### Get on Board with Visual Language

**By Jonathan Cohen**

Robert Horn presented an exciting and energetic talk on a new mode of communication: Visual Language. He demonstrated that energy when he aggressively flung a scroll of paper across the room while holding on to one end, in order to indicate that the era of all-text, scroll-like reading and learning had passed.

When Robert Horn was in high school, his history teacher said, “If you’re going to go to college, you’re going to have to learn how to write a research paper.” He wrote an essay on an international auxiliary language, a language which would be used by the entire world for commerce and science. In that essay, Robert Horn predicted that English would be the main contender for that role; it happens that he was right, for English has become that *lingua franca*.

Robert Horn has another prediction: in the 21st century, Visual Language, (his own concept), will become the international auxiliary language. Visual Language is a tight integration of images, shapes, and language. Visual Language is not just images alone; nor is it metaphor-rich text alone; nor is it shapes by themselves. For example, when you are driving, you glance at the dashboard. You do not get a textual description of the state of all the gauges and readouts, which would take a couple of minutes to read; instead, you are able to apprehend all these details instantaneously, through visual clues which are themselves integrated with linguistic hints. You can perceive integration immediately, without the need for much explanation.

#### Benefits of Visual Language

Visual Language, in all its modalities – diagramming, cartooning, charting, iconography – is absolutely necessary for reducing the complexity of the information presented to us. We are inundated by language today, as the flood of information overwhelms us.

Every scientist in this country is faced with a fire hose of data, even if we are simply talking about continuous telemetry data.

Robert Horn mentioned that the Boeing 777 is composed of three (Cover Story, continued on page 6)

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Chapter Chat

By Santa, sitting in for Mark Bloom

December is a time of giving, a time to think of others before you think of yourself. I had some spare time before the Big Rush at the end of the month, so I’ve given Mark Bloom (good this year) the month off. Will I show up instead of Mark at the next chapter meeting? Ho-ho-ho! If I can “hitch” a ride, ho-ho-ho!

I’m also giving the Education Committee a well-deserved month off. So despite the waiting lists and constant demand, there will be no seminars in December. Bill Darnall, Education Committee chair, will be able to fall off to sleep every night with visions of online courses dancing in his head.

Bob Courtney, Programs VP, is giving you another entertaining, experienced speaker in Bonni Graham. She will arrive in Orange County on December 14 in a blizzard of excitement to talk about selling your services as a technical communicator to your boss or client.

Here in your hands is a gift from Jill Eisenbach, newsletter editor: the December TechniScribe. You know she must have had fun sitting around the tree with her copy editors stringing articles together for this month’s issue! I can picture it – ho-ho-ho – an evening of song, eggnog, and red pens.

Dennis Hanrahan, Membership VP, is hoping he’ll find an exciting member profile under the tree in the morning. Don’t worry, Dennis; Santa knows you’ve been good this year! Ho-ho-ho! You can help, dear reader – contact me at OCSTCSanta@aol.com if you want to write a profile or suggest a potential subject.

I would be remiss if I neglected to mention Jeff Randolph, who gives so much to the chapter that they ran out of awards to give back to him. Jeff not only has a full plate, he has a full stocking and lots of gifts under the tree with his name on them! (Relax, it’s OK for Santa to mix his metaphors.)

Jeanette MacGillivray, Chapter Treasurer, is waiting for the chapter’s rebate check to arrive from the national office. She needn’t worry, though. I’ve sent a few elves undercover to infiltrate STC and find the missing check! Ho-ho-ho!

This article is dedicated to volunteers past, present, and future: from Kathey Hope to Marge Packman to Marcia Couey to Brian McCaleb to Elaine Regan to Sheila Vaughnn to Carolyn Romano to Judy Berman to Anne Stratford to Maggie Rowe and on and on and on Donner and on Blitzen! (Oops!)

Isn’t it about time YOU gave a little bit? Write to Santa at OCSTCSanta@aol.com to offer your time. Remember, I know who’s been naughty or nice … ho-ho-ho!

Have a Merry Christmas, from your Administrative Council.
Selling Documentation to Management and Clients

By Robert Courtney

More than half the battle of selling documentation (whether to outside clients or in-house managers) involves educating the “buyers” as to why we do matters to the business! It seems like most of the non-doc people we encounter think that documentation is a necessary evil when we all know it’s simply necessary.

Until we are able and willing to explain that document development fulfills a crucial business need, and able to explain that need in terms they already understand, we will continue to struggle with our place in our companies and with our clients.

Bonni Graham spent 10 years solo as a technical documentation specialist before starting her company Manual Labour in 1994. Since then, as Manual Labour has grown more than 30% per year, Bonni and her staff have produced manuals for such clients as Sony, Kenwood USA, and Nissan North America. Bonni also works tirelessly with STC. Bonni has been involved in nearly every Region 8 conference, has been a deputy chair for the annual conference, has served as a local and international-level publication competition judge, and has served as the San Diego chapter president and newsletter editor.

Currently, her STC projects include chairing the Unified Southern California Pubs/Art/Online competition and serving as deputy chair for the 2000 Pan-Pacific conference.

In her free time, she also performs with Creative Urges, an improvisational comedy group.

When:

SPECIAL DATE:
Tuesday, December 14, from 6:30 to 9:00pm

Where:

Wyndham Garden Hotel
3350 Avenue of the Arts
Costa Mesa, CA
(714) 751-5100

Cost:

◆ Members with reservations, $20
◆ Students with reservations, $15
◆ Non-members with reservations, $22
◆ All walk-ins, $30
◆ No-shows billed $10

Reservations:

Reservations are due by 5:00 p.m. Friday, December 10. If you call later, you will be billed the walk-in fee, so make your reservation early.

You can register by any of the following means:

◆ Register online at www.ocstc.org/meeting.htm
◆ Send e-mail to Jeff Randolph at erandolp@ix.netcom.com.
◆ Call the OCSTC hotline at (949) 863-7666
◆ Call Carolyn Romano at (714) 894-9221. Leave your name, membership status, and phone number.

Directions

From the 405 Freeway: Exit at Bristol. Go north to Anton Boulevard and turn right. Turn left onto Avenue of the Arts (the second signal). The Wyndham Garden Hotel is about one block ahead on the right. The parking structure is the hotel driveway, on the left. Parking is free.

From the 55 Freeway: Exit at MacArthur Boulevard, turn left on Flower, then right on Sunflower. Turn left on Avenue of the Arts and proceed one block south. The hotel will be on your left.
The Unfair Advantage
By Bill Damall

Part 4: Abbreviated Terms in Technical Writing
This column is about grammar, punctuation, syntax, and style. It is intended for technical writers and editors. Knowledgeable communication professionals enjoy a significant advantage over their less-informed co-workers, customers, and clients. These professional writers and editors have what I call the unfair advantage.

Part 4 is an overview of abbreviated terms. It’s probably debatable whether hyphenation or abbreviation is the more contentious issue in technical writing. Not considering the common single-word abbreviations, there are three types of abbreviated terms commonly found in technical writing:

- Initialisms
- Acronyms
- Symbols

Initialisms are abbreviations formed by grouping the first letters or parts of a compound term. Initialisms are usually read or sounded letter by letter. Examples of initialisms are:
- random access memory (RAM)
- desktop publishing (DTP)
- database management system (DMBS)
- television (TV)
- transmission control protocol/internet protocol (TCP/IP)
- revolutions per minute (RPM or r.p.m.)

There is no consistency in the use of periods. Modern practice is to use all capital letters and to eliminate the periods.

Acronyms
The word acronym is based on the Greek word onym, meaning name. Like initialisms, acronyms are formed by grouping first letters or parts of a compound term. However, unlike initialisms, acronyms are usually read or sounded as a single word. Examples of familiar acronyms are: radio detection and ranging (RADAR) and light amplification by stimulated emission of radiation (LASER). The U.S. Government has created many acronyms, for example: situation normal, all fouled up (SNAFU).

Symbols
Symbols are special abbreviations. A letter, or group of letters, becomes a symbol when adopted or created (usually) by an international organization. Be aware that all organizations do not agree on all symbols. Consider the symbol for “intermediate frequency.” The National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) uses the symbol “i.f.”. The Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers (IEEE) uses the symbol “IF”.

The Grammar of Abbreviated Terms
Do not confuse plural and possessive forms. It is common for inexperienced writers to add an apostrophe to abbreviated terms—when they mean plural and not possessive. For example, the plural form of DBMS is DBMSs. Avoid possessive forms. For example, write: the purpose of the DBMS is . . ., rather than, the DBMS’s purpose is . . .

Use appropriate articles with abbreviations. One reads an initialism letter by letter. Use the first letter to determine the appropriate article. For example, write: the AAA, a DBMS, or an RDX. Acronyms are read or sounded as a single word. The appropriate article should be related to the sound of the word. For example, write a RADAR system, not an RADAR system.

Do not use redundant abbreviations in two-word phrases. For example, do not use ATM machine and PIN number. These redundancies may be acceptable in everyday speech, but they are not acceptable in written technical communication.

Use a period for symbols that constitute another word in the language. Use a period at the end (for example, in. for inch or no. for number) to distinguish the symbol from the word. Otherwise, periods are not used.

Summary and Suggestions
Develop and publish a list of abbreviated terms that are commonly used in your company.

Different industries use different standards. Terms that are accepted in one industry may be obscure in an unrelated industry.

Understand and apply the rules of grammar that apply to abbreviated technical terms.

A final reminder. You are writing to convey information to the reader, not for your own convenience. Minimize the use of repeated and obscure abbreviations.
**Membership News**

*By Dennis Hanrahan*

There’s been some confusion about dues lately, so let’s see if I can clarify the situation. Your dues are renewable on a calendar year basis, regardless of what month you joined. By now, you’ve probably received your annual dues billing from the Society office for the year 2000, which is payable no later than February. Regular member dues for 2000 are $110, while student member dues are $45.

But if you haven’t joined yet, you can still get in at the old rate ($95 for regular members or $40 for students) through the end of December. New regular members also pay a one-time fee of $15, so by joining now, your $110 includes the fee, plus your first year’s dues actually cover you for the first 13 months. Pretty good deal, right?

We had an excellent membership growth month in October. Our chapter total has increased to 443 members, while Society membership overall is up to 22,652. Now, for this month’s profiles.

**Catherine Gottlieb** joined us in May. She works at Downey Savings and Loan Association as a technical writer and online documentation specialist. She writes, edits, designs, and formats documents for electronic retrieval and has been on the job since December 1998.

For more than a decade, Catherine worked as a research editor, writer, and librarian at publications including the *Los Angeles Times, Los Angeles Herald-Examiner, Daily Breeze* (a newspaper covering L.A. county’s South Bay area), and *Bon Appetit* magazine.

Catherine, a Chicago native, has a Bachelor of Arts degree from the University of Wisconsin and a Master of Library Science equivalent from UCLA. Her boss, who is also an STC member, encouraged her to join the organization.

**Patricia Silver** joined us in June. She is currently employed at the UC Irvine College of Medicine Office of AIDS Education and Research as a research assistant, compiling statistics and producing numerical reports. She has over two years of experience at UCI overall.

Patricia is currently enrolled in the technical writing certificate program at UC Riverside, with an expected completion date in the summer of 2000.

Her previous experience included 22 years as a paralegal consultant, advocate, and private investigator, with a specialization in Social Security and Medi-Cal disability claims. But she enjoys technical writing, especially the layout and design aspects.

Patricia has a BA in Business Administration-Accounting from Cal State Fullerton. She joined OCSTC at the invitation of member Linda McPherson.

A native of Olympia, Washington, her other interests include playing the piano, attending concerts and plays, cooking, and reading.

**David Robinson** also joined us in June. He currently manages the Product Information department at Unisys in Mission Viejo, where he is responsible for managing all aspects of technical documentation and publications operations involving approximately 50 professionals.

Dave has held his current position for over three years. Although this is his first position in Product Information, he has over 24 years of overall experience with Unisys in a wide variety of technical and management positions. But the thing he likes best about his current position is the opportunity to be creative.

Dave earned his BS in Mathematics and BS in Physics from Ohio University and his MS in Industrial Engineering from the University of Wisconsin. He joined STC primarily to keep informed of changes in the technical writing industry. Several OCSTC members encouraged him to join.

A native of Coshocton, Ohio, Dave’s hobbies include carpentry, photography, and restoring classic autos. He also manages the annual Unisys United Way Vehicle Show.

We here at OCSTC encourage other technical communication managers to follow David’s lead and become active members.

Happy holidays from your Membership manager as we move forward into the new millennium!
Wonder Why’s...

Shifting responsibility to someone else is called “passing the buck?” In card games, it was once customary to pass an item, called a buck, from player to player to indicate whose turn it was to deal. If a player did not wish to assume the responsibility, he would “pass the buck” to the next player.

People clink their glasses before drinking a toast? It used to be common for someone to try to kill an enemy by offering him a poisoned drink. To prove to a guest that a drink was safe, it became customary for a guest to pour a small amount of his drink into the glass of the host. Both men would drink it simultaneously. When a guest trusted his host, he would then touch — or clink — the host’s glass with his own.

People in the public eye are said to be “in the limelight?” Invented in 1825, limelight was used in lighthouses and stage lighting by burning a cylinder of lime in an oxyhydrogen flame that produced a brilliant light. In the theater, performers on stage “in the limelight” were seen by the audience to be the center of attention.

The Certifiers
By William H. DuBay

Those interested in the issue of certification for technical communicators naturally take an interest in the academic programs for technical communication. They have been around for some time and we figure they must know something about qualifying people for our profession. It is for this reason that I became active in the Advisory Board of the Professional and Technical Writing Certificate program at California State University, Long Beach. I wanted to see how instructors at a large university teach, test, and grade technical communicators.


The book consists of eight essays profiling eight different types of programs available in the U.S. with attention given to quality issues in each type of program. Each chapter profiles each program type and then gives a detailed description of an institution with a successful program of that type. Each profile includes the author’s visit to the institution, a description of the history, faculty, and curriculum, and interviews with staff and students. The last chapter discusses quality issues described in the profiles.

The book lists these types and numbers of programs:
- Ph.D., in seven institutions
- Master of Science, in 20 institutions
- Master of Arts, in 28 institutions
- Bachelor of Science, in 21 institutions
- Bachelor of Arts, in 44 institutions
- Certificate Programs, in 48 institutions
- Minor Programs, in 39 institutions

The most impressive profile is that of Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute in Troy, NY. Founded in 1824, Rensselaer is among the nation’s most prestigious engineering schools. It takes credit for pioneering the field of technical communication. In 1953, it started the Technical Writer’s Institute and its Masters program in technical writing, and, in 1979, its Ph.D. program. Since 1970, the school has published The Journal of Technical Writing and Communication. The profile lists 80 undergraduate students, 46 different courses, and 60 faculty members across several disciplines that participate in the program. This innovative and energetic program focuses on “the whole human being” based on the “inseparability of professional lives from private and public lives.”

As the last chapter of the book concludes, it is difficult to compare the different academic programs with one another. They all respond to different internal and community requirements. Again, we are faced with the lack of performance standards by which we can compare them. There are some in the STC who see its role as one that can set up standards for the growing number of academic programs world wide. Developing those standards, however, is a task that is yet to be addressed.

William DuBay is a technical writer at Phoenix Technologies Ltd. in Irvine. E-mail him at: bill_dubay@phoenix.com.

Cover Story (continued from page 1)

million parts flying in close formation. Robert Horn was hopeful that some things don’t change, like the ordinary tie, or even the ordinary sock. However, in Berlin, Germany they have made the ordinary humble sock become an Advanced Foot Protection System, (AFPS) composed of eleven distinct components.

Visual Language can help by immediately showing spatial relationships, areas of conceptual and physical contiguity, temporal relationships, and motion from one area to another. One of Robert Horn’s most ambitious projects was his map of the debate on machine intelligence. In this map—actually a series of seven maps—Robert Horn and his graduate students clearly lay out the relationships between complex ideas and their foliation. Various thinkers’ ideas are linked to the ideas of their supporters, detractors, and successors through relationships of agreement and negation. Although the map by itself embodies considerable complexity, it does provide a coherent visual “mapping” of a complex issue.

(Cover story, continued on page 9)
The Education Report
By Alison Stamler Gemmell

The Past
You could say I go to extremes. Two years ago I joined the OCSTC, took Intro FrameMaker from Sharon Burton-Hardin, and was so impressed with her course that I asked if I could help with OCSTC education classes. At that time, I did not get a chance to help. A short time later, I moved to Alaska and volunteered for the Anchorage STC chapter.

The Present
When I returned from Alaska, I volunteered once again to help the OCSTC Education Committee. This time I was needed and I’ve had a great time communicating with all of you who sign up for classes and take the plunge. The committee members are extremely enthusiastic and forward thinking and you as students are energetic and informed. I learn something new with every interaction.

The Process
My current role is email madwoman for the electronic registration process. When you sign up for a class, I pile all the data into my email management program and send you emails requesting payment or listing detailed directions to the class. As the class date approaches, I organize pertinent facts and send a class roster to the instructor. I may intrude upon your personal life and ask for detailed contact information, just in case we need to reach you in the ninth hour before class begins. Fortunately, most of you have questions or words of wisdom, which allow me to correspond with you more than once or twice in the registration process.

And Beyond
With all the correspondence going back and forth, my email management gets a little out of control. True to form, I get to learn as a volunteer.

My current fun project is a quest for software that will miraculously pull data from email and place it in registration spreadsheets. Anyone with suggestions, please send them to agemmell@earthlink.net.

Aloha-STC in 2000
Press release from Pam Coca-PR Committee Co-chair

Regions 7 and 8 to produce a Pan-Pacific Conference in Year 2000

STC members from chapters in the United States, Canada and the Pacific Rim will gather in Waikiki Beach, Honolulu, Hawaii on October 18–20, 2000 to produce the first-ever Pan-Pacific conference on technical communication. This is an exciting opportunity to develop your career path, learn new technologies and invest in yourself in the millennium.

Plan ahead and save. Register by January 31st and get an early-registration discount. For details and a registration form, visit the conference Web site at www.pan-pacific.org. Reserve your hotel room by January 31st and receive an ocean view room at the city view rate.

Would you like to be a speaker at the conference? Download the call for papers from the conference Web site. Topics such as best writing practices, state-of-the-art publishing technology, career development, tools and technology, internationalization, and management are requested. The deadline for submitting a proposal is March 1, 2000.

Would you like to help produce the conference? Contact our conference chair, Jack Molisani at jm@claritytechnical.com for volunteer opportunities.

Sponsorship and vendor opportunities are available. Please contact Michelle Maurer at michelle@tecstandards.com for more information.

See you in Hawaii.

Did You Know That...

During the heat of the space race in the 1960s, the U.S. National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) decided it needed a ballpoint pen to write in the zero gravity confines of its space capsules.

The pen worked and also enjoyed some modest success as a novelty item back here on earth.

The Soviet Union, faced with the same problem, used a pencil.

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Just Ask Sandi...
About Employment Matters
By Sandi Giles

Hate your job? Frustrated because you really can’t tell anyone why?

This monthly column is dedicated to answering questions about employment issues that concern those of us who make a living as technical communicators. This month, I’d like to turn the tables and ask you a question. Do you relate to my opening questions?

In my role as a technical staffing specialist, I see quite a few resumes each month. For the past few months, the number of resumes I’ve reviewed seems to have doubled and I’m wondering why. Of course I ask each applicant that I talk to why he/she is seeking a job change. For obvious reasons, I rarely hear the truth and that isn’t surprising.

The primary reasons applicants withhold this information, as perceived by me at least, include these explanations:

◆ It would be unprofessional to speak badly about a current employer.
◆ It might hurt a person’s chances of getting a job they are interviewing for because a potential employer might perceive him/her to be a complainer who might speak badly about them after they are hired.
◆ It would put their chances of getting a good reference at risk if what they said got back to them.

And so it goes… Of course I can speculate forever about this but you get the gist. So, how does a company correct a problem if they aren’t even aware they have one? It’s a dilemma. To benefit us all, I am inviting you to tell me what your primary complaint is about your current or past employer. I will print the TOP TEN LIST OF REASONS OUR MEMBERS ARE SEEKING A JOB CHANGE in my January column. In order to remain anonymous, you can fax your reason (notice that the word reason is singular) to my office. The fax number is (949) 768-2689. Just give it a title of “Take This Job” and list your reason. One caveat, please be reasonable. If your complaint is something frivolous like your boss wears ugly clothing and too much after shave lotion or perfume, please, spare me.

I look forward to hearing from you and to reporting my findings; it should be interesting, and perhaps beneficial, for all of us.

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Thinking Outside the Box
By Mike Russo

Turn your research into to something of value. The key to selling yourself as a technical communicator is to add value to your job. Here is one way that I found that not only adds value to your job but is of mutual benefit to others.

Think out of the box
Sometimes as technical communicators, we tend to put ourselves in a box and think the end user is the only person who can benefit from our efforts. The next time you have to research a project, think about how other departments are involved in the projects and how they can benefit from your efforts.

When you are interviewing a subject matter expert, do you assume that information you are after can only be used in a manual or document that you are writing? Chances are if this person is an expert on the particular project or subject, there are many people in the company could be interested in the same material.

Make research an event
Make your research an event and share the information with other interested parties. Here are some ways of sharing the information. Make an announcement that you are going to be interviewing this subject matter expert at a specific date and time. You may want to make it a meeting, a “Lunch Time University,” or Brown Bag Lunch.” If it’s going to be a meeting, arrange to have refreshments for everyone. If it is to be held at lunch time, see if the company will provide lunch for everyone.

Bring recording tools
Recording tools are as important to a technical communicator as the computer. Recording tools include a tape and/or video recorder, and a camera. If you are using a video recorder, make sure the subject matter expert is comfortable with being taped.

Here are some additional benefits gained by interviews I’ve conducted:
After I recorded the assembly of the first prototype unit produced by engineering, the manufacturing department used the video recording to develop manufacturing assembly instructions and illustrations.

While interviewing an engineer about the theory of operation, I took pictures of the block diagrams that were drawn on the board. These were quickly formalized and shared by other interested parties. When I was collecting source data on ISDN fundamentals, a consultant taught a four-day class. A professional videographer was used, and these videotapes were used by marketing and training to sell the product.

You see, there can be more to technical writing than writing for the end user. You can add value to your job and be recognized for it by thinking outside the box and sharing your hard-earned information with others. Your work will be greatly appreciated and you will be recognized for your efforts.

Mike Russo is a senior member and currently works at Toshiba America, as a senior technical instructor where he does instructional systems design for the development of computer based training.

Visual Language can be used to illuminate different domains:
◆ complex issues
◆ cross-boundary issues
◆ creative problem-solving
◆ cross-cultural communication (i.e., “engineering” culture vs. “operator” culture, or “programmer” culture versus “end-user” culture)
◆ making group processes visible
◆ exploring interpersonal communication and feelings

Putting Visual Language to the Test
The Australian scientist John Sweller has demonstrated that the fight integration of text, shape and image Robert Horn proposes as Visual Language can markedly assist learning. Sweller created two instruction manuals: one was “split-source,” where images were placed off to one side of the text, and the other was an “integrated version,” where text was put in relevant places directly on the graphical diagrams. When tested on the material, students using the “integrated version” scored 20 percent higher than those using the “split-source” version.

Other “split-attention” studies have shown that Visual-Language-type integration improves the ability to make decisions based on the information presented in that way. Sweller’s explanation is that when a large amount of a person’s short-term memory is occupied trying to integrate pictures with text, neither source of information is wholly intelligible by itself, and
Saul Carliner’s 25 Tips for Writing Online Information

General
1. Only present information online when being online benefits readers.
2. Write information with the awareness that you can’t control how or when readers see it.
3. Design information so it has “built-in intelligence.”
4. Design information so it has obvious intelligence.
5. Provide meaningful interaction and often.

Topic Architecture
6. Focus topics on answering reader questions.
7. Limit the amount of information you present to manageable units.
8. Consider coaching and guiding approaches rather than just straight presentation of information.

Communicating with Images
10. Include a caption or title with your graphics.
11. Present verbal information as lists, charts, or numbered procedures.

Interaction
12. Determine the type of interaction users want.
13. Intelligently track user responses.
14. Provide appropriate material based on reader’s responses.
15. Avoid rhetorical questions.

Composing Words, Sentences
16. Write sentences as you would speak them, not as you would write them.
17. Be consistent in your instructions to readers.
18. Refer to readers as “you” or “readers.”
19. When choosing language, emphasize the virtues of clarity and precision.

Screen Design
20. Be consistent with your chosen interface.
21. Include navigational tools on every panel.
22. Make effective use of space on the screen.
23. Use color carefully.

Production
24. Choose an appropriate delivery vehicle.
25. Consider storage and other technical limitations.

Editor’s Corner

By Jill Eisenbach

As you are reading this, Thanksgiving has come and gone. However, at this time I want to express my gratitude and thanks to all the hard workers of this wonderful chapter, especially everyone who has contributed to this awesome newsletter. A thanks goes out to all the article-writers. Please continue to send me your articles so we can get them published.

Star People
I am so excited about my star reporters, Jonathan Cohen, June Lee, and Judy Vaughan. I am so impressed with how they have written up captivating monthly speaker recaps. They also have lots of enthusiasm that is unbeatable. I am always looking for more star reporters. It is an exciting job. Also, I am very grateful for my star editors each month who have been faithful. Special thanks go to Paul Lewis, Linda McPherson, Carolyn Romano, and especially Anne Stratford. I am looking for more star editors too. Last but not least, I want to thank Jeff Randolph, who handles the mailing. Thanks to all of you.

What’s coming up
We have more book reviews scheduled in a few months. We also have more extended membership profiles coming your way. Remember don’t be shy about writing articles, writing book reviews, or even volunteering to have an extended membership profile written about you.

I also need more reports to cover:
◆ Current events
◆ Online help tips and tricks
◆ Other tools like FrameMaker, PageMaker, RoboHELP, and Word
◆ Write about any new projects you are working on
◆ CBT Computer Based Training
◆ Solving problems for users
◆ Also, how about things you love and hate about this field, and how you manage to get through it.

Run any ideas you have by me. Most likely, everyone else in the chapter would like to hear and learn more about it. Give us a try. Thank you.

Upcoming Regional Events

"Plain Language in Progress" Conference

Host: Plain Language Consultants Network
February 25-27, 2000
Houston, Texas

Program:
Brushing up on fundamentals, Plain Language as a marketing tool
Developing and marketing your Plain Language business
New developments in Plain Language
Economics of Plain Language
Experiences in writing and rewriting regulations in Plain Language
Nova Scotia’s Five-Year Plan
Plain Language design in all mediums

Carol Ann Wilson, PLIP
Conference Chair
8902 Sunnywood Dr.
Houston, Texas
77088-3729
(281) 600-6000 phone
(713) 462-7519 fax
Visit http://plainlanguagenetwork.org/conferenceindex.html
Counting My Marbles  
By Pamela Coca  

I lead a crazy chaotic existence. Every day is different. I never start work at the same time or end it at the same time. Quite often, I do 4 or 5 hours in the morning and then don’t get back to my trusty workstation until my daughter goes to bed at nine. I love working in the middle of the night. The world is calm and quiet and there are no interruptions. There is, however, a major drawback to having this kind of work mentality. It is extremely difficult to keep track of your hours, especially when you work for more than one client at a time.

Over the years, I have tried clipboards and charts and logs and graphs and numerous creative methods to keep track of those hours. They work. Anything works, as long as you actually do it; but some ways can be more fun that others.

These days, I keep 2 glass jars on my desk and a box of marbles underneath. At the beginning of the week the larger jar gets fed an assortment of marbles; the other jar is empty. I relocate my marbles as I work on a client’s job. I also use my marbles to track job hunting. By the end of the week jar one is empty and jar two has a mixture of marbles. Beginning to get the picture?

On Monday morning I count my marbles for the week. Let’s say client number one has hired me to work about 20 hours this week and another has ordered 15 hours. Wanting to be sure that I eat and pay the mortgage next month, I require myself to make 15 contacts for jobs on a weekly basis. So, I need 20 red marbles, (my favorite color), 15 blue marbles for remaining calm (trying to handle two things at the same time), and 15 green ones for money, (this is how I make mine).

I always know at a glance where I stand. I feel better when I bill my client knowing I worked the exact number of hours for which I am invoicing. I feel better about my finances knowing I didn’t forget to invoice the client for those two hours on Thursday when I had the urge to work on the project in the middle of the night. I also feel good when my green marbles are all in jar two and I am still sending out resumes for jobs. Of course, I haven’t quite worked out how to log half-hours.

Ken Caird Student Article Competition  
By Bonnie L. Fink, Manager Student Article Competition  

The Ken Caird student article competition was established in 1985 to honor Ken Caird, a long-time leader in STC’s Los Angeles chapter. By recognizing excellence in technical communication articles written by college students and published in professional publications, the awards encourage students of technical communication to write and publish professionally.

Entries may have appeared in a wide range of professional publications including the following:

◆ Any STC publication (such as Technical Communication, Intercom, a chapter newsletter, or a special interest group newsletter)
◆ A journal or newsletter of a professional organization other than STC
◆ A trade publication or newsletter.

Judges examine the quality of writing, including organization and clarity, significance of the article, and use of appropriate documentation and illustrations. The article must, of course, contain sufficient technical content to qualify as technical communication. Students may submit articles themselves. Editors of journals, trade publications, and newsletters may submit articles, with the students’ permission. Program directors and chapter presidents may also submit articles, with the students’ permission.

Winners in the competition will be recognized at the STC’s 47th Annual Conference, May 21-24, 2000, in Orlando, FL.

Details  
Deadline for submission: January 15, 2000  

Qualified entrants: Full-time undergraduate or graduate STC student members enrolled in post-secondary programs that include technical communication

Awards: Undergraduate student articles-
Distinguished $1,000, Excellence $500;  
Graduate student articles-
Distinguished $1,000; Excellence $500.

Contact: Bonnie Fink at (419) 372-7551 or bfink@bgnet.bgsu.edu
Calendar of Events

December 1       Administrative Council meeting at AOL 7pm
December 14      Special Chapter Meeting “OCSTC Holiday Package, with Bonni Graham,” at the Wyndham Garden Hotel
December 29      Administrative Council meeting at AOL 7pm
January 18       OCSTC Chapter meeting, 6:30pm

No classes are scheduled this month.
Contact Marge Packman in January for the FrameMaker meeting at (949) 832-1230.

In the surrounding area...
No meeting scheduled for the IESTC Chapter meeting this month, so make sure you plan to meet with us.
Visit the IESTC Chapter Web site at: www.iestc.org.

REGIONAL CONFERENCES
February 25-27, 2000 “Plain Language in Progress Conference” - Houston, TX
March 5-9, 2000 “WinWriters Online Help Conference” - San Diego, CA
May 21-24, 2000 “47th Annual Conference” - Orlando, FL

No considerable cognitive effort is wasted. Integration of text and images up front spares the reader that cognitive effort and allows the reader to get on with the business of comprehension.

Who are the Inventors?
Visual Language is remarkable because it is being invented around the world. It is not coming from artists, but rather from scientists, educators, and other people trying to get a message across to their readers. Many disciplines have begun to use Visual Language furtively, dipping into its vocabulary and dropping it into prose little by little. Some attempts have at Visual Language have been halting; there are pitfalls such as merely juxtaposing words and images, or verbally describing an already self-sufficient graphic, but standards for good practice are evolving. More than a million Web sites use Visual Language or are progressing towards some form of it.

Robert Horn believes that like the Web, Visual Language will take an increasingly important role in our culture and our future. Speaking of the Web, why not visit www.macrovu.com/cctgeneralinfo.html?