

Byline



Bi-Monthly Newsletter for STC Chicago Members

President's Message Fall Brings Changes

By Adam Evans



Several weeks ago I traveled to my parents' home in Pennsylvania where I discovered that fall is here! The Appalachian Mountain leaves were shimmering in the evening sun—a sight that I

took for granted growing up, but miss now in Chicago.

And with fall comes a host of changes. I'm now dodging school buses on my way to work. The Cubs season has drawn to a close. And the city streets are adding fallen leaves to their litter piles.

STC isn't immune from change with our 2014-2015 program year back in full swing. In August we featured round table discussions from myself, Linda Kelley, and Elizabeth Burke on various tech comm topics. In September, Tanya Blakley provided an eLearning session, demonstrating the differences between Adobe Captivate and Articulate Storyline. And for October, we're continuing our focus on tools by talking about SharePoint. Watch your email for more details!

But that's not all on our calendars. Our annual Technical Communication Competition just closed, and judging has started. Our Get Real! Interview Program is also available for students and anyone else new to the industry. Get Real! pairs you with a seasoned professional in STC to give you the opportunity to ask questions about the field. To learn more, see the [Get Real! page](#) of our website.

If that weren't enough, don't forget about the Summit! Even though it's months away, it's not too early to start making plans to attend. Several of our chapter members are helping organize the Summit, with STC Chicago member Chris Hester even serving as chair of the conference. This year's Summit takes place in Columbus, OH, on June 21-24.

Finally, and as always, if you attend an STC Chicago event this year, please take the time to introduce yourself. I want to hear what you're doing in the field, and I'd love to help you find a way to get more involved in the chapter. Ω

Early Renewal Discount

Our events feature reduced pricing for STC Chicago members, so make sure you renew early!

Read about the many benefits of membership and join or renew online [here](#). Ω

inside this issue

October Program	2
Recap: eLearning Tools	2
Goodbye PDFs	3
Seeking Tech Writer	4
Member Spotlight	5
Fifty Years with Bill	5

Find us online!



October Program: SharePoint's Popularity in the Enterprise

Join STC Chicago on Thursday, October 23, for an informative evening with fellow technical communicators. Speaker Jack Fruh will share his knowledge about SharePoint, one of Microsoft's most successful server products of all time. We'll learn about what market trends and technical advantages have made SharePoint so attractive and take a look at where things are heading, with a predictive look at what companies will be using 10 years from now.

Jack Fruh is a SharePoint Enterprise Administrator for a Fortune 500 company and oversees servers running SharePoint 2013, 2010, and 2007. Jack enjoys helping others learn technology and SharePoint. He's on the planning committee for SharePoint Saturday Chicago Suburbs, has spoken at numerous SharePoint events, and blogs regularly of his experiences on sharepointjack.com.

[Register here.](#)

Thursday, October 23

Networking 6:00 PM

Dinner 6:30 PM

Program 7:00 PM

Olive Garden, 1211 Butterfield Rd., Downers Grove

\$20 Members | \$30 Non-members | \$15 Students

Bring a friend!

Every STC member who brings a guest to an STC Chicago event is automatically entered to win a gift basket full of delicious goodies. Bring a friend and join the fun! Ω

January marks STC Chicago's 60th anniversary, and we're planning something big! Keep your eyes peeled for news about our special event.

Recap: Rapid eLearning Tools

By Becky Hall

STC Chicago's September meeting was another great opportunity to network with colleagues I know and meet some new people. The topic, "Rapid eLearning Tools: Adobe Captivate and Articulate Storyline," gave me a nice taste of how two of the many technical communication tools out there can be used to develop eLearning. Tanya Blakley walked us through some of the eLearning challenges she faces in her role as an Instructional Specialist, concentrating on how these tools are able to help her design meaningful eLearning for users in her company.

After introducing the concept of rapid eLearning, Tanya did a live demonstration of some of the benefits each of these tools offer, showing examples similar to projects she's developed with each tool to highlight different features.

In Adobe Captivate, Tanya showed us how she created simulations of proprietary software so that users could actually step through a process without needing access to confidential information. The act of moving the mouse and clicking on the appropriate interface elements helps reinforce the learning within the module and allows positive feedback when the user succeeds in simulating the task.

In Articulate Storyline, Tanya's demonstration included the ability to create scenes, which are collections of slides. The outline view in Storyline gives you an overall sense of the flow of the eLearning project you're building. Tanya also demonstrated states. Storyline includes a variety of characters, both illustrated and photographed, with different expressions. You can build a question into your eLearning and have the state of the character change in reaction to the option selected by the user. For example, a correct answer could cause the character to smile and give you a thumbs-up.

The take-aways for me from the evening were that each of these tools is a great choice for eLearning, but the approach and interfaces are quite different. I've used Captivate, and I appreciate the level of detail and control. While I haven't worked with Storyline, the interface is intriguing, and it looks like you could quickly build a more "human" element to the interactions using the built-in characters and states. Ω

Goodbye PDFs, Hello 21st Century

By Adam Evans

This article is based on a presentation Adam Evans gave at the 2014 Summit in Phoenix, AZ, and then again at an STC Chicago meeting in August 2014.

A few years ago I read a blog post by Michael Stewart titled “PDFs, North Korea, and the Iron Curtain of Product Help” that really stuck with me. In just six paragraphs, Stewart draws striking parallels between PDF documentation and the Communist rule of North Korean and Soviet Russia. A biting comparison, certainly, but he makes his point. Fast forward a few years to when I started my current job, and you can imagine my shock to learn that a modern, forward-thinking software company was publishing only PDF documentation. I quickly initiated a project to deprecate PDFs and deliver public, online documentation. Here’s how we did it.

First, I’d like you to understand some contextual items:

- The documentation team uses MadCap Flare and consisted of five technical writers at the time.
- The team maintained their writerly responsibilities while executing this process.
- This content transfer took three months to complete.

The problem that we faced was that as a documentation department, we produced over 40 PDFs that were posted on a password-protected site. Not only was our content siloed between so many PDFs, but our clients had to log in before they even started deciding between the various PDFs.

Because content was so segmented, our clients were requesting access to the documentation online. For some, that meant doing away with the authentication piece. But for most, they were looking for a one-stop shop for all documentation in a web help format.

As a team, we were in favor of this transition because maintaining 40 PDFs took a lot of time to manage. Anytime we made an update, we had to regenerate and repost—sometimes multiple times a day. It became a logistical nightmare that wasn’t sustainable long term.

So we decided to create an online help site using Flare’s HTML5 output. To do this, we went through four phases.

Phase 1: Take Inventory

Before you can transition any content, you first have to know all the content you’re transitioning. And while that sounds logical, you often find content you weren’t aware you owned. For example, there were several fringe documents that we assumed other teams managed. When we followed up with those teams to confirm ownership, we discovered they thought we owned them. We had to reconcile these unknowns before we moved forward.

We then mapped each piece of content we wanted to transfer. For us, that meant creating a bulleted list of each PDF and each heading within a PDF. Think the longest bulleted list you’ve ever seen.

Phase 2: Decide the online structure

Chances are, the online version of your content won’t match the structure you have in your PDFs. For instance, our PDFs contained introductions for how to use the document. That content was no longer relevant in an online setting. Therefore, you need to establish the structure of your online content. Is it task-based, feature-based, something else?

We chose a feature-based approach, and created another bulleted list of how we envisioned the structure on a website.

Phase 3: Create a content map

Content maps come in all forms, so you need to find what works best for you. For us, we assigned a number to each heading in a PDF (our first bulleted list from phase 1) and then mapped that number to our new structure (the second bulleted list from phase 2). Our new structure was starting to take form with actual content.

Phase 4: Transfer the content

When it came to the heavy lifting, we assigned each team member specific topics, and everyone was responsible for transferring that content in MadCap Flare. Depending on how your content is structured and the tool you’re using, your process may be more or less labor intensive. For us, it was mostly a matter of rearranging tables of contents and ensuring the actual content was authored in a way that made sense online.

If you’re trying to generate a timeline for your own content transfer, phase four took us the longest, totaling about a

[Continued on page 4](#)

Seeking Student Intern or Part-time Entry-Level Technical Writer

By Elizabeth Burke

Do you know a student looking for an internship or an entry level technical writer looking for a part-time position? Enterprise Recovery Systems (ERS) is seeking a Technical Writer/ Intern for an immediate documentation effort.

The Technical Writer will create and maintain regulatory and Information Technology documentation under the supervision and guidance of a Senior Technical Writer using Enterprise Recovery Systems standards and guidelines. Specific responsibilities include the following:

- Create and deliver clear and concise procedural documents and job aids for use by ERS employees.
- Use established technical writing and ERS documentation standards and guidelines.
- Engage with Subject Matter Experts to gather content and verify the integrity and accuracy of process and procedural documents and job aids.
- Engage with the Senior Technical Writer to confirm documents meet standards and guidelines.
- Alert the Senior Technical Writer to any project issues, concerns, requests, feedback, and shifts in schedules
- Manage time effectively.
- Provide weekly status updates and report any issues or risks to the Senior Technical Writer.

Skills and Experience

The candidate must be a self-starter with the technical insight to document processes and procedures in easy-to-understand step-by-step directions with the guidance of the Senior Technical Writer.

Necessary skills and experience include the following:

- Seeking a degree in writing or a related field, an analytical field such as Science or IT with a proficiency in writing, or work experience.
- Excellent oral and written communication skills with the ability to develop and deliver technical content for technical and non-technical audiences.

- Proficiency with the following tools:
 - ♦ Microsoft Office Suite
 - ♦ Microsoft Visio
 - ♦ TechSmith Snagit
 - ♦ Adobe Acrobat

Notes

- As part of the ERS hiring process, the candidate must successfully pass a background check including fingerprinting and references.
- Samples of previous work required.

Contact

If you are interested, please forward a resumé and course or work samples to Elizabeth L. Burke, eburke@ersinc.com or call (630) 574-3113, X-7147. Ω

Goodbye PDFs

Continued from page 3

month's time. However, we were also nearing a release and our extra availability was lessening. But in the end, we delivered a new documentation site with content optimized for the web.

Lessons learned

I learned several lessons through the process, some about time and project management, others about team communication, but the big take-aways for me were as follows:

- **Just do it.** No one will ever tell you it's time to restructure or transfer content. It's something you have to decide to do and to prioritize.
- **Make it a priority.** We all have a backlog a mile long and a to-do list the size of Mount Everest. Sometimes the most discouraging thing I can do is to look at my ever-growing list of flagged emails. But executing a project like this that has immediate visibility to your colleagues and clients has long-term benefits.
- **You benefit.** Online content allows you to explore opportunities that PDFs don't allow, like mobile, e-books, dynamic content, and more. Do yourself a favor and stay up on trends and choose a delivery method that allows you to embrace the needs of your clients, thereby bringing value to your organization. Ω

Member Spotlight: Jessica Daugherty



Jessica Daugherty is a Technical Writer at kCura.

What are you working on now?

I'm currently wrapping up the loose ends on documentation for our company's next big release, and getting ready for a presentation at our user conference.

How long have you been working in tech comm?

Six years.

When and how did you first get involved with STC?

I first got involved in STC in 2006 as a college student.

What is your most common role as a technical communicator? Do you play any additional roles?

My most common role is Technical Writer, by far. I've also held the Web Design Intern title and student newspaper Staff Writer. I'm also the PR Manager for STC Chicago—you know, the person that sends you all those emails!

What's the most significant thing you've learned from being involved with STC?

To be flexible and have fun!

What's your tech comm philosophy?

Give the people what they want—clear and up front—no treasure hunts for answers.

What's your favorite work moment?

The end of the week at my team retro. The assigned “team” for that week brings one savory and one sweet snack to share as we recap the week's highs and lows.

How long have you lived in Chicago?

Almost 2.5 years.

What are you currently reading?

It Starts With Food by Dallas and Melissa Hartwig.

What would be your ideal vacation?

The beach, mountains, and forests. So basically, California.

What's your favorite movie?

The hilarious and flawless Baz Luhrmann creation, *Strictly Ballroom*.

What do you like to do on weekends?

Sleep in. When I'm not sleeping, I like to explore corners of the city, take weekend getaways, and experiment in my “test kitchen.”

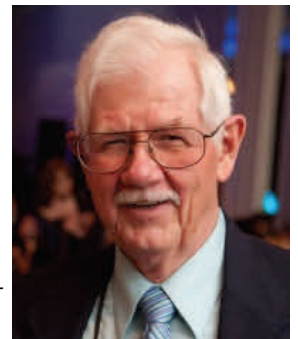
Where would you like to be 10 years from now?

Somewhere TBD, opening my co-owned bakery/coffee shop/creative space and blogging about local sights and cuisine. Ω

Fifty Years with Bill

By Bill Leavitt

Fellow STC Chicagoan Bill Leavitt has been a member of STC for 50 years. Since June, he's been reflecting on his long career as a technical communicator by guest blogging regularly on STC's Notebook under the title “Fifty Years with Bill.” Below are reprints of two of his blog posts.



What Is Technical Writing?

Reprinted from STC's Notebook, June 4, 2015

Over my 50 years in technical communication I have been in many discussions about how to define our profession. Like many of you, I have my own definition. Thus far, however, no one has suggested a better definition that fits all our members.

There are three considerations in developing an all-encompassing definition. First, it should cover nearly all our members. Second, it should reflect the qualities that successful technical communicators have. And third, it should separate us from all other types of writing.

In my case, I have done five different types of technical writing during my career, and I must make sure that they all

Continued on page 6

Fifty Years with Bill

Continued from page 5

fit my definition. I started out as a technical writer in the field of chemicals and liquefaction of the elements of air (oxygen, nitrogen, carbon dioxide, argon, hydrogen and neon). That was really chemical or engineering writing. Then I worked in the space program doing scientific or engineering writing. Then I worked for a building materials manufacturing company doing what I would call construction and architectural writing. As a retiree, I worked for a while doing software documentation for a medical company; that could also be considered medical writing. Finally, I wrote a book that helps people figure out how to plan a happy, healthy, and fulfilling retirement; and that was still another type of technical writing.

So how can I make all these fit my definition? Well, they are all types of writing or communication *that help someone to do something*. In the final evaluation, that is what we do that is different from any other type of writing. Our job is successfully telling people how to do something that they need to be able to do. No other kind of writing that I know of does this (except possibly some types of educational writing, although I would say people who do educational writing to help someone do something are actually doing technical writing). Thus, there are many types of technical writing, but the common thread is that they all are intended to help someone do something.

So what are the characteristics of all technical writers or technical communicators? First and foremost, they are generally caring people who have a strong desire to help others. They have the ability of understand technical concepts and are able to clearly communicate information so that others can do what they want to learn how to do.

What do you think?

The Houston Parties

Reprinted from STC's Notebook, June 25, 2015

STC went through many major changes in its personality during the late 1960s and 1970s. For instance, after World War II, most technical writers were engineers or technical people who learned to be technical writers because it became necessary as a result of the technology explosion that got its start with the war.

In 1964, when I joined STWP (predecessor organization to STC), the typical member was a 50+-year-old man. By the mid-1970s, the membership changed from about 75% men to about 60% women; that is, to half as many men and twice as many women. Average age dropped to the 30s or early 40s. These changes in the demographics of technical writers had a great effect on atmosphere at the annual conference, which went from formal, serious educational seminars to more casual and exciting events, with lots of evening socializing.

The most memorable example of the social changes was the "Houston Party," an annual event which took place from the early 1960s through the mid-1980s. While I have no explanation why it was the Houston Chapter that hosted these parties, my guess would be that since Houston was the center of space technology, it might have been a more exciting place.

Anyway, the format was as follows: A member of the Houston Chapter booked a large guest room or small suite in the conference hotel. Invited guests would stand or sit on the floor. When someone wanted to tell a joke, he or she would get into a line. When your turn came, you would take off your shoes, stand on the bed, and tell away. The value of your joke would be determined by the amount of laughter and applause of the audience, and often the bawdiness of the joke.

There were adult beverages to be had and most people partook of them. The parties usually lasted much of the night, and the numbers of people varied from crowded to wall-to-wall. The parties were usually crazy and wild, and everyone wanted to be invited. Unfortunately, the invitation list was limited to the maximum capacity of the room.

As the new demographics changed and the younger members got older and more mature, the parties became more conservative and, eventually, less exciting. Finally, around 1984-86, the parties petered out completely.

There are only a few current STC members who have experienced these parties, and who could give you more details about some of the antics therein, but I'm not sure they would want to be identified. I believe I attended every one of the parties except in 1982, when I was unable to attend the annual conference. Ω

STC Chicago Chapter Leaders | 2014-2015

President

Adam Evans, president@stc-chicago.com

Immediate Past President

Cheri Noble, ipp@stc-chicago.com

Vice President

Betsy Maaks, vp@stc-chicago.com

Secretary

Cynthia Laughlin, secretary@stc-chicago.com

Treasurer

John Hartigan, treasurer@stc-chicago.com

Nominating

MaryKay Grueneberg, Carla Martinek, Steve Napora, Donna Wampach,
nominating@stc-chicago.com

Alliance

Beth Najberg

Bylaws

Dan Dornbrook

Competition

Cynthia Laughlin, competition@stc-chicago.com

eLearning & Technology Showcase

Linda Jansak

Historian

Bill Leavitt

Internships

Elizabeth Burke

Membership

Dan Dornbrook, membership@stc-chicago.com

Newsletter

Linda Kelley, byline@stc-chicago.com

Programs

Cheri Noble, program@stc-chicago.com

Publicity/Marketing

Jessica Daugherty, pr@stc-chicago.com

Scholarships

Josée Martens, scholarship@stc-chicago.com

Science Fair

Cheri Noble

Sponsorship

Francis Bao, sponsorship@stc-chicago.com

Web/Online

Jessica Behles, web@stc-chicago.com

Byline

Editor

Linda Kelley, byline@stc-chicago.com

Advertising Manager

Francis Bao, advertising@stc-chicago.com

Byline is a bi-monthly publication of the STC Chicago Chapter of the Society for Technical Communication (STC), a non-profit membership organization serving the needs of technical communication professionals.

STC mission statement: Creating and supporting a forum for communities of practice in the profession of technical communication.

News guidelines: Send articles to byline@stc-chicago.com. Preferred format is a Microsoft® Word document file via email. We reserve the right to edit for style and space.

Advertising: We encourage advertising that follows STC guidelines and promotes services to STC Chicago members.

Half page (7.5"x4.5"): \$300 (1 issue)

Whole page (7.5"x9"): \$500 (1 issue)

Discounts for multiple issues

The advertisement and payment must be received by the 20th of the month before the next published issue of the newsletter. (Byline is published in February, April, June, August, October, and December.) 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.com.

Publication and reprints: Entire contents Copyright © 2013 STC Chicago. Permission to reproduce any part of this publication is granted if printed credit is given to Byline, the author (if known), and STC Chicago, and if a printed copy is sent to the editor.

Copyright statement: Byline invites submissions for consideration for publication. By submitting an article, you implicitly grant a license to Byline to run the article and for other STC publications to reprint it without permission. The writer holds copyright. In your cover letter, please let the editor know if this article has run elsewhere and if it has been submitted for consideration to other publications.

Subscriptions: The current issue of Byline and all archived editions are available on the [STC Chicago website](http://stc-chicago.com).

For membership information, contact STC at
Society for Technical Communication
9401 Lee Highway | Suite 300 | Fairfax, Virginia 22031
Phone: +1 (703) 522-4114 | Fax: +1 (703) 522-2075
Email: stc@stc.com