

Byline



Newsletter for STC Chicago Members

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How to Put on a Web Seminar	5	<i>Surprised?</i> I recently interviewed three students of the Rhetoric and Professional Writing Program at Northern Illinois University (NIU) in DeKalb—Elizabeth Dawson, Brande Martin, and Jesse Racine—and discovered how they combined their personal interests with their advanced education to secure jobs in this thriving industry.
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Elizabeth Dawson

Dawson, currently a technical writer for Nielsen Media Research in Schaumburg, collaborates with statisticians and software developers to write documentation. “I enjoy puzzling out the statistical requirements . . .,” she said. “It sounds crazy, but everything I do there is fun!”

How did this avid sci-fi reader find herself in technical writing? She answered, “I came across a book that changed my life. It was the worst thing I have ever read. Completely bewildered, I turned to the front matter to

find that the author’s wife had edited his book. . . I was horrified at the result.” In her quest to be an editor, she found contentment in technical writing as well as graphic design, and she added coursework from the School of Art to complement her studies. “It just made sense for me to make the most of the synthesis of my experience and my education and pursue it further,” said Dawson.



Jesse Racine

Racine, whose academic pursuits included American studies, philosophy, theology, and business, decided to blend his interests with his training.

Racine is the Web Content Specialist for McHenry County College (MCC) in Crystal Lake, IL. “The editorial, technical writing, and research classes (at NIU) all coalesced to qualify me for my current job,” he said. Aside from direct web site maintenance, he conducts interviews and usability tests and dabbles in digital photography.

Years earlier, he discovered that he “liked writing more than debating and tossing

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around ideas." What started out as an internship with a publishing firm, ended up as a freelance position shortly before he became employed by MCC.



Brande Martin

Martin, a 10-year "tech-comm" vet with long-standing freelance experience, shared her story.

"From the NIU program, I learned many theoretical concepts about rhetoric and professional

writing, and in my professional career, this information serves as a good foundation to supplement the practical, everyday work that I perform."

Today, Martin is the News Continuing Medical Education (CME) editor for Medscape, a subsidiary of

WebMD. She and her team write articles about recent and interesting news in medicine for clinicians who, in turn, receive CME credits after being tested on the information.

Martin's proclivity toward writing and the technical communication field is deeply rooted in her DNA. "I was exposed to the field at a young age and always had a positive perspective about a career in writing because my mom (a seasoned writer) always seemed to enjoy her work," she explained.

To read the interviews in their entirety and to learn more about NIU's Rhetoric and Professional Program as well as the STC-NIU chapter, please visit stc-niu.pbwiki.com.

STC Employment Resources

By Karleen Stevens McAllester - STC Chicago Employment Committee

If you are in a job hunt, the following STC Chicago resources can be a great help to you!

STC Chicago Job-Hunting Forum

Use this forum to post or search for a Chicago area technical communication job.

Go to the STC Chicago web site at: www.stc-chicago.org. From the Resources menu, choose the Job-Hunting Forum. You must register on the web site to use the forum, but you do not need to be an STC member.

STC Technical Communication Career Center

Our parent organization provides an online center for posting and searching for technical communication jobs on a national basis. You may also post your re-

sume, set up a job alert, and receive email notices about new job postings.

Go to the main STC organization web site: www.stc.org. Click on the Career Center link. For full access, you must be an STC member.

STC Chicago Listserv

If you are a STC Chicago member, you can receive our chapter's online newsletter, share job leads, and join online discussions about technical communication issues via email.

Send a request to join the listserv to our web master at: web@stc-chicago.org

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Job Postings on the STC Chicago Listserv

"Any employer, whether a member of STC or not, can post a job to the STC Chicago listserv. Members are also welcome to share job leads."

Any employer, whether a member of STC or not, can post a job to the STC Chicago listserv. Members are also welcome to share job leads.

Send the job posting to: employment@stc-chicago.org.

Remember to include the employer name, contact information for the hiring manager, a brief job description, and the requirements. (Do not attach files.)

CIC SIG

The goal of STC Chicago Independent Consulting SIG is to help consultants and other technical communicators develop as professionals, share strategies, and trade job leads.

To join or for more information, send email to:

ciccsig@stc-chicago.org

Corporate Background Check

Online job postings from unregulated sites, such as Craigslist, can be subject to scams. To protect yourself, avoid anonymous postings and verify the employer's contact information. STC member Vicki Byrd recommends using Hoover's corporate research web site to conduct an initial background check.

For a free search on corporate information, go to:

www.hoovers.com

STC Chicago Membership News

Transferring Members:

Carrie A. Hannigan
Susan von Rothkirch
Marie L. Stouffer

New Members:

Shira Bettinger
Catherine DeLarche
Cicilie Gildersleeve
Andrea Howland
Ann Mikulay
Csaba Nemeth
Jonathan H. Sachs
Rachael M. Winter Ω



STC Chicago Membership at a Glance

As of February, 2008:

Total Members: 382
Associate Fellows: 9
Fellows: 8
Senior Members: 218
Members: 134
Student Members: 13Ω



STC Membership at a Glance

As of December 31, 2007:

Total members: 15,294
Members residing in the U.S.: 12,859
Members residing in Canada: 1,458
Members residing elsewhere: 977
Total communities*: 155Ω
*Includes 104 professional chapters, 30 student chapters, and 21 SIGs. Ω

“Thursdays @ STC Chicago” Provide a Unique Networking Opportunity

By Russ Friend, Associate Fellow, Chicago Chapter

In February 2007, STC Chicago started a program that has become quite popular with its members. If your community covers a large geographic area, or has a large number of members, this program may work well for you too.

An Idea Forms

Back in the winter of 2004, co-worker and fellow STC member Malcolm Culbertson and I were lamenting the declining numbers STC Chicago. Malcolm (who later became our chapter secretary) had a brain flash: What if there were a way for practicing technical communicators to meet informally to discuss innovative trends in the field, present their latest projects, and network with colleagues? He envisioned folks gathering at someone's home in addition to the chapter's monthly meetings and special events. We acknowledged that our declining attendance numbers were in part due to the large geographical spread of the region (known as “Chicagoland”). We thought that an effort like this could help members, past members, and non-members stay connected. When our conversation ended, the idea stayed in Malcolm's long-term memory.

About 18 months later, while Malcolm was participating in a meeting to brainstorm ideas for the STC transformation initiative, he remembered this idea. Chapter President Linda Jansak (who was then vice president) liked the recommendation, and suggested scheduling gatherings at local venues for lunch. Any member could call for and organize a gathering at a location of his or her choosing, and post it on our Yahoo! Groups announcements list. Linda and others agreed that an idea like this could help members network with other folks who might find it hard to make it to the regular monthly chapter events. If people had a specific topic in mind, they could handle it in any way they liked.

The Plan Takes Shape

A few months later, Linda mentioned the idea to chapter member Mary Sojoodi Whalen. Mary loved the idea and wanted to implement it right away. “The point is that this whole thing is casual, so we didn't need to let more time pass while we made the perfect plan,” Mary says. Linda suggested that we hold the meetings on the first Thursday of each month and call the program “Thursdays @ STC Chicago.” In February 2007, 14 members attended our first event in Schaumburg. Soon afterward, Mary started encouraging members to “host” at a variety of locations, and several people volunteered.

To publicize the Thursdays program, a new area was added to the chapter Web site dedicated to announcing the various locations for the gatherings. Since the site uses a content management system (CMS), members can supply new locations and contact information each month. The site allows for links to MapQuest or Google Maps and restaurant Web sites, along with the e-mail addresses of the organizers (which are used by prospective attendees to request seat reservations).

As a result of this ad hoc collaborative effort, members have gathered at as many as six simultaneous locations on a given Thursday. Attendance has ranged from three to 20 people per location. The organizers include chapter officers and members who just want to meet with their peers. These free gatherings are open to members and non-members alike. Attendees pay for their own food and drinks. Because of this initiative, we have folks looking forward to meeting with their peers as part of their workday.

For additional details about the “Thursdays @ STC Chicago” networking program, visit www.stc-chicago.com. Ω

How to Put On a Web Seminar

By Jane Smith, Associate Fellow

The Instructional Design and Learning Special Interest Group (IDL SIG) was the first SIG to sponsor and put on a Web seminar (in March 2006). Since then, we've put on two more. Through the planning and management of those Web seminars, we've learned many lessons. To provide tips for others, I'll divide the process of producing a Web seminar into several stages:

Planning

Begin planning your first Web seminar six to eight months in advance of the date. For subsequent seminars, you can compress the timeline. Key decisions you'll make during the planning stage include:

- Selecting the speaker and topic through an RFP process or by invitation. We've found the invitation route takes less time and allows you to control the topic more effectively to meet the needs of your members—as gauged, perhaps, by a member survey.
- Selecting the date and time. After trying hard to plan our Web seminars on the same day of the week and time as those offered by the national STC office—but overlapping once—we strongly recommend that you select a day of the week other than Wednesday. Keeping the time at 1 p.m. Eastern Time works pretty well for people, except if you have a large international audience. We have made our seminars available to our international audience on a recorded basis.
- Deciding the duration. We have provided a one-hour presentation followed by a 20-minute question-and-answer period, and that has worked well. Since our Web seminars are very interactive, the hour goes quickly. We often intersperse question periods in the hour as well.
- Determining the price. We have viewed our Web seminars as a service to our members and have

kept the price affordable: \$50 for members, \$65 for non-members. With this pricing, we have always made some money even after paying our speaker.

- Evaluating the seminar. It's important to plan your evaluation process at the beginning. If you plan to have an online survey, you'll need to involve your Web committee or someone else to set up the evaluation and gather and analyze the data.

Selecting the Tool

While selecting the tool is part of planning, it deserves its own topic because of its importance. Several factors are critical in choosing the tool:

With regards to functionality, typical options include:

- Ability to upload a PowerPoint presentation
- Web interface for production and presentation
- Teleconferencing capabilities
- Combined phone and presentation tool, especially for the Web interface
- Ability to mute and unmute all phone lines at any point during the presentation
- Ability to enable participants to “raise hands” to respond to the presenter's questions or to ask their own—with a Web interface that makes it easy for production personnel
- Chat capability, preferably with the ability to turn the entire group chat off and on during the presentation
- Subgroup chat capability, which allows smaller groups of participants to engage in chats, role plays, or other activities
- Ability to present polling questions along with the answer distribution

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- Ability to share an application with another participant; this functionality is only useful for small groups, but, for tool training, it's ideal for creating interactivity and enabling participants to try out procedures

The IDL SIG has always insisted on a high level of interactivity between participants and the presenter, so many of the above functions are critical. There are a number of good tools available. We have used Accu-Conference, and it works well. I can provide a referral to any community so that it can benefit from our SIG's good introductory rate. The national STC office uses Genesys and will be looking into providing accounts to communities at a very affordable rate as well.

Publicity

Critical to the success of your Web seminar is timely publicity. This includes getting the word out to your community members, all STC members, and members of related communities outside STC. We generally open registration six to seven weeks prior to the seminar and plan to have our first round of publicity go out at that time. We send a second reminder three weeks later, with a final reminder about the cutoff date one week prior to the event.

Registration

Our webmaster had coded our registration process on the Web, which interfaces to a database that both he and the treasurer can access. This functionality allows us to track payments and issue login and call-in information to registrants. We take checks and PayPal payments, with a check registration cutoff date of ten days prior to the event.

Production

The first stage in production is preproduction. At this point, we work with our presenter to ensure interactiv-

ity in the seminar. Using sound instructional design principles, we review his or her presentation and provide recommendations on where and how to build in interaction with polling questions, chats, phone conversations, and other activities, based on the functionality of the tool.

Seven to 10 days before the event, we upload the presentation to the tool, create the polling questions, and prepare the presentation for the rehearsal. Two to three days before the event, the production team meets with the presenter for a rehearsal. At this time, we assign responsibilities and do a full walk-through to ensure that everyone understands his or her role, including when to open chats, phone lines, and other interactive elements. The rehearsal is critical to the success and smooth operation of the event.

Presentation/Execution

At the time of the presentation, start the Web and phone interfaces for the team at least 15 minutes before the official start time. Start with an introduction. Introduce the Web seminar presenter and topic. Then get into the presentation as quickly as possible. At the end, thank the presenter and all the team members by name and responsibility. Then ask the participants to complete the evaluation. Some tools enable you to send participants to a Web site upon closing the Web seminar, which ensures greater participation in the evaluation.

Evaluation

Plan to keep your evaluation short, with most of the questions based on a rating scale. But do include a few open-ended questions to capture more detailed feedback as well as ideas for future seminars.

Immediately following the Web seminar, we have the

STC Chicago Member Profile - Kelly Oja



STC member	W. Kelly Oja
Member since	2000
Job title	Technical Writer / SharePoint Administrator for Newedge Financial, Inc.
STC affiliation	Senior Member
Years of Experience	5+
Tech comm philosophy (10 words or less)	KISS
Favorite STC moment	Probably being asked to serve as the Membership manager for the chapter.
Favorite work moment	I have a number of favorite work moments, but the two I remember the most are how I got my internship and how I got my first real job in the field. Both were prime examples of God's perfect timing.
Working on now	Rebranding documentation and SharePoint content for Newedge Financial, Inc.
Favorite movie	<i>The Usual Suspects</i>
Favorite music	Wide range depending on mood. Currently listening to <i>Within Temptation</i> and <i>Apocolyptica</i> .
Favorite book	The "Richard" trilogy (<i>Things as They Are, Everything to Live For, & The Thin Mountain Air</i>) by Paul Horgan. Just finished reading <i>The Last Templar</i> by Raymond Khoury.
Favorite technical communication gurus	John L. Locke (<i>The DeVoicing of Society</i>), Earl E. McDowell (<i>Interviewing Practices for Technical Writers</i>), and several contributors to <i>Intercom</i> .
Where I'd like to be 10 years from now	If not in Chicago, I'd like to be in Colorado or Montana.
Website and/or blog	I really don't maintain my blog, but I have quite a few pictures on Flickr accessible from the chapter website.

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production crew and presenter call back into a different conference line—for a few minutes—in order to get some immediate feedback and to once again thank everyone. A full debrief should take place at a later time, preferably within a week. Through these team evaluations, we fine-tune our process for the next time. After several iterations, the process is well oiled and should go smoothly.

Jane Smith, a Certified Performance Technologist, has developed training for classroom, multimedia, and e-learning for more than 20 years. As owner of JEM Communications, LLC, she provides course design as well as workshops on instructional design and e-learning. Jane is the immediate past manager of the Instructional Design and Learning (IDL) SIG. She lives in Sedona, Arizona. You can e-mail her at jane@jemcommunications.com. Ω

Remember: Contact us to Cancel

The Program Committee offers this friendly reminder: If cannot attend a meeting for which you registered, please contact STC Chicago to cancel.

- If you cannot attend a meeting, you may find a substitute to attend in your place. Email program@stc-chicago.org with a message including the substitute's name.
- If you cannot find someone to replace you, email program@stc-chicago.org and cancel your reservation by noon the day before the meeting. At that time, you can request a full refund or ask to register for a future meeting.

Please help us use your dues wisely by calling in advance to cancel.Ω

Register Guests at Member Rate

As an incentive for members to introduce their colleagues and friends to STC, the Chicago Chapter is allowing members who register and pay in advance to bring a guest to any regular chapter meeting at the same discounted rate that members pay.

This offer applies only to prepaid online registrations and is limited to one guest per member per meeting. The member must include the guest's name on the registration form. Non-members who register separately, rather than as guests of members, are not eligible for the guest rate.

For more information, contact the Program Committee at program@stc-chicago.org. Ω

Upcoming Meetings



Tuesday, March 12: Awards Banquet

Join us for the STC Chicago annual awards banquet, with Italian entrees served family style.

When: 5:30 p.m. (dinner at 6:30, ceremony at 7:30)

Where: Francesca's Amici, 174 N. York Road, Elmhurst.

Register at: www.stc-chicago.org (click on "Meetings" then "Meeting Registration").

For directions: Call 630-279-7970 or visit the web site: www.miafrancesca.com/restaurants/amici/location.asp.Ω

Become an STC Chicago Sponsor

STC Chicago provides sponsorship opportunities to those interested in supporting our programs, workshops, and special events.

For details about sponsorships, including an opportunity to sponsor the 2008 STC Chicago Awards Banquet, please contact Linda Jansak, president@stc-chicago.org.Ω

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Half page (7.5"x4.5"): \$300 (1 issue)
Whole page (7.5"x9"): \$500 (1 issue).
Discounts for multiple printings.

The advertisement and payment must be received by the 20th of the month before the next published issue of the newsletter (e.g., submit ad and payment by November 20th for the December issue). We will not run your ad until payment is received. Submit ad files in electronic copy only in .TIF, .GIF, or .JPG format to byline@stc-chicago.org.

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