

Steps & Specs

The Newsletter of the STC Policies and Procedures Special Interest Group



Baltimore Conference Highlights



Baltimore's Inner Harbor

If you didn't make it to the STC Conference in May, here are a few highlights as shared by Dawnell Claessen. -- Editor

This year's conference was a real success for the P&P SIG. Although attendance at the conference itself was down somewhat, our own presentations were filled to capacity. There were close to 110 attendees at our progression sessions, and almost 60 for the panel discussion.

The P&P Lifecycle Management panel discussion was lively. The hottest issue was how to get subject matter experts to buy in to the documentation process and participate effectively. Getting authorization was also seen as a contentious issue, especially in highly regulated industries. Our panel of experts was able to point out ways to mitigate authorization roadblocks that often stall the documentation process.

Opening day offered some great orientation sessions. For those who had never attended an STC conference, there was a session on how to make the most of conference attendance. And for first-time presenters, Paula Jameson's popular session provided helpful advice on how to present at the conference.

Social events where P&P members could network were plentiful. There was an opening "jam session" featuring performances by talented STC members; the regional reception; and a dinner hosted by Macromedia.

The SIG Networking Luncheon was also well attended, with two P&P SIG tables hosted by Raymond Urgo and myself.

At the Awards Banquet, the P&P SIG was well represented: Raymond Urgo

was made an Associate Fellow of STC, and Audrey Kessler received her Distinguished SIG Service Award. And, of course, there was the 7:00 a.m. SIG business meeting. Here's hoping we can get a later start for that one next year!

2005 Seattle Conference - Yes, You Can Contribute!

We are still looking for people to be part of our progression sessions and panel discussion at next year's conference. It is easy! Read about the sessions we are planning here:

<http://www.stcsig.org/pp/Conference.html>

If you *might* like to develop a topic, please drop me an e-mail at: mail@dawnell.com. Our proposal will be amended at least twice before Seattle, so if your plans change, you can always withdraw your name later!

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SIG Leadership Team

SIG Manager and Information Request Coordinator:

Raymond E. Urgo
323/957-9317 (office)
rurgo@urgoconsulting.com

Conference Proposal Coordinator:

Dawnell K. Claessen
210/520-2558 (office)
mail@dawnell.com

Membership Coordinator:

Candie McKee
405/974-5628 (office)
405/919-1305 (home)
candiemckee@sbcglobal.net

Listserv Coordinator:

Eddy Frost
800/949-6753 ext 206 (office)
603/234-2711 (home)
EddyFrost@ringwood.com

Webmaster:

Janice Haskins
jhaskins@logic.bm

Newsletter, Editor:

Lois Marsh
416/359/6751 (office)
lois.marsh@bmonb.com

Newsletter, Layout Specialist:

Position Open

Newsletter, Assistant Editor:

Kelli L. Pharo
407/740-8143 ext 189 (office)
407/886-4031
klpharo@pbsj.com

Newsletter, Proofreader:

Gem Smith
713/780/4676 (office)
713/461/5105 (home)
gem@facetscom.com

Society for Technical Communication

901 N. Stuart Street, Suite 904
Arlington, VA 22203-1822
703/522-4114 (office)
703/522-2075 (fax)
http://www/stc.org

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Manager's Report:

Thank You to the Volunteers of the P&P SIG

By Raymond E. Urgo, P&P SIG Manager

As the STC fiscal year draws to a close, it is only fitting to acknowledge the accomplishments and service of our team of volunteers to our SIG.

In the area of membership, Candie McKee welcomed new members and initiated a means for new members to more easily sign up for the listserv via our Web page. Janice Haskins fulfilled the role as Webmaster and was always at hand to maintain changes and post our latest edition of the newsletter. Eddy Frost coordinated our listserv and was always helpful in readily resolving any difficulties members had in participating on the listserv. Dawnell Claessen coordinated the submission of proposals on policies and procedures topics for presentation at the STC Annual Conference. She proved to be an outstanding negotiator with perseverance in getting as many speakers and topics represented even as plans changed in the Conference program throughout the year. Lois Marsh, our *Steps & Specs* newsletter editor, initiated changes in

the naming of each edition (from seasons to quarters). She created a workflow and schedule to get all contributors working together easily. She recruited Kelli Pharo, assistant editor, who has been working with the newsletter name contest. Gem Smith, proofreader, has always been supportive even when the newsletter is being rushed for publication.

I have not mentioned all the accomplishments of these volunteers. No matter how small or large their efforts, I ask our members to join me in saying THANK YOU for their contribution and the difference each one of them has made for our SIG.

And now for more good news: each of these volunteers plans to fulfill the same role in the coming fiscal year. If you would like to join this wonderful group of volunteers to the SIG, please contact me at rurgo@urgoconsulting. Together, we'll find or create a role or task that will benefit the SIG and you.

Education Corner

Introduction to Policies and Procedures Communication

A Web-Based Course

University of California, Los Angeles Extension

Dates: October 14 to December 9, 2004
Fee: \$550.
Course No: 439.19 (Registration number not yet available)
Instructor: Raymond E. Urgo (rurgo@urgoconsulting.com)
Contact: UCLA Extension 310/825-4192 or www.uclaextension.edu

Technical Writing in the Financial Industry

By Sandhya Larsen - Orange County, CA (sandhya.larsen@cox.net)

- *Knowledge of Sarbanes-Oxley required.*
- *Expertise needed in loan origination and mortgage litigation.*
- *Prefer Business Analysts who are Technical Writers.*

These are just a few sample requirements found in job descriptions recently posted by local financial companies looking for technical writers. As a senior technical writer and job seeker, I'm intrigued by the employment potential for writers in the financial industry. If you share my interest, please read on to learn more about the various types of financial companies and the opportunities now being offered to qualified members of our profession.

Financial Companies and Their Business Processes

Financial companies come in all shapes and sizes. Some offer mortgage lending only or investment management only, while others offer a broad range of services that can include banking, insurance, loans, investments, mergers and acquisitions, trusts, estate planning, and more. And let's not forget that large companies whose primary business is not financial must nonetheless operate internal financial departments.

Like most large corporations, financial companies engage in multiple, complex business processes. These include industry-specific processes such as loan origination, and general processes such as human capital management. Today C-level executives are taking unprecedented steps to effectively manage the business processes of their companies. Many are now implementing comprehensive enterprise systems such as Peoplesoft or Oracle that offer customizable, interactive modules for managing every significant business process.

One of the motivators behind the heightened U.S. interest in improved business-process management is the Sarbanes-Oxley Act of 2002, enacted in the wake of large-scale accounting scandals that involved some of America's best-known corporations. Sarbanes-Oxley, or SOX as it is called by industry insiders, requires companies to carefully document their financial processes, and be prepared for periodic audits. User documentation and training materials for enterprise software modules, and reports that meet SOX requirements, are financial writing tasks that may need to be done at any company. Many more writing projects are now being done at specific types of financial companies, and the following segments examine a selection.

Writing for a Mortgage Lending Company

The primary business of a mortgage lending company can be summed up as loan origination. This process

includes all of the steps that lead to placing a loan on the books:

- Solicitation of the customer
- Application processing
- Credit evaluation and background check
- Appraisal and title search
- Loan package selection and closing

Have you ever been on the telephone with a loan officer, applying for home refinancing or an equity line of credit? Perhaps you were aware that the loan officer was using a software application that allowed him or her to enter your data and calculate numbers such as your estimated monthly payment with two or three refinance options.

Behind the scenes, the loan officer must clearly understand company policy for all levels of customer interaction, and must follow specific procedures for qualifying applicants and matching them with appropriate loans. Typically, this knowledge is conveyed through training programs, policy and procedure documentation, and help systems or printed user manuals for software applications. Some mortgage companies expect their financial experts to develop these materials themselves, some realize they will get better results if they hire technical writers to help, and others appear to be confused about the issue.

A technical writer, let's call her Diane, is currently employed by a leading Orange County mortgage company. When Diane was hired one year ago, she had no financial background. Over time, she learned industry jargon and acronyms, and came to understand what she termed the "paper flow" through the organization that occurs when a mortgage is sold. Diane's managers now believe they should hire only writers who have previous financial experience, and as a result, they are hiring people who have financial knowledge but no writing skills. Diane is now very busy teaching these employees how to write.

Writing Positions at a Mergers and Acquisitions Firm

In a merger, two companies are combined. In an acquisition (takeover), one company purchases all of or a majority interest in another company and takes control of its operations. Where does technical writing fit into this picture? To find out, I interviewed a vice president—we'll call him Richard Stone—at an investment banking company that manages mergers, acquisitions, and divestitures for the private middle market.

By talking to Richard, I came to understand his firm's business model as follows. The sales process is initiated through seminars that show potential clients how to get

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the best valuation for their companies. An internally-developed software system is used to schedule the seminars, book prospective clients, make their travel reservations, and manage billing. When a sale is made, the client company is thoroughly analyzed and a company valuation document is prepared. Additionally, the client may purchase marketing services to find potential buyers. Richard acknowledged that his firm employs writers in several capacities, but did not feel comfortable categorizing all of them as technical writers. He expressed the opinion that technical writers develop system and software documentation, and business writers have specialized financial knowledge along with general writing skills.

My research indicates that other companies use the title business analyst or financial analyst to describe business writing. According to Richard, contract technical writers document his firm's software booking system, and they write marketing communication materials. Technical editors support the writers with editing, rewriting, and proofreading to ensure accuracy, consistency, and adherence to style guidelines. It wouldn't surprise me at all if the career path for technical editors at this M&A firm includes advancement to the position of business or technical writer!

Financial Planning and Associated Writing Projects

For an individual client, a financial planning analyst uses financial modeling software to evaluate fiscal needs; suggests portfolio additions such as stocks, bonds, or mutual funds; and forecasts potential earnings over time. For a corporate client, the financial planning analyst performs in-depth research and analysis of a wide range of capital investment opportunities, such as securities, venture capital offerings, and real estate acquisitions. Using financial modeling software, he or she develops a comprehensive business plan, which may include an audio-visual presentation with illustrated fiscal scenarios, to be delivered to the client corporation in person or online.

The financial software suites provide obvious opportunities for technical writers, and the business plans seem to provide more. For verification, I talked to Michael Fuller, a technical writer and local expert who formerly held analyst and management positions with financial services, securities, and investment firms. He reached an advanced proficiency with standard desktop publishing tools used by technical writers, and routinely submitted business plans and marketing presentations to his managers and attorneys for review.

I asked Michael if he knows of other technical writers in the financial industry, and he answered with a touch of

irony, "Yes, but they are attorneys and paralegals!" When a wealthy client needs estate planning, Michael explained, the project is so technical—involving real estate, tax, probate, and investment law—that it must be transferred to an attorney and legal staff who specialize in this field. The easiest way for a technical writer to play this game, Michael asserted, is to become a certified paralegal. The existence of legal and financial cross-functional specialties was news to me!

What the Want Ads Say

The experts I interviewed did more than hint that writers with subject matter expertise are highly valued in the financial industry, and my frequent reading of the want ads underscored this point.

For many months, the major job boards have been running ads from various types of financial companies which require technical writers to have previous industry experience in no uncertain terms. *Just how necessary is this really?* I privately mused. *I can do research, interview experts, and write effectively on any subject, financial or not.* I was especially piqued by a recruiter's ad for a writer who could independently develop company valuation documents. This ad, for a Carpenteria investment firm, even stipulated that "experience with documenting finance-related software is not enough to qualify." So I called OCSTC senior member Jack Molisani, president of Prospring Technical Staffing, who had posted the ad. He didn't deny that a competent writer could do this job even without prior industry experience, but he clearly stated that in today's job market, employers can demand an exact match for their requirements. "Why should they accept a close match, when they can get an exact match?" Jack asked. "Employers would rather have someone who is already familiar with their industry and terminology so they won't have to pay for training."

Well then, what kind of writer is actually qualified for this job, I wondered. "Someone who has done the same job for another employer," said Jack. "Someone who has an MBA and writing experience, or has worked for another investment banking company and understands the relevant terminology." But the saving grace came when Jack revealed that two years earlier, he had placed a writer with the Carpenteria company to write software documentation who now is writing company valuations.

Qualifying as a Financial Writer

The truth is, specialized industry knowledge is a critical factor in the career of every technical writer. If you want to make a transition to the financial industry, you can get an MBA in two years; become a certified paralegal in ten months; or explore the other expensive, time-consuming educational remedies that undoubtedly exist. But

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technical writing experts maintain that there is a cheaper, faster solution: volunteer your writing services and add the experience to your résumé.

Jack Molisani suggests that you find someone who is working on financial documents and offer to help—free of charge, if necessary. You can solicit employers directly or approach independent contractors and volunteer your assistance with their projects.

OCSTC senior member Adrienne Escoe, president of Escoe Bliss Communication, suggested putting in some extra time to assist the financial department at your present place of work. If you're applying for a job that requires industry-specific experience, Adrienne advised, you can offer to work one week for free to demonstrate your skills with the new subject matter. Adrienne also emphasized the importance of strong skills with authoring tools such as Robohelp, and a picture-perfect résumé that showcases your excellent skills with the formatting features of Microsoft Word as well as proofreading to eliminate all errors.

I was encouraged when Adrienne told me that Escoe Bliss recently placed technical writers at three prominent Orange County and Los Angeles mortgage companies, two of which did not require previous financial industry experience. All three of the companies did, however, require experience in writing corporate policies and procedures. Some of the writers worked in industry-specific areas including loan origination, loan servicing,

and default management. The other writers developed policy and procedure documentation and wrote content for the company intranet and newsletters.

I was also inspired by these words on the Writer's Market Web site: "The financial writer [may acquire a basic business sense] through formal education, practical experience, or informal study. Knowledge of the stock market is a common foundation; the writer then develops a financial specialty that may take any of several forms. Writers keep current in their field by regularly reading industry publications, union newspapers, The New York Times and The Wall Street Journal. They gather economic information from government offices, public relations agencies and professional societies associated with their writing specialty."

In conclusion, I believe that a technical writer can make the transition from one industry to another by mastering current authoring tools, acquiring experience through volunteering, taking some form of relevant education, and reading lots of industry publications. The financial industry should be no exception to this rule.

This article was previously published in the June edition of the Orange County Chapter newsletter, TechniScribe.

Employment Corner: Contract to Permanent Position - St. Louis, MO.

Bizmanualz is looking for an experienced technical writer of accounting policies and procedures for a Sarbanes-Oxley project. You will participate as part of a project team using *Bizmanualz* implementation methodology to create a system of accounting procedures and internal controls. *Bizmanualz* is located in St. Louis, MO (Clayton). Clients are located in the US.

Qualifications: College degree in business, accounting, or a related discipline. Prior procedure development experience required. Excellent written communication and interview skills. Experience with MS Word required and Lotus Notes preferred. Familiarity with Sarbanes-Oxley or ISO 9000 compliance a plus. Some travel required.

Responsibilities:

- Interviewing clients to document existing procedures
- Developing process maps, flowcharts and well-defined written procedures
- Assisting project team in documenting the accounting management system

Contact:

Chris Anderson, Managing Director
www.Bizmanualz.com
 130 S. Bemiston Ave. Ste.101, St. Louis, MO 63105
 Phone: 314-863-5079 x11, Sales 1-800-466-9953

2004 STC Conference - P&P Presentation Highlights

Editor's note: The following is the first in a series of excerpts from presentations given at the 2004 STC Conference in Baltimore. The STC Office recently announced that Raymond Urgo's evaluation scores for content and delivery of this presentation placed him in the top ten percent of all (334) STC conference speakers who were evaluated.

Assessing Your Career in P&P Communication

By Raymond E. Urgo

At the policies and procedures progression session at STC's 51st Annual Conference, I presented a topic entitled "Assessing Your Career in P&P Communication."

Using my newly developed three-part assessment tool, I led the attendees through a quick self-assessment and action planning for themselves in relation to their P&P career. One attendee reported, "This presentation gave me a great big push!"

Part one of the tool helps you to quickly assess your present balance or satisfaction with your skills in your P&P career. There are twelve sets of skills arranged in three categories: P&P communication intelligence, business intelligence, and emotional intelligence.

Part two helps you quickly determine where your core values lie and how well you are living these values in relation to your P&P career.

Part three helps you quickly initiate an action plan, including a complimentary coaching session, designed to get you in motion and stay accountable to achieving the goals and balance you want for your P&P career.

For a copy of the assessment tool, an explanation of how to use it, and a complimentary coaching session (in person or by phone), contact me at rurgo@urgoconsulting.com or 323-957-9317.

Raymond Urgo coaches P&P specialists in identifying and achieving career goals, improving their performance with P&P, marketing their talents, and managing projects and working relations.

P&P SIG's Annual Business Meeting Held

On May 11 at the STC Conference in Baltimore, the P&P SIG held its annual business meeting. Approximately 6-8 people attended, including longtime and new members of the SIG.

Topics included use of the listserv, plans for sponsoring P&P topics and sessions at next year's annual conference, the newsletter and the status of its name change, membership trends, and volunteer commitment.

The SIG leaders will be looking at what percent of our members belong to each of the other SIGs in order to better target the interests of our membership.

Volunteers for the past year were acknowledged for their contributions to the SIG. Happily, they all plan to renew their service in the same positions this year. However, we are always interested in accepting new volunteers as contributors in other capacities, either on teams or in newly created positions unique to their talents and interests.

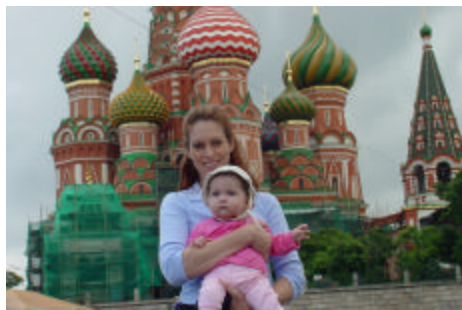
For further information on the meeting, or to volunteer, contact Raymond Urgo at rurgo@urgoconsulting.com.

P&P Member Awards & Recognition

Kelli Pharo Receives Communication Excellence Award

Kelli Pharo has received the 2004 Gloria Jaffe Outstanding Technical Communicator Award from STC's Orlando Chapter in Florida. At her company, PBS&J, Kelli was responsible for the complete revision of an Aviation Services Department Standard Operating Procedures Manual that gained national recognition within the corporation. She established her department's style guide, which is published on the corporate website. She is also responsible for quality control and assurance, and the style guide has measurably contributed to the quality of their technical communications.

Kelli is a graduate of the University of Central Florida and the UCF Technical Writing program founded by Professor Jaffe. She mentors many students through community outreach projects and the STC - UCF mentoring program.



Kelli with daughter Lexie in Russia

Raymond Urgo Named Associate Fellow

At the Awards Banquet in Baltimore, Raymond Urgo was made an Associate Fellow of the STC. Besides serving as our SIG's Manager, Raymond has a thriving consulting practice in Los Angeles, California.



Raymond Urgo

Audrey Kessler Wins STC Service Award

Also announced at the conference Awards Banquet was Audrey Kessler's Distinguished SIG Service Award. Audrey served the P&P SIG for many years as both Editor of *Steps & Specs* and SIG Manager. Read more about Audrey's contribution in the Q1 2004 issue of *Steps & Specs*.

Got good news to share?

Let's celebrate our wins in the professional writing arena. Contact the editor to announce any awards you want to share with the rest of the P&P SIG at lois.marsh@bmonb.com

Membership Report

By Candy McKee

Over the past five months, 172 members joined or re-joined the P&P SIG.

The new members represent the United States (142), Canada (17), India (3), United Kingdom (3), Israel (2), and Australia (2).

This steady growth indicates how important policies and procedures are, and always have been, to the world of technical communications, and also how important SIGs are to the Society membership.

As of August, P&P SIG membership totals **713**.

Steps & Specs Newsletter Contest Update

Results of the Steps & Specs newsletter re-naming contest are not yet available.

It's been a very busy summer and some of our committee members haven't been available to participate in the final vote.

Look for the results in the next issue! And to the members who submitted contest entries, thanks for your patience.