

A Conference First-Timer's Random Thoughts and Initial Impressions

By Pamela Canale

Prior to becoming a technical writer two years ago, the only full-time work I ever had was as a locksmith for my grandfather's security system company in Canada. After a stint writing manuals for a surveillance software and service company, I left the chilly north last year to take a job with an Orange County, California, investment firm to work in the Policies and Procedures Department.

My company has plans to publish all our policies and procedures online and eventually adopt an Intranet. Last spring, I asked my boss if I could attend the STC conference in Cincinnati to learn about these P&P issues. He said he would prefer for me to go to the conference to "take in the big picture of technical writing" because I'm new to the profession. I said, "Groovy," which is what you can say to please an "I-don't-sweat-the-details" millionaire surfer who happens to be your boss.

And so it came to pass that I was an STC Annual Conference "greenhorn" with specific instructions when I attended the event last spring. Until that morning in May, I had never traveled to any convention. Nevertheless, I came, I saw, I ate some Cincinnati-style chili, and I toured the world of technical communication outside the realm of P&P.

Here are some of my first impressions and random thoughts about my experience.

Conference offerings I considered obligatory were first-rate and fun. The best among them were the aptly named "First-Timers' Session" and "Opening Session."

It was stirring to hear the heartfelt remarks about technical communication that were given by the passionate professionals who were this year's STC exemplars.

One of my favorite aspects of the conference was the spontaneous, generosity

See CONFERENCE, p. 2

Liaison Team Needs Leader

By Audrey Cielinski Kessler

The trend toward chapter-level SIGs in STC is under way, and you can play a role in its development by volunteering to serve as the team leader of the Policies and Procedures chapter-level SIG liaison team.

In this capacity, you would work to encourage fellow P&P SIG members to form P&P SIGs in their local chapters. You also would have a hand in developing guidelines that members of the national/international SIG can use to promote P&P events and communication on the local level. Other activities could include identifying chapters that have P&P SIGs and coordinating the exchange of information among these SIGs and between the chapter-level SIGs and the national/international SIG.

See TEAM LEADER, p. 3

Inside . . .

P&P Membership Grows	
By 101.....	3
STC Listserv Undergoes	
Changes	3
Check This Out	4
STEPS & SPECS a Winner	4

CONFERENCE

Continued from p. 1

of STC veterans. While waiting for a session to begin and wondering absently about how good the latest version of Adobe Acrobat really was, a fellow sitting next to me said, "The latest version of Acrobat is fantastic. You'll love it." I asked him why, and the 11-year STC member told me in spirited and lengthy detail.

The most useful session speakers shared the nitty-gritty of *how to meet technical communication objectives*. These participants offered nuts and bolts know-how about surviving and thriving in the wild, wild world of technical communication. For me, two sessions that hit this mark were "How We Built Our Tech Pubs Intranet Site with Cheap Stuff" and "Oh! Oh! The Job Ad Says OO!"

One of the most amusing conference quotes I heard came from Whitney Quesenbery during her session, "Search Interfaces: The Good, the Bad and the Ugly," when she said, "The Web is the largest flat file we've ever searched."

The uncommercial appeal of the vendors' hall came courtesy of its commercial nature. These vendors seemed to recognize that it would be better to pursue conference-participants with trinkets and raffles rather than with

high-pressure click-here, buy-now hype. I liked that, especially since I was there on an "information gathering" mission.

The range of technical session topics allows a curious newcomer to dip her toes in whatever fresh pond seems appealing. The sessions varied only slightly in quality (none I attended were expressly bad), and I was grateful for the dearth of Reddi-Whipped professional wisdom dispensed during the sessions.

I came away from Cincinnati thinking that one size does not fit all when it comes to attending a conference. The experience can begin with asking yourself how you feel about technical writing, what your professional goals and interests are, and how you would like to get to know the conference environs. By starting with the human element, you can take the STC offerings and create a plan unique for you.

You also can go to the conference confident that you will receive many fine things including a book bag, access to the profession's leading technical writing practitioners programs that offer compelling ideas about technical communication.

It was a great experience, and my first conference isn't likely to be my last. I'm already planning for the next year's conference in Orlando, Florida.

STEPS & SPECS is published quarterly by the Society for Technical Communication's Policies and Procedures Special Interest Group.

Editor:

Michelle Anderson
949/725-4805 (office)
909/595-5646 (home)
Michelle_1962@yahoo.com

Coeditor:

Lurette Arrowsmith
312/606-5563 (office)
larrowsmith@usg.com

Production:

Susan Sereno
212/217-0034 (home)
708/585-1446 (fax)
ssereno@moreira.com

P&P SIG Team Leaders & Members:

Audrey Cielinski Kessler, Manager and LISTSERV
330/677-1168 (home)
330/677-8598 (office)
330/667-8598 (fax)
AudCK@aol.com
Joy Osaka-Lu, Membership
818/557-0805 (home/office/fax)
jljo@aol.com
Kris Henige, PR Coordinator, Web Page
216/516-0480 (home)
216/896-2974 (office)
216/896-4025 (fax)
khenige@parker.com
Kathleen Craddock, Special Projects
919/966-7904 (office)
919/968-6489 (home)
919/966-5601 (fax)
kcraddoc@unch.unc.edu
Raymond E. Urgo, Immediate Past Manager and Information request Coordinator
323/957-9317 (office)
rurgo@aol.com

Send contributions to:

Michelle Anderson
21217 E. Washington Street #24
Diamond Bar, CA 91789

Articles accepted for publication are subject to editing for clarity, style and space.

Copyright © 1999

Society for Technical Communication
All rights reserved.

Last year's liaison team leader started the ball rolling, so you won't be starting from scratch. You could just pick up where she left off. And she has offered to serve as an advisor to the team's new leader. The position also could be filled with co-leaders. For example, one member has expressed an interest in handling the liaison function for the Canadian chapters if someone else were able to do the same for the U.S. chapters. If you want to take on the liaison job for both countries, that would work as well. The point is, you don't necessarily have to do it alone. Team members could be enlisted to help.

Please give this valuable volunteer activity serious consideration. If you are or even think you might be interested in serving as the SIG's chapter-level SIG liaison team leader, e-mail me at audck@aol.com or call me at 330/677-8598 or 330/677-1168. I will be happy to answer any questions you may have about the position or provide you with additional information, including the work that the previous leader has done and what her goals were for the future of the team.

*Deadline for the December 1999 issue:
November 15th!!!*

Please email Michelle_1962@yahoo.com with articles

P&P Membership Grows by 101

By Joy Osaka-Lu

This report reflects SIG membership changes as of August 31. The P&P SIG has sustained a steady growth in membership, bringing our current membership to 806. While the names of the new members are too numerous to list, it is interesting to see where our new members call home. Total, by country or continent is as follows:

U.S.A.	90
Canada	7
Israel	1
Saudi Arabia	1
Finland	1
India	1
<i>Total</i>	<i>101</i>

The total for same period in 1998 was 69.

If you have any questions or suggestions regarding your P&P SIG membership, please feel free to contact me at jljo@aol.com or call me at (818) 557-0805.

STC Listserves Undergo Changes

By Audrey Cielinski Kessler

The society office has moved all Listserv mailing lists to a new server and has replaced the Majordomo list-management software with Lyris. Lyris is an interactive, Web-based list-management program that offers a number of features that were not available with Majordomo. For list managers that means no longer having to rely on e-mail transactions for administering the list. Such transactions can be done interactively on the Web. For subscribers, Lyris offers digest and archive functions, which means you now have the option of receiving daily digests of postings to the list and viewing old messages online through Web-based archives.

The change to Lyris also brings with it an address change for posting messages to the SIG's Listserv. Starting now, please use the following address:

stcppsig-l@lists.stc.org

Note that the character after the hyphen is a lower-case letter L – not the number one. Note also that there is a possibility that the new address will change. If and when it does, the change will be posted on the SIG's Listserv and printed in the newsletter. If you have any problems, please e-mail me at audck@aol.com or call me at 330/677-8598.

Check This Out!

What: Introduction to Policies & Procedures Communication (online course)

Where: University of California, Los Angeles Extension.

Dates: September 28 - November 23

Fee: \$550.

Instructor: Raymond E. Uργο

Contact: UCLA Extension
310/825-4192.

STEPS & SPECS Is a Winner!

Thanks to our P&P SIG members for making *STEPS & SPECS* a winner - again. Your article contributions and honest feedback gave *STEPS & SPECS* the edge in achieving the Award for Excellence for SIGs in the 1998-1999 newsletter competition.

Thanks also to the talented editorial staff of *STEPS & SPECS*, without whom this achievement would not have been possible: **Audrey Cielinski-Kessler**, SIG manager, **Lurette Arrowsmith**, co-editor and **Susan Sereno**, production, layout and design.

Visit us on the World Wide Web

We'd like to remind everyone that you can visit the P&P SIG on the Internet.

Go to <http://stc.org/pics/ppsig/www/index.htm> to get the latest SIG information on regional conferences, as well as read and download back issues of the newsletter. And don't forget to check out the main web site for STC, <http://www.stc.org>. With information about other chapters, SIGs, conferences, etc., this website is a key resource for technical communicators.

STEPS & SPECS

Michelle Anderson

21217 E. Washington Street #24

Diamond Bar, CA 91789

The mission of the Policies and Procedures special interest group is to assist STC members in developing, implementing and managing policies and procedures communication through educational and networking opportunities, STC conference sessions and publications, and communication with other STC SIGs and professional organizations in areas of common interest.