

## Buck Rogers Arrives: Embracing the New Electronic Book Technology

By Guy Ball, OCSTC Senior Member

Is there an e-book in your future? To a certain extent, there already is. Many companies are trying to move from printed-page documents to something totally electronic and viewable on a screen. Most technical writers are working with some form of online documentation, whether it be PDF documents or help files. The intent is for the user to view information on-screen and not be burdened with lots of paper.



The problem with electronic documentation, though, is that most people do not want to read much more than a page or two on-screen. For instance, how often does your service staff print out pages from a PDF file to make it easier for them to read and understand the information they need?

Bill Hill, a researcher in Microsoft's eBook group wondered, "How can you have a paperless office when reading on a computer screen is so awful?" In the effort to move information on-screen, Microsoft wasn't content with using a variation of Word to create their online reading resource. They created a dedicated viewing program, Microsoft Reader, which runs on your Windows desk-

top, and they even developed a font display technology named ClearType to improve the reader's experience. Asked why Microsoft put so much effort (and money) into the project, Hill replies, "If electronic books are ever to become an acceptable alternative to books in print, readability is the biggest single challenge they must overcome."

And of course, Microsoft would like to be a leader in that arena.

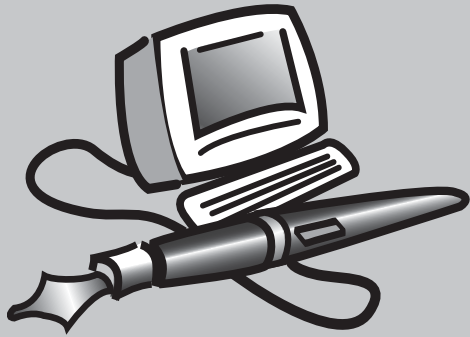
But they're not alone. Adobe has created the Acrobat eBook Reader program for Windows and Macintosh. Like Microsoft, they offer it free for the downloading and have even optimized their own display font (CoolType). Both programs offer a certain level of protection for the author against pirating while making the document downloadable at the click of a mouse (after purchase, of course). Piracy protection is becoming very important as e-book versions of popular books become available through booksellers.

E-book technology is not just software driven. The bulk of the new foray into e-books really deals with hardware devices—some dedicated to reading and some multipurpose—so you don't need to view the electronic book on your desktop or laptop. You can carry your books around in a device no bigger than a good-sized hardcover.

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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](mailto:pamelarm@pcmagic.net)

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## President's Message

By Elaine Randolph, OCSTC Chapter President

As we approach this year's Thanksgiving holiday, let us pause and reflect on the many blessings we enjoy as citizens of the United States.



Our Pilgrim forefathers celebrated the first Thanksgiving as a harvest festival toward the end of a devastating year in North America. The year 2001 has also been a devastating one we will remember for a long time. Some of our members have lost jobs and are facing serious adversity

caused by the economic downturn. The events of September 11 and its uncertain aftermath have caused anxiety in the lives of nearly everyone. But even if you feel that life is spinning out of control, there is *one* thing that you can control—your attitude. Every day you can choose to be the best person that you can be. Every day you can decide to show kindness towards others. Every day you can look for at least one blessing in your life.

When I tote up my list of things to be thankful for, I always remember to include OCSTC. When I attend the annual conference and hear about some of the challenges that other chapters are experiencing, I am happy that we are blessed with a relatively compact geographical area (for most of us, no 100-mile drives to get to meetings), a dedicated, creative council to provide direction, low-cost seminars, an award-winning newsletter, and interesting meetings that are centrally located (with excellent food). Don't take your chapter for granted. Better yet—pitch in and help make OCSTC one of the best chapters in the Society.

As many people step up to make contributions to the victims of September 11, I encourage you to also remember local people in need. The homeless of Southern California are still here. Don't forget them at holiday time (or during the rest of the year). Give as generously as you can to the charity of your choice. You'll be glad you did.



## Next Meeting

### Using Acrobat 5 for Your Document Review Cycle

**Speaker:** Mike Riley

**When:** Tuesday, November 13, 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 with reservations **\$20**  
Students with reservations **\$15**  
Nonmembers with reservations **\$22**  
Walk-ins or those registering after deadline **\$30**  
No-shows billed **\$10**

### Reservations

Reservations are due by 5:00 P.M., Friday, November 9. 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](http://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

Does the *TechniScribe* feel a little lighter to you? Well, it's not permanent weight loss; we're fluctuating for a



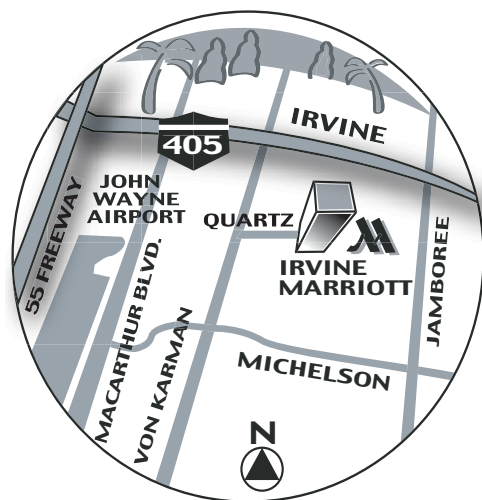
reason. We publish 11 times a year, and adding a little extra to our page count with the "new" *TechniScribe* costs plenty for our chapter. As the new editor, I really had my heart set on adding to the page count. But one of our most valued and helpful STC members came to the rescue with a typically brilliant idea: rather than go over-

budget, why not use a little clever accounting? Why not publish six issues of the year at 16 pages and five issues at 12 pages? I couldn't have been happier with the idea. Besides, everyone knows original content can be hard to find (hint, hint—*submit!*), so five months a year we have slightly fewer pages to fill. So who hatched this brilliant idea? Jeff Randolph, of course! In this issue, Kathy O'Massey picks the brain of the man who saved the *TechniScribe* last year and continues to help our chapter in countless ways. Read all about him!

So, yes, we're lighter, but I think what we've got will satisfy you until next month. Guy Ball enlightens us on the pros and cons of e-books in our future, and Jonathan Cohen asks, have you hugged your developer today? (I didn't think so...)

See you at the Region 8 Conference!

Pamela A.



◀ "Buck Rogers Arrives" from page 1

Today there are a couple of units already on the market and a few that are just becoming available in limited quantities.

Rocket eBook and SoftBook were the leaders when they came out a few years ago with their book-sized electronic devices using LCD screens and rechargeable batteries. These similar models would hold quite a few books—depending on the length of the books—and they allowed you to download material from the Internet. One very important advantage was that you could create your own document using their open e-book technology and upload it into the machine with very little difficulty.

Some high-end computer manufacturers were even looking to these devices to provide an alternate document delivery method for field service personnel who needed to download the latest technical documentation without a laptop.

Early last year, Gemstar (owners of *TV Guide*, VCR Plus, and a variety of other media products) purchased

and combined Rocket eBook and SoftBook into Gemstar eBook with their two styles of e-book manufactured by RCA. Unfortunately, this new owner has "closed" the system, reducing the users' ability to create and store their own books. Gemstar's focus is primarily the mainstream readers' market. That is, people who want to download the latest popular novel, business book, or magazine.

Currently, the Franklin eBookMan is the main competitor for Gemstar's eBook. It has roughly the same screen size as the smaller eBook model and offers a variety of other functions—much like a pocket PC or a Palm Pilot. The eBookMan also offers the important benefit of an open platform so users can create their own content. That content can also be protected if desired.

On the market right now are the pocket PCs from companies like HP (Jornado), Casio (Cassiopeia), and Compaq (iPAQ). These devices use the Windows CE operating system and can easily use Microsoft Reader to display electronic books. While these devices allow for many PDA-style functions, their major disadvantage is the small display area compared to the dedicated e-book readers. This is also true for the Palm-type PDAs, including the various Palm models and the Sony Clie. The current screens are just too small to read comfortably for any length of time.

Two new products showing a lot of potential and expected to be available by the end of this year (if not sooner) are the hiebook™ and the goReader™. The hiebook is similar in look and feel to the Gemstar eBook. Fortunately, the manufacturer has kept the system open so you can create and upload your own books and documents. The hiebook will sell for about \$250.

The goReader is actually a larger tablet device that uses Windows CE for an operating system. The goReader is closer to a notebook computer, has a color LCD, and is slated to sell for \$1,000. It features all of the Windows CE functionality and promises wireless technology.

What do these devices foretell? Why won't a simple laptop suit our needs? Well, imagine a service technician holding a small e-book right next to her as she installs a mainframe component. She can easily move around the machine while summoning the appropriate page of the manual. Or how about outfitting an entire technical staff with \$300 e-books rather than \$1,500 laptops? If your staff didn't have laptops, they could easily download

**"How can you have a paperless office when reading on a computer screen is so awful?"**



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*Guy Ball is a senior technical writer at Unisys in Mission Viejo. He also works with new concepts in documentation technology and usability. He can be reached at [guy.ball@unisys.com](mailto:guy.ball@unisys.com)*



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# How to Talk to Your Developer

By Jonathan Cohen, OCSTC member

When I first started as a technical writer, I thought programmers would be my best friends. They had all the information that I so desperately sought to do my job. They would surely explain to me in loving detail all that I didn't know. And, if they resisted, I would pursue them with blandishments and cases of Diet Coke, getting them to reveal all. Needless to say, very few of my feverish imaginings proved to be true. Over the next year, I had to get information out of programmers who were as laconic as rocks, for whom English was a third or fourth language, or who would give you one technical detail and then pin you down for hours with their pet theories on eugenics. I had to readjust my expectations, and managed to write readable documentation with the mere scraps of information I was given. The only constant remaining from when I began was that Diet Coke was, indeed, a universally accepted currency; I bought it by the case.



At my next job, I hoped to use the lessons I had so laboriously learned about how to handle these programmers. But, alas, that was not to be. Hired as a technical writer, I was put to work as a

programmer. Very quickly, I proceeded to pick up the programmers' attitudes towards technical writers. Technical writers were, from their point of view, annoyances to be dispensed with as quickly as possible. Inevitably, a technical writer would walk in and demand to know something about a part of the software that hadn't been written yet, or which had been written so long ago that the facts about it had to be disinterred from geological record. I could feel the other programmers' bile rising as they beat down the technical writer's persistent inquiries. After all, they had projects to finish and deadlines to meet. They didn't have time for this. So, both sides left their encounters bruised and not too much the wiser.

Now, having been on both sides of the fence, I think I can give technical writers several tips on how to make their relationship with programmers more productive, collegial, and, above all, survivable.

## Get in on the project early.

You need to impress upon the programmers and their managers that the documentation is just as important a deliverable as the software, and that without it, no release will be complete.

## Attend status meetings with the programmers.

This is important for several reasons:

- You'll find out which programmer is implementing which part of the project, so you know whom to go to with questions about a specific piece.
- You'll find out the schedule for the software so you know when each feature will be implemented and won't end up asking for help on an unimplemented feature.
- You'll learn which programmers are under great pressure at the moment, so you can try to moderate your demands on them.



## Realize the programmers are under as much pressure as you are.

Understand that their time is as valuable as yours. Try to store up a number of questions that can be answered in one trip, rather than popping in numerous times with individual questions.

## Learn the programmers' terminology.

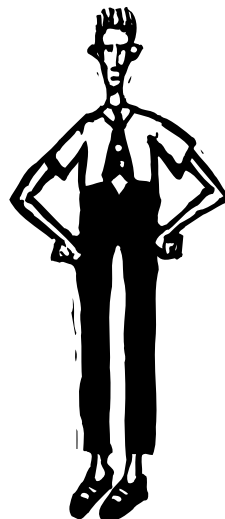
Programmers are a species of engineer, and engineers value precision in terminology. They expect you to know what everything is called—even before they have named it. Here again, you can learn from the status meetings, where the programmers often go over the details of their tasks.

## Try to speak their language (even if it's not English).

If you have to talk to a programmer who speaks English as a second language (or ESL) and this is preventing mutual understanding, it can be helpful to refine your question with a more fluent programmer first. Once you have reduced your questions to their most specific, technical form, you can query the ESL programmer with a higher chance of being understood and getting a meaningful response.

## Go through the proper channels.

Your ideas about bugs and features should go through certain channels: a list of bugs should go to the QA team, while a list of desired features should go to the project manager. Do not work them into your discussion with the programmers;



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# Membership News

By Howard Goldman, OCSTC Second Vice-President Membership

Our OCSTC chapter is now up to 438 members. This represents a fine 12 percent gain from 391 members last spring. STC worldwide is up to 22,238—a whopping 16 percent above our spring total of 19,207 members. Keep up the good work, PR team! And word-of-mouth advertising from satisfied active members is the best way to keep our organization growing and serving us all.

Please watch for new or reinstated members at chapter meetings and make them welcome! Some of the new names you may be seeing on nametags are **Ann Adams, Jerri Bergen, Caroline M. Bielskis, Kelli L. Bond, Ann K. Laming, Chrystal Larsen, Kathleen Klore, Mary H. Monzingo, Pamela Payne, and Ronald R. Selig.**

Here are brief introductions to a few of the members who have joined our chapter in recent months.

## **Christine Klein, Writer & Trainer**

I am a technical writer for Washington Mutual Financial Services. I am involved in creating an online help system for an application used by bank employees to process trades and annuities. I will graduate from California State University, Long Beach in the spring of 2002 with a BS in Business Administration—Management Information Systems.

My first job in technical communications was with a promotional marketing company in project management. During my five years there, I managed the implementation of a new inventory control and accounting software package. I also got to dabble in a lot of marketing, including writing copy for product catalogs. After that I was a project manager at an industrial distribution software company, working in the area of implementation and training. Next, for a year I worked as a technical trainer and writer for an Australian company that provided billing and business intelligence software to wireless telecommunications companies overseas. I also taught from the materials I created. These training sessions were conducted at the client site in Sydney.

I enjoy working with developers on new software systems as it lets me learn new industries and technologies. And I like writing for end users who, like me, are new to the product—to help them to discover all its features and functionality in a way that is fun and enlightening. I also have a nice collection of English and Humanities courses from changing my major a few times. (I will graduate with 180 credits!)

Employers and professors encouraged me to join STC. I wanted an opportunity to meet others in my profession

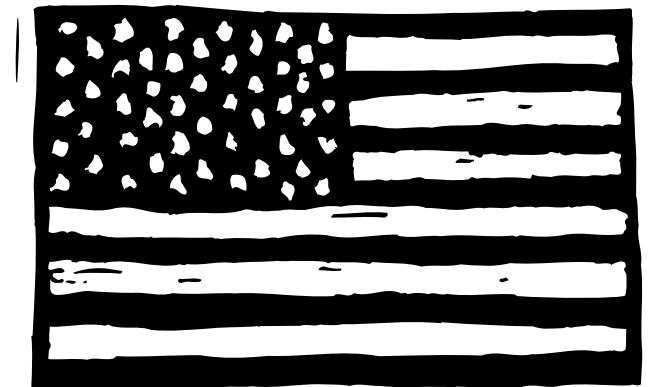
and to learn more about technical communication. For fun, I like running, racquetball, and travel. I've lived in New Jersey, Nevada, and have lived here in Southern California for seven years.

## **Pamela Payne, Lone Writer**

At Broadley-James Corporation in Irvine I work as the lone technical writer, writing manuals, brochures, press releases, quick-start guides, newsletters, and just about anything else that needs to be written. And I edit two web sites and a catalog. This is my first job as a technical writer. I am taking online courses toward UCLA's Award in General Business Studies with a concentration in Technical Communication.

Previously, I was a polymer-organic chemist for a small polymer research company in San Dimas. (I received my BS in Chemistry from Caltech.) As a research assistant in the lab, I helped develop a novel high-energy, rigid-rod polymer. Between experiments, I wrote maintenance and user guides for the analytical instruments in the lab. Before that, I was the Math Specialist for a private K-8 school in Pasadena. At Sequoyah School I taught math and the occasional science class to elementary and junior high school students.

I enjoy having the opportunity to explore new things in researching each new document. I joined STC for the opportunity to learn more about technical writing as a career. As a novice in the field, I hope to meet seasoned technical writers and gain from their experiences. I heard about STC by searching the Internet for information about technical writing. I enjoy sailing, reading, and gardening. I have lived in Los Angeles, Pasadena, Santa Cruz, and Chino Hills, as well as Jerusalem and Tiberius in Israel.



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### ◀ "How to Talk to Your Developer" from page 6

you could be setting up a conflict between what you would like them to work on and what they *have* to work on.

### Cultivate relationships with programmers who are responsive to you.

There is no guarantee that you'll find one who will be your best buddy, but in any group of programmers there is usually one who is more responsive than the rest. Make them understand that you're grateful for the information they have to offer. Respect their time as you would for any other programmer, but over time you will find that they'll open up. In the best possible case, your new ally can help you get information from the entire department.

### Bribery is a next-to-last resort.

Successful writers I have known have maintained full candy dishes on their desks, supplied cases of Diet Coke, and have even resorted to the ultimate inducement: home-baked treats. A couple of brownies never hurt anybody.

I hope you never have to employ brownies (unless you enjoy baking), or be forced to talk with the project manager about improving writer-programmer communication. Programmers may never get over their self-perceived superiority to technical writers, but you can bridge the gap, and get the information you need to get your project done. ☺

*Jonathan Cohen is an editor and writer at Books On Tape, Inc. in Santa Ana.*



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# OCSTC Membership Profile: Spotlight on Jeff Randolph

By Kathy O'Massey, OCSTC member



Time for a pop quiz: Name the OCSTC members who are

- a) Chapter Secretary
- b) Webmaster for the OCSTC site
- c) Administrator of the member database

Answers:

- a) Jeff Randolph
- b) Jeff Randolph
- c) Jeff Randolph

Beginning to see a trend here?

That's right, Jeff does all of those things (and more), but he took some time out of his busy schedule to answer a few questions so you could get to know more about this valuable member of STC.

**Kathy O'Massey:** Where did you go to school?

**Jeff Randolph:** California State University, Fullerton, where I received a BA in History and Geography.

**K:** What made you decide to pursue technical communication as a career?

**J:** After a 12-year career in the insurance business, I was out of work in the middle of the recession 10 years ago. I took some computer classes, and I found—possibly because my family background is in engineering—I had a strong aptitude for computer tools. I started ghostwriting chapters of self-paced tutorial books for an MIS professor at Irvine Valley College.

**K:** What do you like best about your job?

**J:** I am currently a Senior Web Applications Developer for Beckman Coulter in Fullerton. I like the web-related work, especially the programming aspects, and find the work at Beckman Coulter complements the web work I do for STC.

**K:** How did you first get involved in STC?

**J:** My wife [Elaine Randolph] encouraged me to join and I did so in December 1994. My first volunteer position

was as Second VP of Membership, a post I held for three years.

**K:** What is your favorite aspect of STC?

**J:** Well, STC provides career-enhancing training and networking opportunities. STC also provides rewards and recognition for both written work and volunteer work.

**K:** What is a recent trend in technical communications that you like?

**J:** With the newer technologies and delivery methods for documentation (online help, web delivery, XML, and so on), writers have more options than just being “wordsmiths” formatting documents with a word processor.

**K:** Is there a trend you don't like?

**J:** The trend toward a faster turnaround cycle, leaving less time for review and QA (or no money allocated toward them), leading to the inevitable maintenance release, service pack, and so on.

**K:** What is your advice to people just starting their careers in technical communication?

**J:** In addition to tools knowledge, you need “core knowledge” from those who are the cornerstones of the profession; William Horton and JoAnn Hackos, for example.

Internships—particularly paid internships in this economy—are hard to find. STC can help you gain job-related experience. First, you must assess what you need to know and where you want to go. Second, determine how volunteering for STC can help you gain the knowledge and skills to further your goals.

Networking at chapter meetings and volunteering can bring rewards. I stayed involved at the encouragement of chapter leaders. And I can guarantee that I would not have the opportunities I have now without the effort I've put towards STC. ☺

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

***I can guarantee that I would not have the opportunities I have now without the effort I've put towards STC***

# Society Pages



## Scholarship Applications Available

Each year, STC offers scholarships to full-time graduate and undergraduate students pursuing careers in technical communication.

Fourteen awards of \$2,000 each will be granted for the academic year 2002-2003.

**Application deadline is February 15, 2002.**

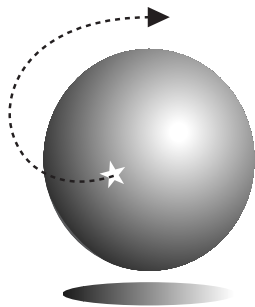
Application forms and instructions are available from the STC office:

901 N. Stuart Street, Suite 904  
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# Question? Comment? Suggestion?

*You have our ears!*

Please send e-mail and letters for the *TechniScribe* to [pamelarm@pcmagic.net](mailto:pamelarm@pcmagic.net) or P.O. Box 28751 • Santa Ana, CA 92799-8751



## 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 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.

## OCSTC Employment Information

By Julie Dotson, Employment Manager

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

### Staff Jobs

[www.ocstc.org/employe.asp](http://www.ocstc.org/employe.asp)

### Contract Jobs

[www.ocstc.org/contractme.asp](http://www.ocstc.org/contractme.asp)

If you have an inquiry or a job to post, e-mail Julie Dotson at [yeppiam@aol.com](mailto:yeppiam@aol.com)

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 [www.stc.org/jobdatabase.htm](http://www.stc.org/jobdatabase.htm)



### STC Mission Statement

Designing the Future of Technical Communication.

### 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.

STC headquarters contact information:

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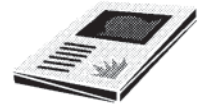
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# Calendar of Events

November 1-3 Region 8 Conference, Irvine Marriott Hotel. Details at [www.stcregion8conference.org](http://www.stcregion8conference.org)

November 5 Administrative Council Meeting, 6:00 P.M., Cadence Design Systems

November 13 OCSTC Chapter Meeting, 6:00 P.M., Irvine Marriott Hotel

\*Please Note! Our meeting will be held a week early this month, so you'll have Thanksgiving week free and clear.

Interested in upcoming classes for technical writers? Visit [www.vaughnn.com/ocstc/home.html](http://www.vaughnn.com/ocstc/home.html)

## *November Meeting Speaker: Using Acrobat 5 For Your Document Review Cycle*



Are your editors and subject matter experts scattered around the globe? Would you like to be able to pour everyone's review comments and sign-offs into one document? Would you like to save trees?

Maybe you'd like to win the free copy of Acrobat 5 we'll be raffling off.

At our November 13 meeting, Mike Riley, the ePaper Business Development Manager (Southwest) for Adobe Systems, will show us how to

- Make notes and markups in a PDF document
- Customize the notes and markups for each reviewer
- Assign and use secure signatures in PDFs
- Assign security levels to PDF documents

Mike will also tell us about the new Rich Text Format (RTF) feature. Did you know that Acrobat 5 allows you to make a complete round trip with your PDF documents? They can now be converted into RTE.

Mike Riley has been with Adobe for three years and has ten years of industry experience. He is an Adobe Certified Expert in Acrobat 5 and Photoshop, so bring your questions and stump the expert.



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