Phlashback to Philly

By Suzanne Madison, OCSTC Senior Member

As one of several OCSTC members who had the opportunity in June to attend the STC Summit in Philadelphia, I would like to share with you all that I learned during those 3½ days. I’m afraid, however, that to do this would fill a volume. Instead, I’ll try to give you a taste of the conference by sharing some highlights of the opening session. A panel of distinguished presenters, including our own Barbara Giammona and Jack Molisani, along with Andrea Ames of the Silicon Valley Chapter, Paula Berger of the Boston Chapter, and Bogo Vatovec of the TransAlpine Chapter, discussed some trends in the field of technical communication.

The panel suggested that, along with thinking about the content of our writing, we also think about why we are writing. What big problems do our documents solve? Regulatory compliance? Fewer help desk calls? Customer satisfaction? Our writing should add value to our company and/or its product and make it more competitive.

The panel also touched on the trend toward minimalism in technical communication. Not only does making our documents as concise as possible make them easier to read, it also reduces the cost of publishing/printing and of translation when that is required.

If you are downsized in your job or just looking for a change, it may not be necessary to change your career—just the way you look at what you do. Technical writing is a commodity (that can easily be outsourced or off-shored). Technical communication, on the other hand, covers a much broader range of skills and is perceived as having more value. Look into other types of work where you can leverage your technical communication skills, such as project management or instructional design.

Continued on Page 9 >
It’s an exciting time in Orange County—the weather is beautiful, the beaches are filled, and the OCSTC Council is brimming with energy, enthusiasm, and grand ideas!

At our July council meeting, we spent a lot of time discussing new strategies for meetings, speakers, locations, scholarship programs, web site upgrades and membership. Here are some of the brainstorming ideas that were presented:

- Redesign the OCSTC web site and include new items such as a chapter knowledge base for technical topics like tools, writing skills, web design, graphics, and so on.
- Get the new education site up and running and deliver online classes.
- Increase scholarship awareness through visits to surrounding campuses.
- Provide new members with both online or in-person demonstrations of the STC and OCSTC web sites to explain how to make the most of their membership.
- Initiate monthly meeting questionnaires to obtain feedback and get an idea of what topics the membership would like to see covered.
- Offer classes and workshops.
- Host a meeting in south Orange County.
- Work toward obtaining a chapter achievement award.
- Nominate senior members who meet the criteria for STC Fellowship awards.
- Offer networking events outside the meeting.
- Provide more interactive and hands-on meetings.
- Research alternative hotel options for dinner meetings that may reduce the meeting cost.
- Promote corporate sponsorship for the scholarship fund, newsletter advertising, and other events. Get local technical companies educated and involved with OCSTC!

These are just some of the ideas presented. Of course, the brainstorming part is easy—bringing ideas to fruition will take planning and time. If you see any topics that interest you, we would love to hear from you,

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Next Meeting

Topic: Testosterone Technology
Speaker: Saul Carliner
When: Tuesday, August 19, 6-9 p.m.
Where: DoubleTree Club Hotel
7 Hutton Centre Drive
Santa Ana, CA 92702
714.751.2400

Cost:
- Members, no dinner, with reservations: $10
- Members with reservations: $24
- Students with reservations: $18
- Nonmembers with reservations: $29
- Walk-ins, or those registering after the deadline: $33
- No-shows billed: $24

Reservations:
Due by midnight, Friday, August 15
Registration:
Online at http://www.ocstc.org/dinres.asp

Directions to the DoubleTree Club Hotel
Map of the I-405 and SR-55 area. The star below indicates the hotel location. Parking is FREE. Overflow parking is available at 201 Sandpointe Avenue

There’s a lot we don’t offer you in 4 days.

We know that regardless of how hyped, how well spoken, or how rich it is, you don’t want bull. Our conference provides access to real users, experts, and answers.

You deserve udderly clear answers to your technical communication questions!

The Bright Path Solutions DITA and technical communication conference has sessions on:

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- Working with and developing for DITA
- Deciding on a CMS
- Case studies on XML, DITA and CMS tools
- Developing FO
- Creating XSLT
- Content reuse
- Tech comm tools: FrameMaker
- Acrobat
- RoboHelp
- Captivate
- InDesign
- XMetaL
- WebWorks
- much more…

November 3–6, 2008
McKimmon Conference Center
Raleigh, NC, USA

For more details or to register online: www.brightpathsolutions.com/nobull
Enter the promo code OrngCty to save up to US$100!
Editor’s Desk

By Michael Opsteegh, TechniScribe Managing Editor

Who Doesn’t Enjoy a Challenge?

Jeff Randolph sent me an e-mail from the STC Summit in Philadelphia to tell me that the weather was great, the people are friendly, and, “oh, by the way, the New York Metro chapter is gunning for us.” Apparently, Jeff cut in front of John Posada, the president of the New York Metro chapter, who was waiting in line to check into the Summit. Angered by this affront, John Posada gave Jeff evil stares across the general assembly, sat behind Jeff and kicked the back of his chair during breakout sessions, and violently bumped Jeff’s shoulder every time they passed each other in the exhibit hall. Fed up, Jeff finally challenged John Posada to an arm wrestling match, but John, clearly daunted and intimidated by Jeff, declined. John did, however, issue a counterchallenge to Jeff: his chapter newsletter, NY Metro News, would overtake TechniScribe in the STC newsletter competition and win the Best of Show award.

Of course, none of this story is true except for John Posada’s challenge.

So, for the next year, our chapter will be in a head-to-head competition with the New York Metro chapter to determine which chapter has the best, most informative, and most engaging newsletter.

Of course, I’m confident that our TechniScribe is in no danger of relinquishing its crown anytime soon, but a challenge must be answered. Competition is a healthy way to keep a regular newsletter exciting and interesting.

TechniScribe Needs You!

I extend John Posada’s challenge to you. The TechniScribe staff needs articles from you to fill these pages. TechniScribe is delivered to you each month, and we are constantly looking for interesting, relevant articles. You can help us by contributing to...
PROSPRING’S MISSION STATEMENT
To match candidates looking for a position with clients needing to fill a position so both candidate and client are happy with the result.

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ProspringStaffing.com
The Query Letter

Editors expect to receive query letters. Do not disappoint them. Always use a formal query letter to contact an editor. Formulate your query carefully to say what the editor wants to see and hear. Never treat a query letter like an informal e-mail.

The following checklist may help you to produce an effective query letter. Feel free to improvise. However, do not eliminate an element simply because you believe it is not important. Be aware these elements predate computers and mechanical typewriters. This protocol has remained relatively constant for nearly two hundred years.

**Checklist for Your Query Letter and Attachments**

- Use professional letterhead
- Address the editor by name
- Write in a professional style
- Explain your idea for an article
- Refer to the publication's editorial schedule
- Refer to a recent issue of the publication
- Refer to the author's guidelines
- Summarize your credentials
- Include your contact information
- End with a respectful closing
- Include your clips

Carefully study and then implement each of these elements. You might think of your query letter as a cross between a job interview and your best elevator pitch. Oh, I almost forgot. You should keep your query letter to one page. However, you may include selected attachments.

**Query Structure**

You never get a second chance to make a good first impression. Plan to mail your query letter. However, the guidelines may suggest e-mail. Always use professional-looking letterhead.

Be 100% sure you have spelled the editor's name correctly! Use information from the masthead. If there is any doubt about the spelling, spend a few cents and call the publication's main office for assurance.

Write everything in a professional, error-free style. Find someone who is qualified to proofread your letter. Consider writing your query letter using the style called for in the author's guidelines. Use a cleanly structured format. You want a clean professional look.

This is another reason for mailing your query letter printed on quality letterhead.

**Query Content**

Clearly explain your idea for an article. Demonstrate your knowledge of the publication's editorial schedule. Try to refer to an article in a recent issue. Emphasize your intention to follow the author's guidelines. Explain that you understand your idea may not be a perfect match. Express your willingness to prepare an article that meets the editor's exact requirements.

Present your credentials. Summarize your writing experience. Explain why you have the expertise necessary to prepare a creditable article. If included, mention your attached clips.

Ask for the assignment. Provide your detailed contact information, even if it is already included as part of your letterhead. Include your telephone number. Record a professional-sounding greeting for your voice mail. Grandparents are the only people who appreciate hearing young children answering the telephone.

End your letter with a respectful and professional closing. You want to leave the editor with a good impression. Please understand, it is all about the protocol. Demonstrate that you understand how to play the game.

**Attachments**

If available, include copies of your very best recent articles, called "clips." Clips prove you are demonstrably serious about writing. For consumer magazines, you will possibly include a finished article.

**Conclusion**

You have spent a considerable amount of your time researching publications. You have spent additional time developing an outline or creating an article. Do not waste those efforts. Craft a professional query letter. Send your query to the right editor. Spell the editor's name correctly. Ask for an assignment. If successful, follow the editor's instructions. If you receive a rejection, try again. Keep trying until you are successful. Good luck!

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**New Speaker-Only Meeting Option!**

Starting in August, members will have the option to make a reservation for a speaker-only/no dinner meeting for $10. A reservation is required for the speaker-only option. When registering for this option, you will be prompted for your STC member number and password. As always, the dinner/speaker option will continue to be available for $24 with reservation or $35 for walk-ins. The speaker-only option is being offered as a trial.
At the June 17 meeting, Jack Molisani made his annual appearance at OCSTC to tell us about “Alternative Career Paths for Technical Communicators.” Jack, who is the president of ProSpring Staffing, a company specializing in the placement of technical communicators, and the founder and president of the LavaCon documentation and project management conference, conducted a survey in December 2007 to look more closely at a trend that he was seeing in the industry—the movement of technical writers out of their core discipline into other related areas that are “perceived” to be of greater corporate value, and therefore likely to be careers where members can earn more money.

The premise for the survey sprang from Jack’s July 2006 presentation on how to make a six-figure salary. In that presentation (http://www.prospring.net/Resource/MakingSixFigureIncome.pdf), he proposed that there were indeed alternate career paths—many related closely to technical writing—that use the same skill sets and likely pay greater salaries. And, he proposed, it appeared that we were moving into those disciplines to realize that money-making dream. He hoped from the results of the survey to see if this was really true.

Jack began the evening by recounting a fact most of us know to be true—that the career of most technical writers progresses to the point of becoming a “senior technical writer,” and then rests there forever, unless you are promoted into a Documentation Manager’s role or, by some motivating factor (such as a layoff), you are propelled into becoming a contractor and eventually, perhaps, starting your own technical writing business. The third, more recent, path that Jack had observed is a trend toward movement into related fields.

What are those fields? They include such familiar turf as business analyst, quality assurance analyst, marketing writer, proposal writer, web developer, content management, usability expert, training leader, and other positions that use our core skills, such as writing, interviewing, planning, project management, critical thinking, and attention to detail.

His premise was that these roles have greater perceived value by corporations and, therefore, are likely to pay more to the individuals who perform them. They are roles that are thought to contribute to revenue, or to the reduction of costs, and hence have greater value to the company than a technical writer, who is generally an overhead cost in most companies.

Jack assembled a survey which he publicized across STC that asked key questions about whether people had made such a leap in their careers or not, and what their earning power looked like today. He had 351 self-selected responses, so it is a sampling of data, but not necessarily a scientific one. Nevertheless, the results were interesting.

Here’s what Jack found:

- 79% of the respondents had transitioned out of Technical Writing.
- The largest numbers of those had moved into fields such as instructional design, business analysis, documentation management, project management, training, usability, or web site development.
- The largest majority, 59%, were still staff employees, with the rest either consulting or owning their own business.
- 35% of these people made this jump nine or more years ago, but 31% had transitioned in the last three years.

So, yes, as Jack predicted, movement to new roles is taking place—not just in the last couple of years, but apparently for nearly the last 10 years! But what about Jack’s key premise—that by making the move, one can actually make more money? Here was the greatest surprise of all: the survey respondents, though they may have made a move to related field, were not all making more money. Now, while Jack’s sampling is admittedly small, and the data may be somewhat skewed, it was clear that a change in job title or function did not necessarily mean that one would make more money. Some areas clearly were making more—usability, project management, product management, instructional design, compliance, and change management. Business analysts also appear to make more than the average senior technical writer. But many previously “prestigious” professions were also making less, including graphic design, marketing, training, and quality assurance. In some cases, these professions are becoming commodities that are being taken offshore.

So what is the best way to make more money as a technical writer? Jack believes it is by making yourself into a “hyphenated” professional: technical writer-usability specialist, technical writer-project manager, and so on.

His data went on to show that those people who worked for themselves clearly made the most money. Since a direct leap from staff employee to self-employed can be risky, Jack suggests that you start to take on side work on a contract basis until you reach the point at which you are losing money by continuing to hold down your day job. Build up a list of...
July 15 was education night at the OCSTC chapter meeting, featuring a keynote address by California State Superintendent of Public Instruction, Jack O’Connell, who made his first-ever presentation to STC. In the first part of the meeting, we acknowledged Michael Opsteegh and Jennifer Gardelle for their recent graduations from Cal State Long Beach. Suzanne Madison presented Michael Opsteegh with the Best in Show plaque from the STC Newsletter Competition. Michael was also presented with a friendly challenge from the New York Metro Chapter, who, based on our printed newsletter, decided to resurrect their newsletter. We saw six visitors, five of whom were teachers, to hear Jack O’Connell.

Jack O’Connell engaged us in a presentation that left us all thinking about the future of education in California. Some of the trends and challenges coincided with the challenges we have been going through as a profession. During the course of the next 40 minutes—including Q&A—Jack took us on an exciting and passionate ride citing many studies, personal stories with other educators, provided an opening monologue reminiscent of Johnny Carson, and dropped a few names along the way.

Jack took us on a vision of the future with a handheld device that we would document or design an interface for. That particular handheld device would also function as a GPS that would direct us to the easiest way to an event. We could make our ticket order and pay for our parking.

One major problem facing California is a shortage of qualified people. Jack related discussions with business leaders in Silicon Valley that high-tech companies are using all of the available H-1 visas, and the employers need about 2½ times the number currently allowed. California cannot produce enough qualified talent, and the problem is getting worse. This has also led to jobs being exported, either to other states or overseas. As a result our state economy, the world’s fifth largest in 2002, is currently eighth and dropping.

Since 1990, we have had a 25% increase in the student population, and a corresponding demographic shift with a large increase in Hispanic enrollment, which accounted for 50% of students from households who are not fluent speaker.

While there has been across-the-board proficiency improvement over the last five years, the gap between whites and African-American and Hispanic students has not closed. This exacerbates the “needs gap,” particularly in English and math-science-engineering. Additional breakdown of proficiency levels by family income level reveal issues that need addressing and further complicate efforts to close the achievement gap.

Finally, the funding of California education is well below the national average, currently ranking 46th among the states in per-pupil spending. We need to recommit to the smaller class sizes.

Jack concluded with an extended, lively Q&A, exploring many issues including the recently adopted “8th grade algebra requirement,” ability of students to be competent in the most basic math skills, and possible cultural issues behind the achievement gap.
Many people personally expressed their positive feedback to Jack after the presentation, ranging from “I was pleasantly surprised” to “when will he be back to speak again?” and relating his vision to their experiences as teachers.

Jack O’Connell’s presentation is available from the OCSTC web site at http://www.ocstc.org/meeting_archive.asp and there are additional links to his “Closing the Achievement Gap” initiative and to the California Department of Education web site.

President’s Message
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whether just to hear your ideas or to have you join the supporting committee. Remember this is the year that “It’s all about you!”

Enjoy the summer and the warm, sunny weather, and don’t forget that we’d love to see you at the next OCSTC meeting.

If you have any questions or suggestions for Betsy, e-mail her at pres@ocstc.org.

Editor’s Desk
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your newsletter. You can write an article on any of the wide variety of topics that relate to technical communication. Don’t be intimidated about writing to an audience of professional writers; our copyeditors and proofreaders are here to support you by editing your content, dotting your i’s, and crossing your t’s.

Here are a few of the old standby article topics to get you thinking:

- Book review
- Software review (e.g., InfoPath, Windows Vista, Word 2007, Acrobat 9, RoboHelp 7, Dreamweaver CS3, Doc-To-Help, AuthorIT)
- How I did it…
- Document design tips
- How to become a freelance/contract writer

Help us send a resounding shot across New York Metro chapter’s bow!

Submit your newsletter inquiries, articles, and ideas to Michael at techniscribe@ocstc.org.

President’s Message
< Continued from Page 2

clients who look to you for their technical writing or related needs; then, when that list is solid enough, go to work for yourself.

You can also take deliberate steps to establish yourself as a specialized expert in technical writing or a related discipline. Make yourself visible, speak at STC events, write articles for this newsletter or STC society-level publications such as Intercom. Get your name out there! He also encouraged networking at the professional societies of related professions and at those professions that your new business can effectively support (for example, go to a Java programmers meeting to sell your wares).

Jack’s presentation can be found at http://www.prospringstaffing.com/Resource/Alternate_Career_Paths.pdf

Phlashback to Philly
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The panel suggested some technical communications skills worth developing, including:

- Improving your public speaking (try Toastmasters)
- Becoming an industry-specific subject matter expert (SME) (healthcare, biotech, banking)
- Getting your Project Management Certification or an MBA
- Learning software development/programming
- Learning more about information architecture or a new program such as DITA
- Improving your negotiating and communication skills

The opening session of the Summit served as a provocative prelude to what was to come over the next few days—educational sessions, networking, and discussions of topics and activities to stimulate minds and enhance careers. It’s hard to describe the atmosphere of sharing, learning, and just plain fun at the STC Summit. I recommend that you begin creating a business case to justify to your employer the budget to send you to the 2009 Summit in Atlanta. If you are self-employed, start your own fund now to pay your way. If you have questions or need suggestions, feel free to talk to any OCSTC member who attended this or any previous Summit.

Start planning now to attend the Atlanta Summit. This time next year, you’ll be glad you did.
OCSTC Employment Information

Our job listing is entirely online at the OCSTC web site. Pages are updated as jobs are submitted.

**Staff Jobs**
http://www.ocstc.org/employme.asp

**Contract Jobs**
http://www.ocstc.org/contractme.asp

**Free Job Posting**
http://www.ocstc.org/jobsubmit.asp

**Inquiries**
If you have an inquiry, e-mail our employment manager, Betsy Malone, at betsybythebeach@adelphia.net. A limited number of printed copies of the OCSTC web site listings are available at monthly chapter meetings.

**Society-Level Job Listings**
STC maintains job listings on the Internet. You can download the listings from the STC web site at http://www.stc.org/jobsdatabase.asp.
Orange Juice: Membership News
By Jane Baker, OCSTC 2nd Vice President, Membership

It’s been quite some time since we’ve been able to announce new members in this column. Some of them have already introduced themselves at the chapter meetings. Please join me in welcoming the latest members who have joined over the last several months:

- Stephanie Allyn
- Daniel Barrozo
- Dennis Burcal
- Alexandria Berks
- Erin Erice
- Gilson Esteves
- David Evans
- Jackie Hense
- Neal Lange
- Scott Lindstrom
- Michael Lunde
- James Miller
- Marilyn Peterson
- Len Poche
- Carl Pulley
- Mark Russell
- Kate Spitzer

Typically, at this time of the year, we just want a break. A time out. A time to recharge our batteries.

However, it is a good time to look ahead, perhaps. Maybe it’s time to think about pursuing skill enhancements. Or, even in this terrible job market, a new professional challenge is in the offing. The job market cycles, like much of life—and we all know the bad can’t last forever! (It just seems that way at times.) Are you where you want to be? Do you want to consider the possibilities?

Maybe this is the time to think about inviting a colleague to an STC meeting. In September, OCSTC is going to offer opportunities to our community of technical communicators to polish résumés and hone our interview skills. The first will be a résumé workshop at our regular September meeting—Tuesday, September 16, with an opportunity to hear from and meet with some recruiting professionals—followed by a Saturday Back to School/Back to Work Job Search Tune-up—date and time TBD. Watch for e-mail announcements and more information in the September TechniScribe. If you or one of our colleagues would like to take advantage of this opportunity, mark your calendar and extend that invitation. It’s your membership—make the most of it!

In addition to dusting off your résumé and brushing up your interviewing skills, you may consider taking a class or two to make yourself more marketable. The following list is just a taste of what’s being offered in and around Orange County.

College and University Information

CSUF: California State University, Fullerton Extension
2600 Nutwood Ave., Fullerton, CA 92834-6870
714.278.2611  http://www.csufextension.org/

CSULB: California State University, Long Beach
1250 Bellflower Blvd., Long Beach, CA 90840-2403
562.985.4223  http://www.csulb.edu/

CSUDH: California State University, Dominguez Hills
1000 E. Victoria St., Carson, CA 90747
310.243.3730  http://www.csudh/extended/

GWC: Golden West College
15744 Golden West St., Huntington Beach, CA 92647
714.892.7711  http://www.goldenwestcollege.edu/

OCC: Orange Coast College
2701 Fairview Rd., Costa Mesa, CA 92626-5563
714.432.0202  http://www.orangecoastcollege.edu/

Thinking about joining OCSTC? Contact Jane Baker or Pat Olsen at 2vp@ocstc.org for membership information. T5
August Meeting Topic

Testosterone Technology

Reflect on the good, the bad, and the ugly of technology. Yes, information technology has benefited humankind through improved communications, enhancements to science, and increased productivity. But it’s also given us techno-babble, the dot com bust, and a lot of technology failures. Most significantly, it’s led to a situation where people sometime over-estimate their own technical capabilities, and under-estimate those of others.

Based on research of successful and unsuccessful technology projects, Saul Carliner will explore ten lessons for business.

About the Presenter

Saul Carliner is an internationally known expert on e-learning, information design, and technical communication with extensive industry experience.

As a consultant, he advises managers on strategic issues in online learning and communication, evaluation metrics, and general management issues. He also designs learning programs and communication materials. He is probably best known for his popular seminars on e-learning, and instructional and information design, as well as the management of training and communication groups.

Saul holds a Ph.D. in instructional technology from Georgia State University, a master’s degree in technical communication from the University of Minnesota, and a bachelor’s degree in economics, professional writing, and public policy from Carnegie Mellon University.

Orange Slice: Calendar of Events

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Time</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>August 5</td>
<td>OCSTC Council Meeting</td>
<td>Airport Executive Suites, Irvine</td>
<td>6 P.M.-7 P.M.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 19</td>
<td>OCSTC Chapter Meeting</td>
<td>DoubleTree Club Hotel, 7 Hutton Centre Dr., Santa Ana, CA, 92707, 714.751.2400</td>
<td>6:30 P.M.-9 P.M.</td>
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New speaker-only meeting option—see page 6 for more information.