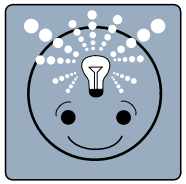
Tech Writer's Toolbox of Tips & Tricks

STC NorthBay

About This Map

Reviews, Production



Your Many Hats

Authoring Tool Helpers

Online Community

Email

PC Productivity

Backups (Your Safety Net)

Be

Monique Semp, Write Quick, Inc.

ToolboxTipsAndTricks.mmap

Tech Writer's Toolbox of Tips & Tricks

Notes from the presentation to STC, NorthBay, July 19, 2007

Monique Semp, Write Quick, Inc.

Before the presentation starts, please answer the following questions on an index card and give to Monique:

1. I'm attending this presentation because I'm interested in...
2. I'll consider the evening well spent if...
3. Three concerns or questions I have about tools are...

Audience Poll

1. Does your company allow you to buy tools?
2. Do you work with other Tech Writers?
3. Do you participate in STC SIGs or other tech writer listservs?

Presentation Notes:

- This is a new presentation...
- Please feel free to ask questions any time

The Tech Writer Is…

Organized!

Researcher

- Use SnagIT to capture Web pages.
- Use Google Notebook (www.google.com/notebook) to save/share bookmarks.

Writer

- Participate in your online community!

Editor

- Don't wait until the end!

Project manager

- Spreadsheets vs. MS Project.
- MindManger vs. PowerPoint.

IT

- Just Google your question.
- Security:
  - ZoneAlarm Security (firewall, and more; www.zonealarm.com)
  - AVG Antivirus (http://free.grisoft.com/)
  - SpywareBot (http://spywarebot.com/?hop=needjob)
- Remote:
  - YouSendIt (file transfer; http://www.yousendit.com/)
  - Remote PC viewing/control (GoToMyPC, www.gotomypc.com; NetMeeting, Remote Desktop)

Enforcer (impetus) for Software Process Improvement (SPI)

- Where's the spec?
- How is QA testing this if the requirements aren't clear?

"Programmer"

- Use the tools (source control, file comparison tools, editors) that your SMEs use.

Online Community

STC:

- Lone Writer's SIG (http://www.stcsig.org/lw/)
- CIC SIG (http://www.stcsig.org/cic/OnlineBook/contents.htm, http://www.stcsig.org/cic/OnlineBook/c18intro.htm)

Lots of Yahoo groups (www.groups.yahoo.com): tech writing, FrameMaker, Indexing, Word, graphics, editing, FrameScript, all sorts of tools, tech writing, etc.

Essential Resources for FrameMaker Users (http://www.soltys.ca/techcomm/articles/Essential_Resources_for_FrameMaker_Users.html)

Adobe Forums (for example, http://www.adobeforums.com/cgi- bin/webx/.3bbf2746/)

FrameUsers.com (http://www.frameusers.com/)

TechWR-L (http://www.techwr-l.com/techwhirl/index.php3)

PC Productivity

Downloads folder

Utilities:

- Task Arrange (http://users.forthnet.gr/pat/efotinis/programs/taskarrange.html)
- Desktop Icon Layout (http://users.rcn.com/taylotr/icon_restore.html)
- LS - File List Generator (http://home.a03.itscom.net/tsuzu/programing/en/)
- GoogleNotebook (www.google.com/notebook)

Use Perl scripts to automate file management. And there are tools to help with the regular expressions, such as RegEx Buddy (http://www.regexbuddy.com/).

Use spreadsheets! (Include important info in the footer, such as filename and print date.)

Clean out your temp folders! A tip: have a desktop shortcut.

Lots of tips from Gale Rhodes, of WiseBytes

Be Stylish

Create a cheat sheet.

Flag important items and things you frequently forget.

Place a shortcut on your desktop to the electronic version of your *Style Guide*.

Backup

Create a folder, and don't forget:

- .joboptions files
- browser bookmarks
- fonts
- desktop icons
- access connections (ThinkVantage, FTPVoyager)
- email messages, address book/contacts, filters/rules, calendar
- checkbook, invoices, expense reports

Email

Use filters!

Disable the sound/popup announcements.

Every week, cull the Inbox down to a single screen.

Use flags (such as red for ToDo, green for done).

Avoid embarrassment:

- Don't put in the names until you're done with the message.
- Open all attachments before sending the message.

Use informative subject lines, and change them in replies that arrive with vague subject lines. Examples:

- fyi - revised v2.45, Rev. B API Ref posted
- pls review - Admin Guide
- did the patch release go out ?

Don't use your email program's formatting (bullets, numbering, tables). If your recipient uses a different program, your formatting probably won't come through.

Use colors, but don't rely on them. If your recipient uses plain text, they won't see the color.

If you have several questions, number them!

In your sign-off, tell people what you want from them, and by when.

Authoring Tool Helpers

Copying without Formats:

- HovText (mixed results; http://hovklan.com/hovtext/index.php/?page=features&lang=en)
- PureText (haven't used; http://www.stevemiller.net/puretext/)

FrameMaker:

- PageLabeler, (http://www.frameexpert.com/plugins/pagelabeler/index.htm)
- TrackChanges (mixed results; http://www.intech.com/solutions/trackchanges/)
- IXGen (http://www.fsatools.com/)
- FrameScript (http://www.framescript.com/)
- FrameMaker-to-Acrobat TimeSavers (http://www.microtype.com/timesavers.html)

Word:

- RemoveHiddenData (http://www.microsoft.com/downloads/details.aspx?FamilyId=144E54ED-D43E-42CA-BC7B-5446D34E5360&displaylang=en)
- Redaction (http://www.microsoft.com/downloads/details.aspx?familyid=028C0FD7-67C2-4B51-8E87- 65CC9F30F2ED&displaylang=en)
- Magic bullet for styles: base them on No Style, not Normal!

Graphics:

- (SnagIt)
- PowerPoint

Vendors:

- Silicon Prairie Software (http://www.siliconprairiesoftware.com/Welcome.html)
- Leximation (http://leximation.com/)
- PlanetPDF (http://www.planetpdf.com/)

Reviews

Scheduling (billing if you're a contractor) issues.

Getting feedback (create checklists).

Consider video recording the SME interview. Could also use Captivate/Camtasia with a microphone.

Tools

- Acrobat (commenting)
- e-Publisher

Production

Scheduling

Checklists

Tools

PDFs

- Page numbering.
- Consider security options.

Engineering Tools

Use the same ones your SMEs use. You'll understand what they're doing, and they'll respect you more.

Source control (VSS, SubversioN, Tortoise)

Text file comparison (CompareIt)

Text editor (EditPlus, UltraEdit)

Conclusion

Questions?

- Contact me at mailto:monique.semp@earthlink.net