

The Mechanics of Becoming a Book Author

By Guy Ball, OCSTC Senior Member

After you went to the recent OCSTC meeting where John Hedtke spoke on being an author, you were probably all fired up. Heck, you may even have gone home to begin the first chapter of that book you always wanted to write. OK, now what are you going to do with it?

I can't say I can compare myself to John who has written or collaborated on a whopping 21 books. But as an author of several books and having several friends who have been published, I can certainly give you tips based on our experiences and successes. (Please note that this subject cries for more space than I have in this article, so I'll just hit the major points.)

Planning your book

If you're serious about writing a book, look at *why*. Do you really have a story to tell? Do you want to be rich? Or do you just want your name on a published book? (Not to negate the last point; it's a very valid desire—and your battle plan will need to reflect it.)

Let's assume for now that you have a story to tell. For instance, you want to share your knowledge of creating remote-controlled battle robots. And you also hope to make some money from the book.

Studying the market

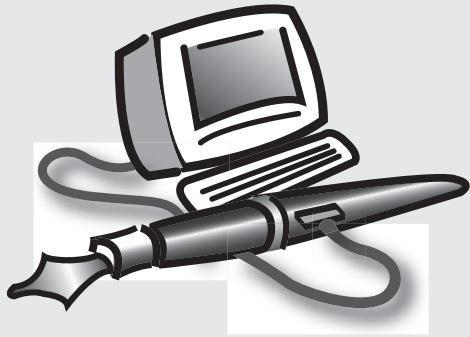
How relevant is it? Is this a subject of interest to the world? For instance, is there now a new show about battle robots that is becoming very popular? Is there a bit of a buzz on the subject, but not enough information on it? If your gut says yes, continue on. (Should you really think there is a need for yet another Beanie Baby catalog or a book on Word 6 hints, your inner scales need calibration.)

Outlining your book

This part should be easy for us as technical writers. Notice, I said "should be." Sit down and look at what you've started and where you want to go with the book. Put a goal at the top of the piece and see if you're on the right path. Modify the outline or the goal until they match up. (You will undoubtedly continue to modify them during the project, but this will give you a solid starting point.)

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The *TechniScribe* is published 11 times a year as a benefit to the members of the Orange County Chapter of the Society for Technical Communication. The goal of this publication is to reflect the interests, needs, and objectives of OCSTC members. The *TechniScribe* strives to be an advocate for, and an inspiration to, technical communicators by keeping them connected to each other and to opportunities for professional growth.

Articles published in this newsletter may be reprinted in other STC publications if credit is properly given and one copy of the reprint is sent to the *TechniScribe* Editor.

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When submitting material please remember to

- Include a 25-word biography about yourself.
- Send articles in Word format, RTF (Rich-Text Format), or ASCII. You can also send your article in the body of an e-mail message.
- Send material to the Editor, at pamelarm@pcmagic.net

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President's Message

By Elaine Randolph, OCSTC Chapter President

During the past ten years, this chapter has gone from a struggling group to one of the most talked-about organizations in the Society. I remember when we passed the 300-member mark in 1994 and won the coveted Chapter Achievement Award in the large chapter category. Talk about excited! But chapter leaders didn't want to see OCSTC become a roller coaster organization with the alternating periods of ups and



downs that had characterized its earlier existence. Our goal has been one of sustained growth. A growing chapter of excited members has more to offer everyone, especially during a period of economic downturn. Some members might decide not to renew their membership at the end of the year as they seek areas in which to economize.

Believe me, this is not the time to abandon your STC membership. More than ever, investing in STC is investing in yourself. This is where you network, gain new experiences, and find those valuable job leads. The person you work with in a volunteer capacity might be able to help place you in your next job. Many of us owe our current positions to the influence of OCSTC colleagues. Start planning (and saving) now for your year-end renewal. Come to chapter meetings and network. Take advantage of our low-cost seminars and conferences. We are still one of the biggest bargains in professional societies.

For the next three months (September, October, and November), OCSTC is sponsoring a membership drive. During my tenure as president, I'd like to challenge you to help us grow to the 500-member mark by January. We have hit 500 at the end of March for the past two years. When the non-renewal numbers are tallied by the Society office in April, we generally fall by about 100 to 125. It takes months for the membership numbers to climb back up again. Why should you care? On June 30, the Society looks at our membership numbers and determines how much money the chapter will get back to fund our operations in the upcoming year. This money underwrites your chapter newsletter, mailings, out-of-town speaker travel expenses, and other things that are of ultimate benefit to you.

Let's grow our membership so that we can continue to offer some of the best programs in STC. If you bring a friend or colleague to a chapter meeting in the next three months and that person joins by December, you'll receive a complimentary meeting as a thank-you. To ensure that you get credit for your recruits, be sure to write "Sponsored by

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Next Meeting

Say It In Pictures: Visual Literacy for Instructional Designers, Information Architects, UI Developers, and Technical Writers

Speaker: William Horton

When: Tuesday, September 18, 2001 from 6:00 to 9:00 P.M.

Where: Irvine Marriott Hotel
18000 Von Karman Avenue
Irvine, CA 92612
(949) 553-0100

Cost: Members (STC or ASTD) \$25
Students with reservations \$20
Nonmembers with reservations \$30
Walk-ins or those registering after deadline \$40
No-shows billed \$10

Reservations

Reservations are due by 5:00 P.M., Friday, September 14. If you call later, you will be charged the walk-in fee, so make your reservation early!

You can register by any of the following methods:

- Register at www.ocstc.org/dinres.asp
- Call the OCSTC hotline at (949) 863-7666.
- Call Carolyn Romano at (714) 894-9221. Leave your name, membership status, and phone number.

Note: Parking will be validated at the door. Please park in the Marriott lot. Do *not* park in the adjacent Koll Center Newport parking structure.

Directions to the Irvine Marriott

Coming from north and central Orange County:

Proceed south on I-5. Exit at Jamboree Blvd. Turn right onto Jamboree Blvd. Proceed south approximately 3 miles on Jamboree Blvd. Turn right onto Michelson, then right onto Von Karman Ave., then right again onto Quartz. Go left to enter the Marriott parking lot.

Coming from western Orange County (Fountain Valley/Huntington Beach): Proceed south on I-405. Exit at MacArthur Blvd. Turn left onto MacArthur Blvd. Turn left onto Michelson. Turn left again at Von Karman Ave., then right onto Quartz. Go left to enter the Marriott parking lot. If you want to avoid the airport congestion, exit at Jamboree and turn right.

Coming from southern Orange County:

Proceed north on I-405. Exit at Jamboree Blvd. Turn left onto Jamboree Blvd. and go over the freeway. Turn right onto Michelson, then right onto Von Karman, then right again onto Quartz. Go left to enter the Marriott parking lot. *

Editor's Desk

By Pamela Armstead

We all love our jobs as technical writers, communicators, and “information engineers.” It’s not always glamorous, but I don’t find it particularly dull either, thank you very much. Even so, some of us may have an itch for something a little different in our spare time, something with a little more notoriety attached.... Ever thought about becoming an author? Can you see your own name, written gracefully along the spine of a book in B&N? Some of us got a taste of



the idea in May with John Hedtke’s entertaining and informative presentation, “Hey Kids! Become an Author at Home in Your Spare Time and Earn Big Bucks!”. Well, we were game and decided to dig a little deeper into that topic. For this issue, we have an interview with Mr. Hedtke and an article from three-time author Guy Ball on the mechanics of writing a book and getting it published. We also offer some resources to help you get started.

This month also brings you the first of “PR Presence,” Julie Atkins’s column that will keep you updated on the doings of our enthusiastic new PR team. As you will see in the two other articles related to PR, this team has been busy! I predict we will soon see the fruits of their labors in OCSTC events and membership numbers.

Enjoy!

Pamela A.



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Then look at what you’ve done and see if it really makes sense. If it doesn’t, toss the idea or rethink your plan. If you like it, talk to friends and ask them how to improve the concept. Don’t just ask what they think. Most friends, when asked, will politely say, “Oh, it’s great.” You really want some constructive criticism that you can include or ignore.

Finding a publisher who’ll talk to you

This is the tough part (not that the first parts are easy). Publishers are in business to make money and few books really make money. So they’re taking chances on new books, and especially on new writers. You will have to sell the publisher on the topic. Going with our book example from above, realize that the person deciding on your battle robot book has never seen “BattleBots” and is clueless on its growing takeover of America.

However, a key to getting accepted is knowledge—know your subject and know your publisher. Study the possible market and know who your readers will be. Create a query letter with a good business case offering facts, not

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just hype. Choose publishers that may be interested in this sort of book. Show them writing samples that show you know what you’re talking about. And then expect to be rejected—over and over again. Expect and plan for the worst, but don’t give up! You know you’re right!

What to do if you get rejected

Keep trying. There are lots of publishers—big and small. Look for publishers that publish in your genre or have similar books. Go to bookstores and write down the names of likely publishers. Pick up a current edition of *Writers Market* and browse through its 1400 pages of publishers. Try other publishers. If at first you don’t succeed, keep going. Don’t give up.

What to do if you keep getting rejected

Consider revising your query letter in case you didn’t do a good job the first couple of times. Look at the subject of your book. Could you be ahead or behind the marketing curve? Could your publishers just be clueless? (By the way, this answer might be yes.) However, if you still believe that there is a market for your book and you can’t handle any more rejections, you have a couple of options. One is to keep pursuing the topic—just put it on a backburner for another time. Another is to self-publish a book. A great book on this topic is *The Self-Publishing Manual: How to Write, Print and Sell Your Own Book* by Dan Poynter. This book is in its 12th edition for a reason. By the way, this is a great book to read even if you don’t want to self-publish. Poynter’s insights into the publishing business will help you understand why publishers do certain things (and what to watch out for to protect your interests).

What happens when you are finally accepted

Jump for joy. Scream and shout! You are ranked in a minority of writers. You not only went after your dream of having a book published, but you were *accepted*. Feels good, doesn’t it? Now you “just” have to finish the book.

The babies are crying, your spouse needs attention, and you’ve just developed writer’s block.

Expect it. Plan for it. And work around it. At some point in time, back off a bit and give your family and friends some time. Amazingly this will work for you as well. You will return to the book writing with some new ideas and a bit of new vigor. Writing a book *is a job*. After the first couple of chapters, it is no longer “fun.” And the last 20 percent makes you wonder why you didn’t go into something easy like law or medicine.



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The book is in the mail (eventually)

Expect four to ten months before you get a printed copy back. It could be longer. My last book was printed in England and I could just see a Titanic thing happening and all copies being lost at sea. The publisher will have delays and the copy you promised Mom for Christmas will arrive in March. This is a great time for a vacation, to thank the family for all their support, and to party “like it's 1999.”

The book arrives

Be proud. Very proud. That's *your* name on the cover and you deserve it! Then realize that you will have to promote the heck out of it if you want it to sell. The publisher has 100 books they're pushing at the same time your book is coming out. They need your help with interviews, press releases to local publications, articles in magazines that deal with your subject, etc., etc. Don't sit back and let them do the whole job. They can't. And if you rely completely on them, your sales will probably reflect that.

Money

Oh, that's right. You were hoping to bring home big bucks. Sorry. You probably will get a couple of thousand. Maybe you got an advance on royalties when you delivered the book. Maybe you have to wait for six months before you get your first check. Either way, don't assume you can quit your day job anytime soon until you have published five or ten books and they are all very mainstream. For instance, sales from my *Santa Ana in Vintage Postcards* will buy me a laptop and pay for my extra expenses during the book writing, but they won't buy me a new car. Be realistic both in what you will make and in what you get out of the project. You'll be much happier and less discouraged.

Bottom line

Why do it if it's so much work, so much rejection, so little money (for the time expended), and so much grief?

Because at the end of the day, you can sit back and see the fruits of your labor—a book with your name on it. Much like watching one's child growing up, you can sit in pride knowing that “ya did good!”

And like having a child, life doesn't get much better than that! *

Guy Ball is a senior technical writer for Unisys in Mission Viejo. His third book, Santa Ana in Vintage Postcards, was released this spring by Arcadia Publishing. Guy can be reached at GuyBall@att.net

Touchstone 2001

Touchstone 2001 has officially kicked off. Each year STC sponsors the Touchstone Technical Communication Competition as a vehicle to promote the technical communication profession, foster excellence in that profession, and ensure that outstanding work gets deserved recognition. Entries are judged in the fall, and awards announced at a celebration held the following March. Entries receiving Touchstone's distinguished regional award are automatically entered into the international competition, which presents its awards at the international STC convention in May. The deadline for entries is September 21, 2001.

For more information, visit www.stc-touchstone.org

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<your name>” on the bottom of the membership application. When the STC office returns a copy of the new member's paperwork to our membership manager, we'll send you a voucher for a free meeting. Unfortunately, we can offer only one free meeting per member during this campaign. But members who sponsor more than one will have their names entered in a drawing for a special prize at the December meeting.

It should be easy to invite friends and colleagues to hear William Horton this month. But don't delay your registration. We expect this meeting to sell out. *

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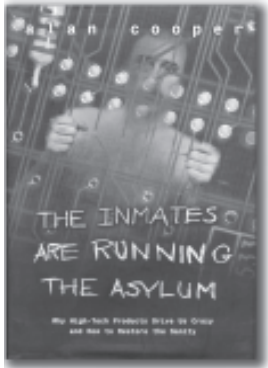
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OCSTC Bookshelf: *The Inmates Are Running the Asylum*

By Kathy O'Massey, OCSTC member



By Alan Cooper
(SAMS, 1999; \$25.00;
261 pages)

There is a prevailing culture that apologizes for the difficulty of using computer programs, when the programs should never be *that* difficult to begin with. “Interaction design” means designing for “real people,” not for those who are already familiar with the ins and outs of a computer. Alan Cooper’s *The Inmates are Running the Asylum* makes a case for applying interaction design to the development of computer-based products and recommends the tools to make it happen. Cooper argues that we need to get away from the idea that difficulties with software programs are the fault of users who don’t inherently know how to use them. Cooper suggests that we need to design more intuitive programs and make interaction design an integral part of the product design from the beginning of every project.

My take on the book

I am not a big fan of self-help, motivational, follow-my-scheme-and-you’ll-make-lots-of-money books. The image that pops into my mind is that of a smarmy guy on a stage wearing a purple suit and gold chains trying to sell me something—flashbacks to a horrible car-buying experience.

It takes a lot to get that image out of my head and replace it with the intended message.

Here’s how Alan Cooper achieved it.

1. Writing style

This is not textbook writing. Cooper has a clear style, peppered with humor throughout. I didn’t find myself going to the end of each chapter to see how many pages I needed to work through. I was able to just read. Also, though it usually takes me forever to plod through the usual IT book, this one was a quick read.

2. Examples

Cooper’s book isn’t just 300 pages of impressive vocabulary and little substance. He backs up his position with lots of real-life examples. He gives examples showing what *not* to do in certain situations. For those of us who have dealt with people resistant to the idea that we need to design for “real people,” these examples foster a feeling that we’re not alone.

3. How the book applied to me

Everything he wrote about could have applied to my job: the personalities of the main players, the scenarios—all of it. I had just gone through trying to justify changes to a document because usability testing had pointed up some problems. I had to knock down my share of brick walls to get those changes implemented. And there it was, in Chapter 7: “Homo Logicus vs. Homo Sapiens or Programmers/Developers vs. Real People.” It was as though Cooper had seen my situation and just changed the names to protect the innocent!

Needless to say, I was easily convinced. Maybe *too* easily convinced.

That is to say, I don’t think I’m the intended audience for this book.

Cooper writes that this book is a “business case” for interaction design, not a “how-to.” He does a lot of persuading in this book—and does a good job of it—but I could have done with less.

There is some discussion of “how-to,” such as dealing with different personalities and usability testing, but the bulk of this book is devoted to showing *why* we need interaction design.

My recommendation

Well, if you’re not yet convinced of the need for interaction design, user-centered design (call it what you will), or if you know of someone who needs convincing, read this book cover to cover.

However, if you’re already on the bandwagon, you’re probably going to find the first two-thirds of this book repetitive. Better to wait until Cooper writes a “how-to” book. *

Kathy O'Massey is a technical writer at Unisys in Mission Viejo.

Want to know more?

An interview with Alan Cooper is featured on the usability web site www.uidesign.net

Cooper discusses interaction design, denial, and working with programmers.

www.uidesign.net/2000/interviews/cooper1.html

Membership News

By Howard Goldman, OCSTC Second Vice-President Membership

Please encourage new acquaintances or old colleagues to visit our chapter meetings and other activities. STC has so much to offer even experienced writers—from professional development to the exchange of ideas and contacts. Pick up a form from the membership table, contact me at the meeting or write to me at HowGoldman@aol.com

It's rewarding to look for possible new members at our chapter meetings and make them feel welcome. And now is a particularly good time to encourage prospective members to join. Our membership drive is on: *any current member responsible for signing up a new member wins a free chapter meeting!* If you know of anyone, perhaps a colleague at work, who might be interested in STC membership, please invite him or her to a meeting.

Also keep in mind that as we enter the second half of the calendar year, rates fall by 50%. You never get more for your membership dollar than right now.

Our chapter membership is now up to 424, with the addition of some 10 members in each of the past two months. Membership internationally has passed 19,200.

Here are two new members's self-profiles:

Stephanie Seegmiller-Banner, legal writer

I am excited to be a part of this chapter and all that it has to offer. I am a professional writer for the California Attorneys' Group. I write demand letters to insurance companies on behalf of clients who have been injured in auto accidents.



I am also a student in the Masters of Professional Writing Program at USC and plan to graduate in January of 2002.

Because my father is a personal injury attorney, I have been working in the field of law since I was 12 years old! Throughout high school I clerked at his firm. And when I went away to college, I worked there during the summer. Later, in my junior and senior years at UCLA, my summers were spent working at law firms for other attorneys. Because I was an English major, the attorneys started to give me editing and document-drafting jobs. Naturally, I worked for a law firm upon graduating from college. In my first post-graduation job, the firm had me writing exclusively.

I enjoy technical writing because it gives me a chance to use my creative writing talent to earn money. Sure, I would like to be published someday. But until then, it's

nice to be able to do something all day that is easy for me and brings home a paycheck. I like to see how my words can help simplify a complicated subject.



I joined STC because my first professor at the Masters program at USC was Shirley Thomas. She had been a technical writer for years, working primarily at NASA. I took her technical writing class, and she introduced me to STC.

I love to read and cook. I tend to prefer nonfiction and self-help books. But I love fiction, too. I also love to entertain and work out. One of my favorite things is the music of Frank Sinatra and fellow "crooners." I love dancing and recently took a workshop where we learned the cha-cha, merengue, swing, waltz, and fox trot. Outdoors, I enjoy skiing and fishing and am starting golf lessons.

Lisa Lillie, writer for a major payroll company

As an instructional developer working for a major payroll company called Automatic Data Processing (ADP), I work in the Tax & Financial Services division in the Human Resources Development department. This is ADP's training and documentation department.

I create internal procedure guides and training packages, edit a biweekly newsletter, and do internal marketing and publicity. Previously I worked as a client services representative for one of the ADP payroll regions.

I like the diversity in my job. I am always working on a new project, with new information and new challenges. I find it intriguing when I start a project that I know little about, and upon completion I have learned something new.

I have a BA in Journalism from California State University, Long Beach. I continue to take classes to keep up to date and am pursuing a certificate in Graphic Design. I attended the Pan-Pacific Conference in Hawaii. That was great fun!

Last year I was a member of the San Gabriel chapter of STC. I wanted to join the Orange County chapter not only because I live in Orange County, but because I have attended meetings in the past and have enjoyed them. Also, I like the quality of the newsletter.

I love going to Las Vegas when I need to get away. I also enjoy seeing movies. *

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Director-Sponsor's Message

By Bonni Graham, Region 8 Director-Sponsor

Welcome Region 8 members! As promised, here is the first in a series of articles discussing the relevance of Board actions from each meeting. This article covers some of the items decided at the Spring Board meeting held at the 2001 Annual Conference in Chicago, Illinois. There will be more on the outcome of the conference next month.



Chapter Recognition

This year, we saw a change in how chapters and chapter leadership are recognized. Previously, there was one level of award: either your chapter received a Chapter

Achievement Award or a Pacesetter Award, or it didn't. The more we examined this structure, the more we decided that a more inclusive approach was needed.

Just as a publication, online document, or piece of technical art can be recognized for one of several levels of achievement, so should chapter efforts be recognized. Following is a list of the new award levels, their meanings, and their recipients for 2001.

Chapters of Merit and Excellence are merit awards: every chapter meeting the qualifications for either of those levels will be recognized. Chapters of Excellence that have also indicated they want to be considered for recognition as Chapters of Distinction compete within chapter-size groupings to receive Chapter of Distinction Awards.

2001 Chapters of Merit

Chapters recognized as Chapters of Merit have created programs that satisfy their members and fulfill a majority of the goals outlined in the *Guidelines for Chapter Achievement Awards*. The following chapters have provided superior service to their members via creative programs, events, and other support:

Piedmont	Kansas City
New Mexico Kachina	Vermont
Snake River	Alberta

North Carolina State University (student)

2001 Chapters of Excellence

Chapters recognized as Chapters of Excellence have created programs that delight their members and fulfill nearly all the goals outlined in the *Guidelines for Chapter Achievement Awards*. They've gone above and beyond simply following the suggestions, and have extended and improved upon the ideas presented. They have often contributed at the regional level as well, broadening their horizons to connect their members to peers in other locales.

The following chapters have provided exceptional service to their members via innovative programs, events, and other support:

Boston	Atlanta
Washington, D.C.	Northeast Ohio
Suncoast	Houston
Central Ohio	Oklahoma
Southwestern Ohio	St. Louis
Lone Star	Puget Sound
Phoenix	James Madison
Twin Cities	Rocky Mountain University (Student)

2001 Chapters of Distinction

Chapters recognized as Chapters of Distinction have provided consistent and near-perfect service to their members. They've created entirely new ways of serving their members in addition to following nearly all of the suggested standards. They have contributed at the regional and societal levels, broadening their horizons to connect their members to peers internationally. The following chapters have provided unparalleled service to their members with unique programs, events, and other support:

More than 600 members	Rocky Mountain
301 to 600 members	Houston
151 to 300 members	Southwestern Ohio
41 to 75 members	Oklahoma

2001 Chapter Pacesetter Awards

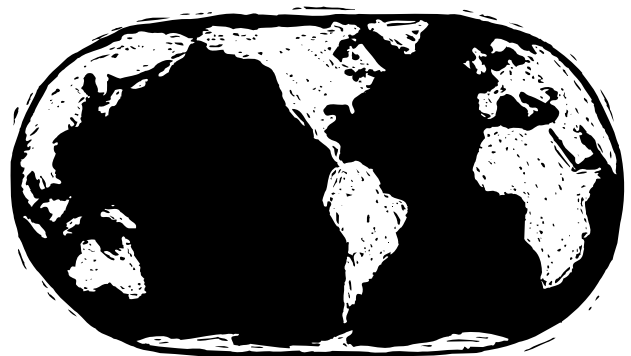
Pacesetter awards recognize chapters that have contributed something new and unique to other chapters and display excellence in a way that serves as a useful example to other chapters. Each region can award one professional and one student chapter a Pacesetter Award. The regional winners for 2001 are

Region 1	France
Region 2	Belgium
Region 3	Orlando
Region 3 (Student)	Mercer University
Region 4	Central Ohio
Region 4 (Student)	Bowling Green State University

Region 5	New Mexico Kachina
Region 6	Twin Cities
Region 6 (Student)	Southwest Missouri State University
Region 7	Alberta
Region 8	Aloha

More results next month! *

Bonni Graham
 Region 8 Director-Sponsor
bgraham@manuallabour.com



OCSTC Volunteers 2000-2001 Correction!

In last month's *TechniScribe*, we recognized the hard working volunteers from the chapter. The last thing we'd want to do is miss anyone, but that's exactly what happened! Please thank **Steve Johnson**, **Bill Wood** and **Alison Gemmell** for their work on the web site redesign, and **Theresa Key** for her work on the Scholarship Committee. Let no volunteer go un-thanked! Our chapter couldn't happen without you...

Colophon

The *TechniScribe* was produced using Adobe PageMaker 6.52 for Macintosh. ModernBlack, Arial, and Goudy Old Style were used for text and heading fonts.

All original art work was created using Adobe Illustrator 9.0 for Macintosh. The PDF on the OCSTC web site was distilled from raw Postscript using Acrobat Distiller 5.0 for Macintosh.

An Interview with John Hedtke: What Does It Take to Be an Author?

By Pamela Armstead

For those of us lucky enough to have attended John Hedtke's presentation at the May OCSTC meeting, his success as an author and a presenter is no secret. With 21 books under his belt, Mr. Hedtke knows his business and has been vocal and generous in showing other writers how to get a piece of the authorship action. Recently, I had an opportunity to ask him a few questions about authorship and his experiences in this risky yet rewarding endeavor.



Pam Armstead: Do you now write books full-time?

John Hedtke: Not exactly. I've certainly written books full-time in the past, but right now I'm consulting with several different clients as well as coordinating a lot of book projects. I also write the occasional magazine article for several major magazines. As I'm fond of saying, the consulting takes up 90 percent of my time and the book writing takes up the other 90 percent of my time.

P: When did your focus move from being a technical writer to an author of your own books?

J: I wrote my first book in late 1987 to early 1988. It was an addictive sorta thing. Since then, I've written or collaborated on a total of 21 books. I've got several books underway at the moment, so I wouldn't be surprised if the total goes up to 28 by this time next year.

P: What's it like writing books while working as a technical writer?

J: Busy. Really focused. You get better at every aspect of writing and project management when you write books. Most authors will tell you that when they're really getting "in the groove," they get a bit of tunnel vision about what they're doing. This happens to me, definitely. A former girlfriend once said that she could tell what chapter I was on just by the way I answered the phone!

P: When not writing tech docs, did you do anything to supplement the money you earned as a book author? In other words, can we live on what we make as technical authors?

J: We can definitely *live* on it, but a bad run of books can be crippling if you haven't the resources to deal with it. Great success should never be counted on; better to hope for moderate success and budget accordingly. It's good to

plan on using multiple venues to achieve success: write books and magazine articles that both capitalize on the success of the book and advertise its (and your!) existence.

P: There are so many books about technology out there today. Is it really possible for a new author to make a good living from writing in today's market? How do we discover a fresh topic?

J: Yup. You don't have to have a new topic; you can write a new book on the same topic. There's not *really* that much to say about the basics of using the Internet, yet dozens of books get published. Similarly, how many times have you read an article about upgrading your computer? Most of them are the same; only the technology is somewhat different.

P: Is there anything in particular you do to get ideas for books? How and when do you decide what that next book will be?

J: Where do I get my ideas? Well, see, there's this post office box in Poughkeepsie you can subscribe to.... Seriously, it's wherever I think there's a need I can possibly fill. How and when I decide is mostly a function of what I am able to sell to a publisher as a viable concept. Not infrequently, my agent will say, "Hey, there's a publisher that needs a book on something-or-other—you interested?" I also try to broker more deals these days for third-party books commissioned by a company with a pre-sale deal. The company buys maybe a couple thousand copies of a book, the publisher publishes it, sells it through normal channels, and markets the company. The author gets a guaranteed kick of royalties up front—everyone wins.

P: When you come up with those new ideas while working on a current book, how do you record that information—simple notes, sample chapter, major outline, napkin scribbles in a file folder?

J: I'll frequently dash off a book proposal. After all this time, they "dash off" rather quickly. This takes maybe two to three hours for some of the basic concepts, and possibly another couple of hours for a market analysis. I then send it to my agent, who gives me an opinion and shops it around accordingly. Were I still "un-agented" (I worked it that way for 10 years by choice), I'd send it to the publishers directly.

P: As technical writers, we are accustomed to having (somewhat) easily accessible sources of information from developers, marketers, programmers, and technology

experts. In writing your own book, you are considered the technical expert. How does one bridge a possible knowledge gap, especially for a book on technology that's brand new?

J: Very good question! You need to develop resources of your own in any way you can. The STC is a good way to do this, as are many of the STC listservs and SIGs. You may not have anyone at the company, but there are likely to be other venues—Linux user groups and SIGs for Linux authors, for example—that will prove effective. As a case in point, I've been writing about Bluetooth technology for the last year. I've found a number of really great Bluetooth web sites with reams (literally) of printable information to study and absorb.

P: Do you do any of your own promotion for your books—for example speaking tours, writing articles in publications for support of the book, etc.? How much time and effort does your publisher really dedicate to your book?

J: Yes, I am a shameless self-promoter. I've done lots of radio interviews, magazine articles, and other publicity. Whenever I go somewhere or speak, I make sure that people know how to find me and my web site and know that I have lots of books that they should buy. What your publisher does along these lines is a crap shoot, but you will always do better if you let them know you want to help market. I'd also recommend *1001 Ways to Market Your Books* by John Kremer.

P: Do you feel you receive more attention from your publishers now than when you were a newer writer?

J: Hard to say... probably yes. I definitely have more clout now if I'm not happy about the way the publisher is doing something.

OCSTC Employment Information

By Julie Dotson, Employment Manager

Our job listing is entirely online at the OCSTC web site. The pages are updated as jobs are submitted. Visit at www.ocstc.org/jobline.htm

If you have an inquiry or a job to post, e-mail Julie Dotson at yepiam@aol.com

Society Level Job Listings

STC maintains job listings on the Internet. You can download the listings from the STC web site at www.stc.org/jobdatabase.htm

P: Assuming the writer is not an expert on any one piece of software or process, but wants to start having books published, should he or she go for a larger, more general book (Windows 2000), or something specialized—like “Using Excel for Non-Profit Organizations”?

J: Go for your strengths and the things you can enjoy. *

References

Here are a few of John Hedtke's favorite authoring-related web sites:

www.hedtke.com

John Hedtke's web site. Links to other publishing and writing web sites, and general self-promotion.

www.studiob.com

Studio B Literary Agency. Contacts with authors, publishers, and information about the publishing business.

home.earthlink.net/~ivanlove

Ivan Hoffman, BA, JD, is a lawyer representing authors and publishers as well as web designers and site owners.

thorplus.lib.purdue.edu/reference/index.html

THOR+, The Virtual Reference Desk. Good online reference materials for writers.

www.bookmarket.com

Home of the Book Marketing listserv, which gives you information on successful marketing and a chance to compare notes with other authors doing the same thing.

www.bookzone.com

There are more links here than you'll ever be able to research for all kinds of book and magazine publishing. Check out the links at

www.bookzone.com/secret/addresses.html#pub too.

www.publishersweekly.com

Publisher's Weekly, the best-known trade magazine in the publishing industry.

www.tinaja.com

“The Guru's Lair,” Don Lancaster's rich and funny web site. Don wrote *The Incredible Secret Money Machine* years ago—one of the best books for showing how you, too, can freelance and make money.

PR Presence

By Julie Atkins, OCSTC Public Relations Chair

Hello chapter members!

THE WORLD IS ABOUT TO END!

Now that I have your attention, I'd like to welcome you to "PR Presence," an occasional column about the work of the OCSTC Public Relations committee.

Another article in this issue of the *TechniScribe* reports on the exceptional PR-process-and-news-release-writing training classes that the committee attended recently. As a result of these sessions, the committee is focusing attention on two activities immediately:

- Implementing a smooth system for e-faxing meeting and event information to the local media
- Running PR campaigns for the July and September meetings

In the background, two other important elements require attention:

- A clear understanding of where the OCSTC has been and where it plans to go in the future. This is called situation analysis.
- The preparation of a PR plan to guide the committee over the next three to five years.

The PR committee plans to add several pages to the OCSTC web site. These pages will include a media kit, the PR plan, and news releases.

How can you help? Thanks for asking!

The committee needs the following volunteers:

- **Outreach project coordinator.** The committee will be sponsoring an outreach activity, which will take place on October 27, 2001. A coordinator is needed to organize this "Make a Difference Day" team event and future outreach events.
- **Short-term volunteers.** These folks help with the current campaigns, such as the campaign for this month's meeting with William Horton.
- **Shadow members.** These people are interested in being committee members but they aren't ready to take a leadership role or may not be able to attend all the meetings. Their responsibility would be to choose an aspect of the committee's work that interests them and stay up-to-date on that aspect of the work. They would receive e-mail messages and attend meetings as often as possible. When the positions they are shadowing open up for whatever reason, these volunteers would be up-to-speed and ready to become full-fledged members.

To participate, please speak to a committee member or contact the committee chair, Julie Atkins at julie@toptechwriters.com

Thank you! *

The PR Committee

Julie Atkins, Chairperson

Frank Blasingame

Pat Byrne

Dennis Hanrahan

Brenda Lalian



Susan Buckner

Trish Carland

Theresa Key

Brian McCaleb



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Public Relations 2001: Three Days, A Thousand Ideas

By Susan Buckner, OCSTC PR committee member

Did you know that over 70 percent of the news you read is generated by public relations agents? With statistics like that, we of the recently formed OCSTC Public Relations committee thought we should learn as much as possible. In May, the OCSTC Public Relations committee spent three fun, informative sessions learning the art of successful PR. Our instructor was Les Goldberg of Maples Communications, Inc., a PR company in Irvine. Les very kindly offered his services to our committee so we could learn how to improve our chapter's PR strategy.

**Reporters
are anxious for stories that
"write themselves" with
minimal research and
rewriting**

During our first session, Les explained the foundations of media relations. He told us what goes into a successful news release and how to write one that will get published. We learned that reporters are anxious for stories that "write themselves," that they can put onto paper with minimal research and rewriting. As homework, Les gave us a sheet of facts and told us to create our own news releases.

In session two, we discussed our homework. Les complimented our committee on our work. That was reassuring! Then we went over the basics of a PR campaign:

- Learning about the audience
- Setting goals and planning the campaign
- Determining the audience
- Determining the strategy to best target the audience

We then discussed how best to use these tactics to create our own PR campaign, both inside and outside OCSTC.

For our third session, Les helped us devise a campaign specifically for OCSTC. We brainstormed ideas we could use in meetings and ways to contact inactive members of our chapter. He explained that we should examine past strategies to see what worked and try new ones as well. He also suggested that we choose one or two upcoming events and create PR campaigns for them, and design an overall strategy for our chapter.

With Les's encouragement in mind, we've already started on our chapter strategy. Julie Atkins and Brenda Lalisan produced a survey at the May meeting that yielded some surprising statistics about what members want from this chapter and where they go for information. We've designed

campaigns for both the Job Fair in July and the William Horton event this month.

We appreciate Les's gracious help. Thanks to him, we're well on our way to a successful, and, we hope, award-winning PR campaign for OCSTC! *



Question?
Comment?
Suggestion?

You have our ears!
Please send e-mails and letters for the TechniScribe
to pamelarm@pcmagic.net or
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Society Pages

Have a special interest? Join an OCSTC Special Interest Group!

Single Source SIG

Meeting times: 5:00 P.M. before the monthly STC meeting.

Topics: Single-sourcing implementation strategies and success stories, costs, required skills and tools, and much more. We may also call on experts in the field and vendors to address our meetings.

Manager: Mike Sanders. Contact him at mike@base80.com if you're interested in joining.

Contractors SIG

Meeting times: 5:30 P.M. before the monthly STC meeting.

Topics: The group is open to all chapter members who are

- Interested in learning more about being an independent contractor
- Current independent contractors who want to share their experiences
- Employers looking for contractors

Manager: Suzanne Madison. Contact her at madisons@pacbell.net

Region 8 Conference 2001

Richard Lederer, Keynote Speaker

Richard Lederer, celebrated linguist and author of scores of books and articles on the English language, will be the keynote speaker for the STC Region 8 Conference to be held at the Marriott Hotel in Irvine, from November 1-3, 2001.



The most recent additions to Lederer's notable career are his post as Usage Editor of *The Random House Dictionary of the English Language*, and his regular guest slot on the radio show "All Things Considered." He also writes a syndicated column "Looking at Language"; hosts his own radio show "A Way with Words"; and maintains a busy schedule of speaking engagements with various educational and corporate groups.

Lederer's career as a wordsmith began after earning a Master of Arts and Teaching at Harvard University. He became an English and media teacher at St. Paul's School in Concord, New Hampshire. While teaching at St. Paul's, he earned a PhD in English and Linguistics at the University of New Hampshire and began writing books about the language. The success of his books, starting with *Anguished English*, enabled him to explore other career opportunities.

Since his days at St. Paul's, Lederer has written many other books, contributed to such diverse publications as *Writer's Digest*, *Annals of Improbable Research*, *Mensa Bulletin*, and *Farmers' Almanac*, and appeared on numerous television and radio shows. The International Platform Association (the oldest speaking organization in the United States) awarded him first place among their showcase speakers in 1994 and the San Diego Toastmasters awarded him its Leadership and Communications Award in 1999.

This year's STC Region 8 Conference has a timely and exciting theme, "The Guerrilla Conference." The conference will be packed with information to help STC members thrive professionally during these uncertain economic times. For more information about the Region 8 Conference, including proposal submittal, conference pricing, conference registration, and hotel accommodations, visit the conference web site at www.stcregion8conference.org

Be sure to return to the site frequently, as it will be updated on a regular basis.

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PR Survey Confirms Reliance on Word-of-Mouth and the Web

By Julie Atkins, OCSTC Public Relations Chair

At the May chapter meeting, 57 attendees filled out a yellow questionnaire designed to solicit information for use by the Public Relations committee. Seventy percent of those respondents were actual STC members, and most found out about the chapter from a colleague, friend, or relative. Only five percent discovered us on the Internet. One heard about us from "the guy who fixed my VCR!" In answer to the question "Where would you look for info about OCSTC?" the majority suggested the web site. This confirms what we might have guessed: people increasingly rely on the Internet for this kind of information. Fourteen percent suggested they would look in their local newspaper, and a few would resort to the *Yellow Pages*. The *Los Angeles Times* and the *Orange County Register* appear to be read by equal percentages of those at the meeting (47 percent each). Twenty-six percent read a wide variety of magazines, most of which are not candidates for OCSTC advertising.

In sum, word-of-mouth is still the best advertising mechanism, followed by the Web. So tell your friends about the OCSTC!

Thanks to everyone who participated in the survey!



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Positioning Statement

STC helps you design effective communication for a technical world through information sharing and industry leadership.

The Society for Technical Communication (STC) is the world's largest organization for technical communicators. Its more than 20,000 members include writers, editors, illustrators, printers, publishers, photographers, educators, and students.

Dues are \$115 per year, plus a onetime enrollment fee. Membership is open to anyone engaged in some phase of technical communication, interested in the arts and sciences of technical communication, and in allied arts and sciences.

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Calendar of Events

- September 4 Administrative Council Meeting, 6:00 P.M., Cadence Design Systems
- September 18 OCSTC Chapter Meeting, 6:00 P.M., Irvine Marriott Hotel
- September 29 Chapter Leadership day, 12:30-4:00 P.M., Mark Bloom's house
Plan to attend if you want to become a chapter volunteer, even in a small way. Free food will be supplied! For more information, send e-mail to Elaine Randolph at elaine.randolph@unisys.com

Interested in upcoming classes for technical writers? Visit www.vaughnn.cm/ocstc

September Meeting Speaker: *Say It In Pictures—Visual Literacy for Instructional Designers, Information Architects, UI Developers, and Technical Writers*

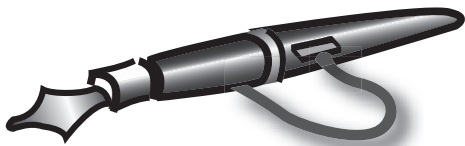


William Horton, recognized leader on communicating technical information, author of numerous books, and founder of William Horton Consulting, will give us a crash course: “Say It In Pictures: Visual Literacy for Instructional Designers, Information Architects, UI Developers, and Technical Writers.” You will not want to miss this energetic, humorous, and highly informative presentation.

Do you communicate across boundaries of language and culture? Do you need to communicate graphically but can't think of what to draw? If you answered “yes” to either of these questions, this session is for you.

Today's communication media demand more than just words. Producing effective user-support, web pages, documents, and training materials requires the ability to understand, think, and communicate graphically—to be visually literate.

This session will teach you how to show instead of just tell. It will show you how to convert words to graphics. You will practice picking graphical forms to represent the most common kinds of ideas you communicate. You will learn to tap your visual creativity and seduce reluctant readers. By looking at numerous examples of what works and what doesn't, you will learn valuable principles that you can use back on the job to refine your own graphics. And you will learn to avoid the embarrassing graphical blunders that mark the visually illiterate. Don't miss this event!



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