

# northbay news

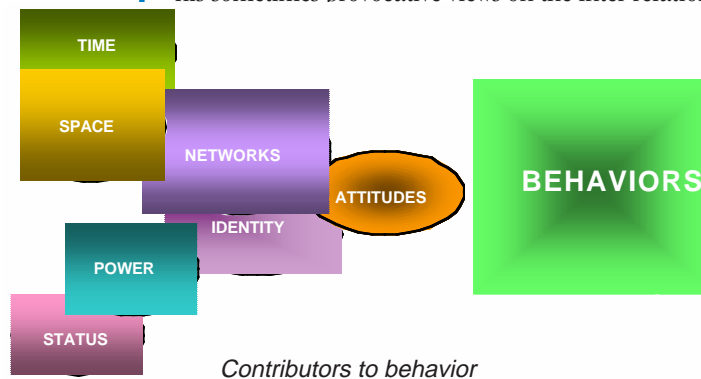
The monthly newsletter of the NorthBay Chapter of the Society for Technical Communication

Volume 7, Number 11, November 2000

## Managing on Internet Time

Barbara Herbert  
Vice President

At our October meeting, Charlie Grantham—former sociologist, self-described “recovering academic,” and currently Chief Scientist of Goodshark Enterprises—presented his sometimes provocative views on the inter-relationships between time, technology, and human psychology. Grantham, author of *The Future of Work* and co-author of *Communities of Commerce*, believes that the Internet is actually doing something to us at a very personal and psychological level—it is changing the way in which we think about ourselves, about the people we interact with, and probably even about the world around us. Grantham also believes that very few people have yet come to grips with the magnitude of change we are experiencing and the change we will continue to



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## Communicators in Hawaii

John Dibs  
NorthBay President

The joint STC Regional Conference for Regions 7 and 8 was held this year in Waikiki Beach, Honolulu, October 19-21, 2000. A handful of lucky NorthBay STC members—including me—attended, drawn by the call of tropical weather and the promise of festivities. One of our newest NorthBay members, Annalise Beck, was a conference volunteer, having recently moved from Honolulu, where she served as president of the Aloha Chapter. Several writers from Fair, Isaac's Technical Publications team attended, and our own Ken Delpit took advantage of the opportunity as well.

Not everyone likes conferences. Moreover, technical communicators may be slightly

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**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 jdibs@earthlink.net  
Advertising rates (per issue): \$20 for 1/4 page, \$35 for 1/2 page.

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**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, November 16, 2000**

### **Identity Crisis**

*the Persona as a Tool for*

*Evaluating Information*

**by Bonni Graham**

Knowing your audience's demographics is good, but statistics are not people — and we write for people. In this presentation Bonni will explain how to turn statistics into a "persona" and use that to improve and sustain your information design.

Bonni Graham has spent 10 years as a practicing technical documentor. In 1994, she started Manual Labour, a technical documentation outsource provider. She has created manuals for clients like Sony, Kenwood USA, Nissan North America (with Technical Standards), Hewlett-Packard, Tadpole-RDI, eDigital Corporation (for Lanier Worldwide), and many others.

A senior member of STC, Bonni has been involved in nearly every Region 8 conference, has been a deputy chair for the Annual Conference, has served as a local and international level publications competition judge, and has served as chapter president and newsletter editor. She recently served as Deputy Chair for the successful 2000 Pan-Pacific Conference in Hawaii, October 19–21. In her copious free time, she performs improvisational comedy with the Creative Urges.

**Editor's Note:** The NorthBay STC, together with the San Francisco chapter of the STC, is sponsoring Bonni for a visit in November. Bonni's home base is in San Diego. Please come to welcome Bonni to our chapter and learn from her experience.

### **Meeting Schedule**

Location:	Parker Compumotor, 5500 Labath Dr., Rohnert Park	
Time:	5:30 - 6:30	Networking and Refreshments
	6:30 - 8:15	Introductions and Program
	8:15 - 8:30	More Conversation, Idea Swapping

## Managing on Internet Time

Continued from page 1

experience in the next several years.

To illustrate this point, Grantham asked us to imagine the mindset of a farmer or merchant or priest at the time

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*The challenge is  
to think far out  
of the box about  
the ways in  
which we live  
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together, work  
together*

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the printing press was invented. It's likely that most people saw the press as an interesting development, maybe even a significant one, but probably not as one that would radically and fundamentally change the fabric of life as they experienced it. Yet over the next 100-150 years, that's precisely what happened. Grantham posits that the Internet will engender cultural changes of a similar scope and magnitude, but with one crucial difference—this time around, the cultural shift will take only ten years, and we're already three years into it. His challenge to us, then, is how to think that big. How can we think that far out of the box about the ways in which we live together, learn together, work together?

### The psychology of time

Grantham explained that there are a number of traditional sociological

concepts that are studied as a group, which, taken together, inform our behaviors (see the figure on page 1). In

some new environments, before you get A completed, someone else has already finished B and decided that you need to

Aspect of Time	Industrial Age	Internet Age
Linearity	Straight path from A to B to C	Non-linear path from A to B to A' to C
Scale	Seasons, years, decades	Quarters, weeks, hours
Sequencing	Serial; one project after another	Parallel; many projects at once
Pace	Slow to moderate; change took time	Fast to faster; change is constant
Salience	Oriented towards the past	Oriented towards the future

*The Psychology of time, as it's changed over time*

his talk, however, he concentrated on the concept that he currently finds most fascinating—time.

In particular, Grantham discussed the psychology of time in terms of five primary components—linearity, scale,

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*Orient ourselves to  
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business a year  
from now.*

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sequencing, pace, and salience—discussed below and summarized in the table on this page.

### Linearity

These days, projects don't usually proceed directly from A to B to C. In

modify A to A' and then move directly to C. If you are a linear thinker, you may have to learn some new skills if you want to adapt to this new, non-linear environment.

### Scale

In terms of time, scale refers to the duration of events and the length of time between events. In these days of multicultural work groups and global businesses, differences in how different cultures relate to a time scale can be a source of conflict. The changing time scale is also apparent in the fact that where we used to think in years, we now think in quarters, and where we used to think in quarters, we now think in days. Grantham noted that while he used to prepare a 10-year development plan for himself, he now creates a new plan every three months!

### Sequencing

Most of us are now working in parallel instead of serial mode. We're doing a number of things at once, and this can be a great cause of anxiety. (Later in his talk, Grantham provided a number of suggestions for how to overcome some of this discomfort.)

*Continues* ↪

## Managing on Internet Time

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### Pace

Everywhere we turn, either we're being told to speed up or we're trying to slow down. When we go to work each day, we could learn that our company is being bought out and everything's going to change, or that we're bankrupt and everyone is being laid off. In either case, we're wrestling with the pace at which events unfold, and with the fact that we have little control over the pace.

### Saliency

This concept relates to how we orient ourselves to time. We used to orient to the past—how things used to be done. Now we orient ourselves to the future—what we need to do now to make sure we're still in business a

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*We must build  
teams like those  
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project*

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year from now. In particular, the methods used in stock market valuations are going to have to change. Instead of looking at past performance, investors and analysts need to start examining intellectual capital within

companies and developing forward-looking estimates of where a company is going. Accountants will probably be struggling with how to quantify these factors for quite some time!

## The new work environment

If our businesses are going to operate effectively in the new Internet

degrees of creativity, we need to revise our work models. We need to be able to build teams like those in Hollywood that come together to produce a film. Highly trained, capable, creative people come together for a specified period of time to see a specified project through from start to finish. When it's over, they move on to the next project, taking their skills and talents with them.

Here's how much time you have...	If you want to...
2 minutes	...take action on immediate requests for your attention. If you can't handle it that quickly, then you need to go to someone, or someplace else!
2 hours	...hold face to face meetings. If it takes longer than that, you're not planning!
2 days	...respond to electronic requests. If you can't get to it by then, you're wasting your time and everyone else's.
2 weeks	...assemble a work team and commit to a plan. If you can't find the right people and the right plan by then, the project will fail.
2 months	...identify a business opportunity and test it with customers. If you can't do it by then, your competition can.
2 years	...nothing at all. If your plans reach out years into the future, the world will have passed you by long before you get them done.

Charlie's Rule of Two's

time, how long do we really have to get things done? Grantham proposed what he calls "Charlie's Rule of Two's" to explain his views on this subject, which are summarized in the table on this page. Grantham realizes that these "rules" may grate on some of our sensibilities (discard a request if I can't get to it in the next two days??) but suggests trying to live by them for a few days. You might be surprised at how well they streamline your work flow!

Grantham also predicts that as we move into a world where higher degrees of complexity require higher

Companies who can learn to build such a workforce have a much greater chance of long-term success than those who follow an older model of traditional departments and traditional job titles.

## Making the personal transition

On a personal level, what can each of us do in our daily lives to make our way through the transition from standard time to Internet time? Grantham provided a number of suggestions.

Continues 

## Managing on Internet Time

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### Unplug

Turn off the pager. Stop taking calls during certain times of the day. Take calls at only certain times of the day. Don't check voice mail after 5 PM. Randomly delete voice mail messages! (The idea here is that if it's important enough, the information will make its way to you again.)

### Filter

Filter your email into mailboxes based on relevant information, and focus on those that really require your attention.

Cancel subscriptions to magazines you never read.

### Shift your energies

Grantham recommends that every three months you develop a plan to spend more time on things (families, friends, work activities) that are important, and cut back on things that just aren't working any more. Then, as you cut out less motivating activities, you can "move" the time you save into activities that are more rewarding and satisfying, as illustrated in the table on this page.

### Conclusion

Each of us needs to learn about ourselves—how we process information,

how we cope with change, how we learn and adapt to new situations—and then put that knowledge to use as we rethink our own relationship with time. Information is only becoming more dense, expectations more demanding, and choices more numerous. If we want to do more than just cope with our world, we have to step back now and then to examine our work and our lives within the larger concept of the world of Internet time as it is now unfolding. Just as it sometimes takes money to make money, it sometimes takes time to make time. Take the time to evaluate your life activities, and you'll be able to make the time you need to slow down and enjoy the ride.



*Shifting your energies*

Start	Prepare to start	Maintain	Cut back	Stop
List things you want and need to start doing that you're not doing now. Examples: find a new job, learn a new skill, make a new friend.	List things you need to start putting energy into, but on a more modest level. Examples: begin learning a new field, think about going back to school, ask your doctor about a smoking cessation program.	List things you should keep doing at about the same level as you currently are. Examples: keep a steady job, exercise three times a week.	List things you should spend less time doing. Examples: Stop reading irrelevant e-mails, avoid attending too many meetings.	List things you should just stop doing. Examples: Drop out of a dead-end project, "fire" clients you don't like working with, resign some volunteer positions that no longer energize you.

## Worst Manual Contest

Contact: Jim Desmond  
jimd@tecstandards.com

Have you ever been so frustrated with a manual or set of instructions that you cursed the author and wished you had never bought the product? Do you remember the last time you used Help on your computer and every click of the mouse led to a new set of decisions?

How about \$500 for your frustration? Technical Standards, Inc. (TSI), a

Southern California documentation services company, is offering \$500 for the winning entry in their "Worst Manual Contest."

Send a manual or set of instructions that is hard to understand, poorly written, or just plain wrong. You don't have to send the whole manual; excerpts of the worst parts are okay. Send it if it has bad grammar, too much legalese, is poorly translated, or has missing steps.

The deadline for submissions is January 15, 2001, so check those holiday gifts for potential entries. Entries must be in English. For complete contest rules see the TSI Web site at [www.tecstandards.com](http://www.tecstandards.com). Technical Standards, Inc. is located in San Marcos, California.



## Communicators in Hawaii

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more critical than the average human creature (bent as they are to use analytical questioning to win their daily bread and butter). Perfection seems to elude us on a regular basis. Yet it was evident at this conference that a good deal of time and thought went into planning the

*Can technical communicators successfully employ the literary form of narrative in order to get their message across?*

program and arranging presenters. The location couldn't have been more perfect. By the opening of the conference at a tasty hospitality night at the Ilakai Hotel, five hundred like minds were ready to learn and soak in the surroundings. To top it off, the Governor of Hawaii declared the week of the conference as "Technical Communications Week" in Hawaii in a proclamation read to the participants. Maybe we've lost touch with the value in such gestures, but where else could such a proclamation take place, but in Hawaii?

Our keynote speaker, an editor from *Wired* magazine, kicked off the conference presentations on an interesting note. Asked to tell about her most unusual

experience as an editor, Martha Baer told a tale taller than life. Once she had stretched the truth to its limit, Martha's talk ended with an unusual challenge: Can technical communicators success-



*Boning up on the literary form of narrative*

fully employ the literary form of narrative in order to get their message across?

A tight schedule of presentations then ensued. Several presentations were offered in parallel each hour, with participants choosing which to attend. Each presenter had 45 minutes to talk, after which participants scurried to the next presentation, vying for a space among the crowd. Most presentations had little time for questions, and presenters had to work hard to fit in all the information on their PowerPoints.

Participants were given the opportunity to attend half-day workshops on the Friday and Saturday afternoons at the conference. For some reason, several participants used the time for island exploration. In my case, an unexpected eyelid infection kept me in the hotel room Saturday afternoon watching the longest World Series game in history. Lucky for those of us in Hawaii at the time, the six-hour time difference from New York allowed us to watch the game at a reasonable hour of the day!

On the extracurricular side, my wife and I got out to a Lu'au outside of Waikiki one evening, and we floated along the Waikiki waterfront on a dinner cruise to celebrate the end of the conference on the last evening of the conference. We mingled with fine, dedicated people. Thanks are due to the hard-working conference crew, including Jack Molisani, Conference Chair, and Bonni Graham, the Region 8 Co-Chair.

As an added bonus, we have Bonni Graham as our guest presenter for our November 16 meeting. Bonni will be coming up from San Diego. I hope as many as possible have a chance to attend.



### Want to Move North?

Microsoft Windows Management UA has an opening for a technical writing lead in Washington. Responsibilities include planning, scheduling, and maintaining a comprehensive document set for a wide variety of Windows management products.

For a full description of the opening, contact Kristina Ullen at Microsoft, e-mail [kullen@microsoft.com](mailto:kullen@microsoft.com)



We meet on the third  
Thursday of each month

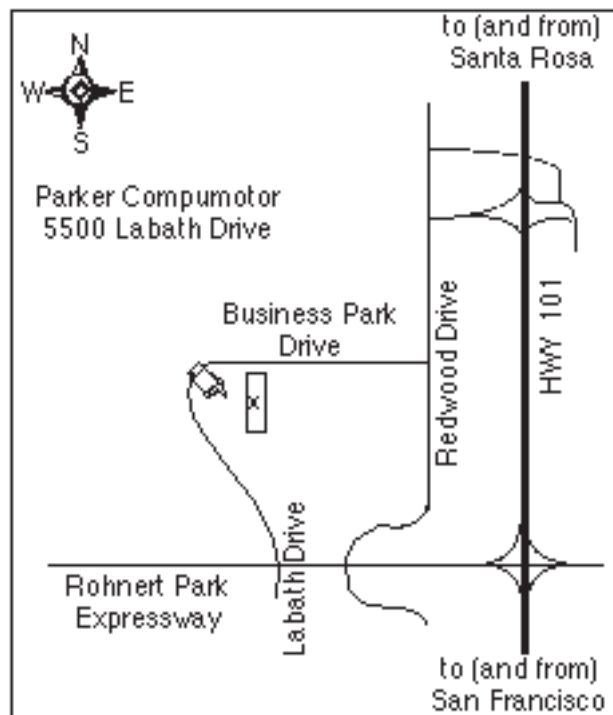
**No December Meeting**

**Next meeting:**

**Thursday,  
January 18, 2001**

**Topic to  
be announced**

Parker Compumotor  
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