is she asking me?" I wondered, but I agreed to attend. If nothing else, I'd make some new friends. This event was the catalyst that resulted in leading my local chapter's annual competitions, serving as chapter president, leading my chapter's programs team a few times, and serving the IDL SIG as membership manager and scholarships co-lead for a few years. And now comes the part where I say, "I've made the greatest friends while volunteering in STC," which is unequivocally true. But I've also honed my strategic planning and organizational skills—skills that I'm currently using in my church to revitalize a much-needed group and important skills for running my own business.

During the past 20 years I have found myself in the position of being laid off, fired, in between project assignments as a consultant, and in very difficult financial straits when the time came to renew my membership. But at those times I realized that I needed the organization more than ever, so I renewed—even when it came from my pocket. And now as an independent consultant, I would not think of letting my membership lapse. STC is offering more value for its members than ever—like courses for certification, two free archived webinars per year, and promotion of our profession to the business world (see http://www.stc.org/membership/ for more information). Not renewing would be kind of like not wanting to answer the phone during a suspenseful movie—I'm afraid I might miss something!

*by **Gretchen Hambright***

IDL SIG Secretary

This last quarter was full of big questions and discussions about the budget, scholarships, a possible virtual conference and where the SIGs future lies. Peruse some of the highlights of your IDL SIG managers' accomplishments below:

Web Site: The Web Site team will be providing training to Committee Managers to begin updating their own committee's pages.

Webinars: PayPal is now available for use in webinar registration. Webinars will be scheduled for daytime slots only due to higher registration numbers.

Summit: Five interested parties have sent in proposals for topics for the IDL SIG progression at the 2011 conference.

Survey: Questions were drafted for a new survey targeting webinar topic suggestions and the web site.

Scholarships: A revised application and requirements have been drafted and approved for both student and summit scholarships.

Membership: Virtual Evaluations of Instructional Design Projects is great new benefit to all IDL SIG members.

IDL SIG Live Web Seminar

Teaching through the Internet: Using Desire2Learn, Moodle, and Blackboard

Thursday January 27, 2011
1:30–3:00 PM EST (GMT-5)

Are you thinking about teaching an online class? Might seeing how different tools are used in the academic world of teaching spark an idea for your current project?

Join us Thursday, January 27 as panelists demonstrate their long distance teaching tool: Desire2Learn (D2L), Moodle, and Blackboard. A 15-20 minute demonstration of each tool will be followed by a Q&A session.

$20 IDL SIG Member
$30 STC Member
$50 Non Member

More information, or to register:
http://www.stcidlsig.org/wp/?page_id=1240

STC Live Web Seminars

Creating Visual Help and Training Using Adobe Captivate
Tuesday, 25 January 2011
1:00–2:00 PM EST (GMT-5)
Presented by Neil Perlin
STC Members $79; Student Members $29

Freelance vs. Captive: Making an Informed Decision
Wednesday, 26 January 2011
1:00–2:00 PM EST (GMT-5)
Presented by John Hedtke
STC Members $149; Student Members $29

More information, or to register:
http://www.stc.org/edu/seminars.asp

by Robert Hershenow

EtherPad
A Web-based collaborative word processor with "infinite undo history"
http://ietherpad.com/

2010's 10 hottest 10 Things Lists
From TechRepublic
http://bit.ly/ibwCX4

10 ways to deal with a personal or professional weakness
Also from TechRepublic
http://bit.ly/hojwJW

10 ways to get paid
If you are an independent, you need this
http://bit.ly/ghIUu7

Five tips: Speed Up XP
Are your Windows XP machines running slowly? Here's how to increase performance
http://bit.ly/di8qES

Skitch
"Screengrab, add a note, and share…"
https://skitch.com/

Who Are Learning Technologists?
From eLearn Magazine, courtesy of Gloria Reece
http://bit.ly/9D4zD7

Peek behind a shortened URL
Ever wish you could preview a blind link before opening it? If it's a bit.ly URL (like http://bit.ly/fSH639), copy and paste it into a browser address bar and add a plus sign to the end of it: http://bit.ly/fSH639+ . This will take you to a page that shows the full link.

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STC, Social Media, and You

Stay connected with STC wherever you go! Follow STC on Twitter @stc_org and follow the #stcorg discussion group; get information about the Summit from @stc2011 or #stc11. Are you on LinkedIn? Search for the Society for Technical Communication group, or visit www.linkedin.com/groups?gid=2926. STC has started putting more videos up on YouTube as well; find us at www.youtube.com/Society4TechComm. And sign up for our RSS feeds, too—click the RSS icon on the STC home page, STC's Notebook, and Intercom.

Conference Registration Now Open

Registration for the 2011 Technical Communication Summit (15–18 May 2011 in Sacramento, CA) opened 1 December.
Visit http://summit.stc.org to register.
The "Really Early Bird" rate has expired, but the "Early Bird" rate of $895 is active through 15 March 2011. That's $100 less than the regular Advance rate and $400 less than the Walk-in rate for all the education sessions and networking opportunities the Summit has to offer.

STC Releases 2009-2010 Salary Database

What are the fastest-growing industries for technical writers? Which ones are posting the sharpest declines? How much should you expect to make if you apply for a job in another city? The answer to these and other questions asked by job seekers and project planners can be found in STC's 2009–2010 Salary Database report (using 2009 data), available for purchase online at www.stc.org/pubs/salary-database.asp.

In this issue of Intercom:

- The Global Language: Using Symbols and Icons When Delivering Technical Content, by Alan J. Porter

- The Trouble with Visual Explanations: A Quick Look at Common Problems, by Don Moyer

- Integrating Text with Graphics in Procedures, by Geoff Hart

- Community Help: Technical Communication for the Web 2.0 User, by Samartha Vashishtha

… and much more.

This issue is available for members to read online, or download as a PDF or Flipbook.

Attend Summit '10 in Dallas, Texas, from your own computer... with no travel at all

Society for Technical Communication