

northbay news

The monthly newsletter of the NorthBay Chapter of the Society for Technical Communication

Volume 7, Number 5, May 2000

In This Issue

- ❁ *Our April Meeting: "Come to Terms," Part I*
- ❁ *Editorial by our President-elect*
- ❁ *This Month's Meeting*
- ❁ *The Year 2000 Pan-Pacific Conference*
- ❁ *Editcetera Spring Workshops*
- ❁ *What's your Racket?*
- ❁ *Upcoming Events*
- ❁ *Employment Opportunities*

Come to Terms: Part I

Gabrielle de Serres
northbay newsletter staff

Wayne Gibson gave a great seminar on telecom terminology last meeting. He packed a lot of material in and gave us maximum bang for the buck. For those of you who left afterwards with your heads swimming, my head was swimming also, and I work as a technical writer in the telecom industry.

Wayne, a Senior Applications Engineer at Next Level Communications, is known as "the Answer Man" by his coworkers. Wayne has been in the telecommunications industry for over thirty years. As he puts it: "I've been on the bleeding edge of technology now for thirty years and my blood count is getting low."



The telecommunications industry has come a long way.

Wayne's Background

Wayne entered the world of telecom in 1970 at General Telephone and Electronics (GTE) working in the Step by Step (SXS) program. He left GTE to work for Pacific Bell in

Continues on page 3 ➤

Editorial: Paradigms for Success

John Dibs, vice president

Technical communication isn't an easy profession to do well. What's more, when we do well, our name doesn't usually get put in lights or appear in any credits. On the contrary, as full-time staffers, we often finish one project only to find that we've been slotted us for another thankless assignment. Or as contractors, we escape one fray only to begin anew the task of selling our talent to the highest bidder. So if it isn't fame, what can motivate us to do well?

For the end result — the online help, printed manuals, tutorials, or web pages — we strive for tangible results such as readability and usability. But how can we measure the process of getting there? How do we model our day-to-day behavior in such a way that we can be called *successful*?

Continues on page 6 ➤

**northbay officers
and committee chairs**

president
michael meyer
(707) 765-0618
mmeyer@sonic.net

**first vice-president
(programs)**
john dibs
(707) 792-1791
johndibs@fairisaac.com

newsletter
editor, john dibs
publisher: shelly hoose (hoose@mac.com)
newsletter staff:
diana abele (diana@emaildrop.com)
ken delpit (kdelpit@compuserve.com)
gabriella de serres
(gabrielle.de.serres@usa.alcatel.com)
barbara herbert (barbara@sonic.net)

web
shelley hoose

membership/telephone tree
whitney parker
(707) 537-1792
whitneyp@aol.com

hospitality
michael simoni & gabriella de serres

treasurer
carolyne gibson
(707) 577-2529
carolyne_gibson@hp.com

submitting articles and ads

We welcome articles, advertising, and news about meetings, workshops, and courses that pertain to technical communication. Please email simple text to the editor at johndibs@fairisaac.com. For our current advertising rates, please email or phone the editor.

reprints and distribution

If you reprint articles from the *northbay news*, please credit them and forward a copy to the editor. Reprints in non-STC publications are subject to the author's approval. Copyright © 2000 *northbay news*. *northbay news* is free to NorthBay Chapter members. Nonmember subscriptions are \$6 per year.

STC Mission Statement

The mission of the Society for Technical Communication is to improve the quality and effectiveness of technical communication for audiences worldwide.

This Month's Meeting**Thursday, May 18****Distinct or Extinct:****A Method of Success for the New Millennium**

The technical communications industry is wrought with challenges and replete with opportunity. Due to ever-increasing competition in the industry, success and growth of the individual employee, management staff, and the company as a whole can stagnate if not powered by a progressive approach. Competitive survival is dependent upon this golden rule: "Be distinct or become extinct."

PacificTec Progressive Solutions, Inc. is a documentation consulting firm sharing its "VIP" method of success and offering employment opportunities for both new and experienced technical communicators.

"Building Business with Distinction"

Introduction

Variety: Projects • Industry • Client Base

Innovation: Adaptation • Leading Edge Tools/Applications • Client Focus/Custom Solutions

Professional: Company Values/Philosophy • Commitment to Quality • Opportunity/Growth

Conclusion

Q&A

Chris Steele is General Manager of PacificTec. He has degrees in both Electrical Engineering and Communication Studies. Cyd Dunning is General Manager of the Technical Publications Division at PacificTec. She has been a technical writer for nine years and a STC member for three years.

Meeting Time & Schedule

Date: Thursday, May 18
Location: Parker Compumotor, 5500 Labath Dr., Rohnert Park

Time:	5:30–6:30	Networking, Show and Tell
	6:30–6:45	Introductions, Announcements
	6:45–7:45	Program
	8:00–8:30 ...	More Conversation, Idea Swapping

Last Month*Continued from page 1*

outside plant (that part of the phone system outside telephone company buildings), later moving to inside plant.

Wayne learned about the #1ESS switches as part of the second wave of students taught through AT&T training classes. In the years since, Wayne has followed the crest of technology and worked at other companies including Northern Telecom (known as Nortel), Siemens, and MCI.

Switching

In the early days of the telephone, all calls went through operators. As one can imagine, this system had definite disadvantages. In the 1920s, an undertaker named Stroger thought that operators were sending all calls to his competition and none to him, and invented a way to dial direct without going through the operators. Stroger's innovation led to the Step by Step (SXS) program, an electromechanical switching system in which phone users would dial a



"Hello, hello? Is this the party to whom I am speaking?"

number and the call moved through the system "one step at a time."

The next advance in switching came in the 1950s with the Crossbar switch. Electromechanical in design, the Crossbar had the same function as the step switch, but was much smaller. The Electronic Switching System or ESS, smaller still, arrived in the 1960s to replace the

Crossbar. While SXS and Crossbar switches have become obsolete in the US today, some third world countries still use them.

ESS switches have evolved into five classifications, dubbed #1ESS to #5ESS, which are partially, but not totally, numbered in the order of their date of appearance. #1ESS is solid state and first came out in 1965. At the other end of the range, Nortel makes a #5ESS digital multiplexing system (DMS), and Siemens calls their digital central office switch the Elektronisches Wahl System Digital, or EWSD.

Acronyms for Telecom History

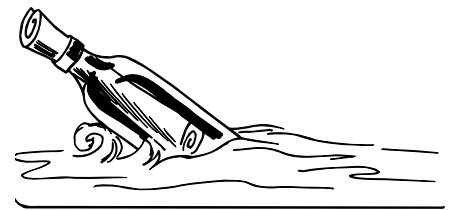
RBOC — Regional Bell Operating Company. Prior to 1984 the AT&T/Bell system had a monopoly in the telecommunications industry. Antitrust litigation resulted in AT&T/Bell's divestiture in 1984 and the creation of seven roughly equal, independent companies known as the RBOCs: Ameritech, Bell Atlantic, Bell South, NYNEX, Pacific Telesis, Southwestern Bell, and US West.

April 1996 saw the process of divestiture start to reverse itself, when Bell Atlantic bought NYNEX. One of the other RBOCs, Southwestern Bell, changed their name to SBC. Here in California, Pacific Bell was part of Pacific Telesis, and very recently SBC acquired Pacific Telesis.

CCITT — Comite Consultatif Internationale de Telegraphique et Telephonique, or Consultive Committee on International Telegraphy and Telephony, based in Geneva, Switzerland. Known today as the International Telecommunications Union - Telecommunications Services Sector (ITU-T), the CCITT creates and recommends worldwide standards for telecommunications equipment, systems, networks, and services. While not enforced, companies often voluntarily follow ITU standards to enable their equipment to be

interoperable with equipment from other companies. One example of an ITU standard is X.25, a protocol providing computers and mainframes with direct connection to a packet switched network.

Telecordia — The research and development (R&D) facility for the RBOCs. Prior to the 1984 divestiture, Bell Telephone Laboratories (Bell Labs) was the R&D arm for the AT&T/Bell system. During divestiture, Bell Labs stayed with AT&T. After the divestiture, Bellcore



"Psst...ESS in the ISDN and then CCITT!"

spawned to supply the RBOCs with R&D support in place of Bell Labs. Last year, Bellcore changed its name to Telecordia. Bell Labs still exists today supporting AT&T.

Telecordia produces documents listed as TR or GR followed by a number, for example, TR-008 and GR-303. The TR stands for technical requirements, indicating documents created or revised before divestiture at Bell Labs. The GR denotes generic requirements, for documents created or revised after divestiture by Bellcore, now Telecordia.

Acronyms for Telecom Technology

Tip & Ring — Tip is the ground, and ring is the battery. Voltage comes out on the wire around the ring of the jack and goes back on the wire at the tip of the jack. The terms originate from the time that operators had cordboards and had to

Continues ➤

Last Month*Continued from page 3*

plug in the tip of the jack to make connection. Some jacks had a third conductor around the sleeve.

ISDN — Integrated services digital network (fondly referred to in the industry as “I Still Don’t Know” and “I Spend Dollars Now”). ISDN is comprised of two 64-kilobit clear channels and a 16-kilobit signaling channel used for data and voice. Another way to depict ISDN’s two channels is 2B+D: Two channels that contain voice, data, or video plus one data channel that contains signaling information about the bearer channels. There’s also ISDN Broadband, or ISDN-B, which provides a rate close to 1.544 Mbps (1,544,000 bits per second), known as T1.

In Europe the telecommunications industry currently uses ISDN extensively. If it was given away for free here in North America as it was in Europe, ISDN would likely be in heavy use here as well. Nortel’s proprietary P-Phone supplanted the market here in North America because it was cheaper, gave all the features of ISDN, and offered a price per month service rate.

NTSC — National Television Standards Committee, jokingly referred to as “not twice the same color.” The NTSC created the Federal Communications Committee (FCC) standard for the television signal’s luminescence, lines per inch, and scan rate. This standard is followed in the United States, Canada, Japan and a few other countries. The UK, Australia, and some Western European countries have a different standard called Phase Alternate Line (PAL). The two standards are not compatible.

OSI model — Open Systems Interconnection model, created by the International Standards Organization (ISO). The OSI model is a fundamental model in the

telecom and computer network industries, and is composed of seven layers.

1. physical - electrical-mechanical interface, hardware
 2. data link - data communications protocol
 3. network - routing
 4. transport - maintenance of end-to-end message integrity, message reassembling
 5. session - establish, maintain, and terminate logical links
 6. presentation - feature mapping code translations
 7. application - application program data formats, user network dialog
- Layers 1, 2, and 3 deal with data transmission and routing while layers 5, 6, and 7 deal with user applications. Layer 4 connects the first three with the last three layers.

REN — Ringer equivalency number. The REN is part of the FCC certification number approving a telephone terminal product for direct sale to the end user and certifying that it will not do harm to the telephone network.

The need for RENs arose in the



“Uh, oh, dear. I think the phone’s REN may have expired.”

1960s. Then, the phone company owned all of the equipment that could be plugged into the telephone network.

When an answering machine device was invented by a person who was not affiliated with the phone company, the Bell system tried to prevent its use, arguing that there was no proof that such a device would not damage their network. The inventor took the Bell system to court and won. As a result, today, any equipment that has a REN (and a REN sticker) on it, whether made by a phone company or not, can be plugged into the telephone network.

RENs are listed on the bottom of telephone bases. The REN includes a letter (A, B, C, D, or E) and a number indicating the frequency of the individual telephone’s ringer. In North America, the letter A indicates 30hz or 20hz. If you have more than one phone in your house, and the sum of the RENs is greater than 5, then some or all of the phones may not ring for an incoming call.



The Year 2000 Pan-Pacific Conference

*Jay Mead, PR Committee Chair
Past president, STC Rocky Mountain Chapter*

A great time at a great price. A conference in Hawaii-sounds like paradise, right? It will be, if you think a beautiful setting on the beach, three days of great presentations, a nationally-recognized keynote presenter, and the chance to meet hundreds of fellow professionals sounds idyllic. It should be on your calendar by now: October 19-21, Honolulu, Hawaii, and you’ll be there, of course!

Airfare - a Bargain!

Conference organizers have arranged discount, group fares. Per person round

Continues ➤

Pan Pacific Conference

Continued from page 4

trip group fare on United from San Francisco is \$298 (price subject to change and does not include tax). To take advantage of group fares, you must depart Tuesday, October 17, and return Sunday, October 22, and be booked through the conference agency, Seawind Tours and Travel. Other flights and fares are available. Group airfares must be purchased by August 1 and are subject to availability. Contact Lori or Derek at Seawind by phone at 1-800-424-3324, or by e-mail at dhiyane@seawindtours.com.

Conference Hotel: a Bargain!

The conference will be held at the Ilikai Hotel, a fabulous hotel in Waikiki Beach, Honolulu. For an enticing preview, visit the hotel Web Site at www.ilikaihotel.com. We have negotiated very affordable room rates*:

- \$115 city view (only \$57.50 per person double occupancy!)
- \$135 city view with a kitchenette
- \$135 ocean view
- \$155 ocean view with a kitchenette

* Double room, per night.
Must be booked through Seawind Tours and Travel.

Conference Cost:

Another Bargain!

The conference preliminary program will be available the first week in May. Session and workshop speakers form a Who's Who of the technical writing industry. See the conference Web Site for the preliminary list of speakers and sessions. Register soon to obtain a lower registration fee*:

Register by...	Pay only...
July 31	\$190
August 31	\$250
October 19, or walk-in	\$325

* Non-STC members, add \$115 to each price. Student members (full-time) pay 50% of each price. One-day prices also available.

Other Costs - As Much or as Little as You Want

Once you're there, Hawaii can be a surprisingly inexpensive vacation. Rental cars are reasonable, and hotels in all price ranges are found throughout the islands. Honolulu and other locations offer superb dining in every price range. Seawind Tours and Travel has off-island tours and packages, so call them to make a vacation of your stay. Traveling in Hawaii is an unforgettable experience, and the conference committee has ensured that the conference will be both enriching and affordable.



Combine professional development with a little sun, swimming, and ancient Hawaiian canoeing.

Visit the conference Web Site at www.pan-pacific.org for more information and to download the conference registration form. You can contact conference chair Jack Molisani at jackm@ClarityTechnical.com or me at jay_mead@jdedwards.com. See you in Waikiki!



What's Your Racket?

Soon, about 1200 randomly selected STC members and about 600 members of related organizations will receive surveys from the Society's Core Competencies Committee. Why? Technical communicators are a diverse lot, and the Society wants to define who we are and what we do, irrespective of our industries and specialties. Why? There are several reasons:

- To help us market ourselves to prospective employers
- To help us plan our careers and professional development by determining the skills and knowledge required to succeed
- To help human resources personnel to write job descriptions and evaluate candidates
- To provide information instructional designers and academic professionals can use to develop, evaluate, and revise courses and curricula

Important stuff!

How can you help? Simple: if you are selected, complete the survey and return it by the due date. All responses will be analyzed and kept confidential by an independent consultant, and the results will be published later this year.

We look forward to your input to this important initiative. If you have any questions or suggestions for the committee, contact the manager Ken Rainey or any member of the committee, listed below:

- Kenneth T. Rainey, 770-528-7209; FAX 770-528-7425; krainey@spsu.edu
- Lottie B. Applewhite, 919-918-3436; FAX 919-968-3554; lottielba@juno.com
- Diane Forsyth, 604-879-7606; FAX 604-606-0970; diforsyth@hotmail.com

Continues ➤

- Lance Gelein, 916-635-9139; FAX 916-635-9139; gelein@ix.netcom.com
- Jennifer Jackson, 415-307-0290; jennifer.a.jackson@us.pwglobal.com
- Victoria Koster-Lenhardt, 431-661-71 41 4; FAX 431-661-71 63-0; vkosterlendhardt@eur.ko.com
- Brian O'Malley, 403-282-4399; FAX 403-282-0421; omalley@nucleus.com



Editcetera Spring Workshops

Founded in 1971, Editcetera is a nonprofit organization of freelance editors, writers, production managers and other communications professionals. A few of Editcetera's workshops for publishing professionals and newcomers to the field appears below. Other spring 2000 workshops will have already started as of publication time. All workshops are held in Berkeley. Editcetera also offers correspondence courses in proofreading, copyediting and advanced copyediting. Consider these workshops as a great way to gain perspective for current or prospective employment and to interact with others who have similar interests.

Editing for the Web: A Primer
Monday, May 22, 7–9:30 p.m., \$50
Adventures in Abstrusity: Issues of

Technical Editing

Thursday, May 18, 6:30–9:30 p.m., \$45
The Business of Freelancing
Saturday, May 6, 9 a.m.–4 p.m., \$80

Visit www.editcetera.com for workshop descriptions, space availability, and enrollment forms. For more information or to receive a brochure, call 510-849-1110.



Editorial

Continued from page 1

Two Levels of Success

It seems to me that we can experience success on two basic levels. First, and fundamental, by finishing a project, or by producing a tangible result, we can



Measuring our achievements as technical writers is often difficult.

acquire confidence. And second, by focusing on basic technical communication skills — planning, gathering, and shaping — we can achieve excellence.

What does it take to get past the first hurdle? Here's a partial list of factors that directly impact whether or not a technical publication reaches the finish line:

- funding for the product or project
- ability of the project lead or technical publications manager to recruit talent
- team members who feel no obligation to gather or give information
- unrealistic expectations for the publication
- no expectations for the publication at all

Notice that some of the above factors fall outside of the sphere of influence of technical communicators, while others fall directly in it.

Three Paradigms

In real life, it's not often that adequate funding has been secured, good talent has been recruited, team members

have understood their roles, and expectations have been realistic, at least not all at the same time. Still, imperfections notwithstanding (writers can usually articulate imperfections better than most!), we can focus on what we do best. I define the three behavioral paradigms that embody our profession as follows:

- **Plan:** Compare our resources against the publication expectations. If lacking, articulate and create expectations based on knowledge of the external or internal audiences. Be sure to define the project scope and set limits.
- **Gather:** Get the required information by interviewing, organizing, and sorting through available data. As you determine what material will go into the information mix, thoughtfully consider what material will be best left out.
- **Shape:** Sketch and refine the results to fit the required media.

More often than not, time constraints seem to truncate this list to exclude planning. Successful writers, however, usually manage to carve out planning time, even if it's on the fly. Inevitably, changes occur between initial project planning and project completion, yet gaining a sense of proportionality for the component tasks and agreeing on a set of metrics for reviewing progress will go a long way in guiding the gathering and shaping processes.

The Overall Process

It's humbling to realize that we don't control all the factors going into a project, but technical communicators are not usually product decision makers. We observe and work with developers, and in the best circumstances, developers use us as sounding boards. By maintaining objectivity and focusing on user needs, we give the technical publication, and indeed

Continues ➤

Editorial*Continued from page 6*

the product itself, the best chance of hitting their targets.

What does success mean? Success after the fact means a well-organized, easy-to-use publication. Success before the fact means getting a job done on time and sticking to proven patterns of behavior. Articulation of audience needs, love of each component in the publication process, and the drive to excellence, in my view, demonstrate that we embody the paradigms for success.



Raycomm, Inc. Offers Free Online Employment Database

Raycomm, Inc., based in Logan, Utah, has announced the addition of Employment Central to the TECHWR-L Web site at <http://www.raycomm.com/techwhirl/employment/>. Employment Central offers a free, full-service, employment resource, consisting of a database of technical writing-specific jobs and personal profiles for the technical communication community. The TECHWR-L Web site, also houses a mentoring program, articles, and topic summaries.

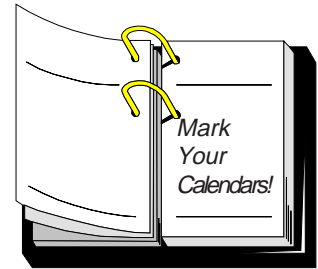
According to an April 18 press release from Raycomm.com, Employment Central improves on the old Contractors Database, which provided contact information for contract technical writing professionals. For more information about the TECHWR-L Employment Central feature, about advertising on TECHWR-L, or about sponsoring the TECHWR-L site and its features, contact Deborah Ray (debray@raycomm.com) or Eric Ray (ejray@raycomm.com), or visit the TECHWR-L site.



Coming Soon!

October 19-21, 2000 STC Regions 7 and 8 Pan-Pacific Conference in Hawaii

See the article in this issue. For late-breaking information, see www.pan-pacific.org, and Jack Molisani's articles there.



Senior Technical Writer Cisco Systems in Petaluma

We need a senior technical writer with experience in networks or telecommunications. This is a permanent career position at Cisco's Petaluma location. For information, contact David Scardifield, Cisco Employment Technical Recruiter, Petaluma. (707)285-5350. "Empowering the Internet Generation."

Technical Writer

To write Consumer Owners Manuals and in-house technical manuals for Electric Motorized scooters, Bikes, Sea Scooters and more. Experience writing for recreational products companies preferred. Re-write existing manuals, create new templates, photos and graphics. 3-4 month full-time position. Contract may be extended.

To apply: Mail, fax or e-mail resume to Robinn Van Deusen, Human Resources Manager at: ZAPWORLD.COM, 117 Morris Street, Sebastopol, Ca. 95472. Fax : (707) 824-4159; E-mail: robinn@zapworld.com



We meet on the third
Thursday of each month

Our June Meeting

June 15, 2000

“Usability: A Case Study”

Mic Vanderslius

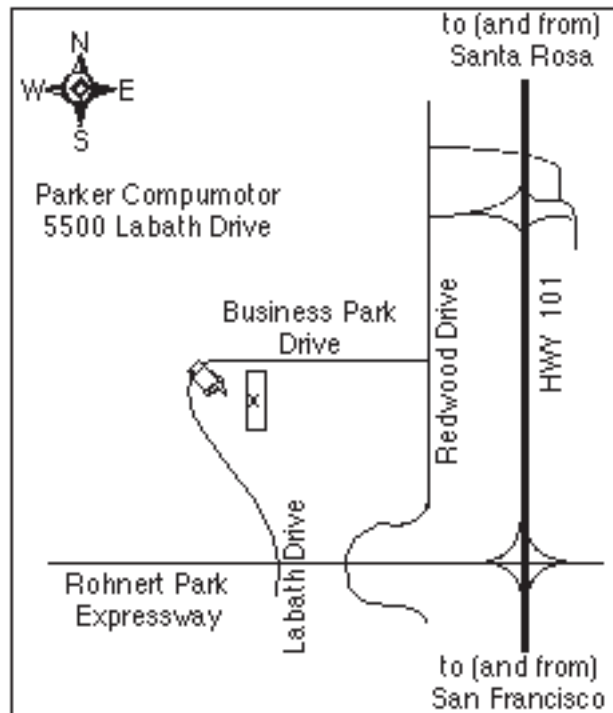
Senior Member, NorthBay Chapter

Parker Compumotor

5500 Labath Drive

Rohnert Park

stc.org/region8/nbc/www/



northbay news

c/o

4389 sonoma highway

santa rosa, ca 95409