

# Byline



Bi-Monthly Newsletter for STC Chicago Members

## President's Message Opportunities Await You

By *Betsy Maaks*



It's true that over the years during which I have participated in STC Chicago activities, I have expanded my professional knowledge

and made contacts among hundreds of talented technical communicators. That's pretty amazing and exciting to know that such a quality organization exists right in my backyard!

But what's more amazing is to see new talent start to explore the tech comm field, connect their curiosity and thirst for knowledge, and contribute their energy to the tech comm field.

I had an opportunity this week to be an interviewee in the STC Chicago chapter's Get Real! Professional Interview program. The interviewer is a student at DePaul who was looking for advice on how to meld her professional interests and talents, specifically tech comm and education. She came to the interview with nearly an hour's worth of questions. We

had a really great discussion, and some of her questions provoked some experience or thought in me from way down deep.

I'm buoyed by her quest for a meaningful career and hope that my \$0.02 was worth her time. I know that the interview experience brought an infusion of energy and meaning to my years dedicated to the tech comm field.

I'm encouraged that the field continues to grow, fed by educational programs that support the STC organization, and vice versa. STC supports educational programs as well. If you know students who could benefit from our programs, or their instructors or professors who may not have mentioned to their students that STC offers job guidance and career experience, please let one of the STC Chicago officers know. The mission of STC is to support education for tech comm professionals—it's what we're all about. Ω

## Time is running out!

Don't forget to enter the 44th annual STC Chicago Technical Communication Competition!

Entries must be postmarked by October 29, 2015.

**Get more info...**

### inside this issue

November Program	2
Wednesday Webinars	2
Judging the Competition	3
Tips on Contracting	3
Advancing Your Career	4
Member Spotlight	5
Wanted: Competition Help	5
Congratulations to...	5

Find us online!



## November Program

### MadCap Flare

Join us Thursday, November 19 in downtown Chicago for an overview of MadCap Flare from one of MadCap's own experts! This presentation is tailored for new users and provides a general overview of Flare's features and capabilities including single-sourcing, topic-based authoring, and multi-channel publishing.

Even if you already use Flare, there's more to learn! Come with questions while you have access to a MadCap specialist.

**Mike Hamilton**, MadCap's VP of Product Evangelism, will be joining us remotely. Even though he won't be here in person, you can still engage with him as if he were in the room. The evening will include a networking and dinner hour, Mike's presentation, and Q&A time.

#### Thursday, November 19

<b>6:00 PM</b>	<b>Registration and networking</b>
<b>6:30 PM</b>	<b>Dinner</b>
<b>7:30 - 8:30 PM</b>	<b>Presentation</b>

#### kCura offices

**231 S. LaSalle St., 8th Floor  
Chicago, IL 60604**

When you arrive, you must check in with the security desk, where they will have the names of all registered attendees. You'll need to provide a photo ID, and they'll give you a visitor's pass. Proceed to the 8th floor and follow the signs.

#### **\$20 Members | \$30 Non-members | \$10 Students**

A Mediterranean buffet of the following items is included with your registration:

- ♦ Organic falafel (vegetarian, gluten-free)
- ♦ Chicken shawarma (gluten-free)
- ♦ Doner kebab
- ♦ Steak shawarma
- ♦ Organic roasted red pepper hummus (vegetarian, gluten-free)
- ♦ Spring mix (vegetarian, gluten-free)
- ♦ Cucumber-tomato salad (vegetarian, gluten-free)

**Register now!**

#### About the speaker:

Prior to joining MadCap Software, Michael Hamilton served as the Product Manager for Macromedia's award-winning RoboHelp product line. As product manager of RoboHelp for most of its life, Mr. Hamilton gathered input and feedback from the customer community and guided ongoing development of the various RoboHelp products. Mr. Hamilton joined the RoboHelp family in 1999 as a founding member of the Training Solutions Program team, where he co-authored the certified training materials supporting the RoboHelp family.



Mr. Hamilton has more than 10 years of experience in training, technical communication, multimedia development, and software development at several organizations including Cymer, a leading supplier of laser illumination sources to the semiconductor industry, National Steel & Shipbuilding, and the US Navy.

Mr. Hamilton is often a featured speaker at industry events, including the STC Technical Communication Summit, the WinWriters Online Help Conferences, Forum 2000 London, the Annual Australasian Online Documentation Conferences, the European Online Documentation Conferences, and many more events. Mr. Hamilton has also appeared at the Microsoft Campus and STC regional conferences and events. Ω

### Wednesday Webinars

Don't miss our upcoming webinar, User Assistance in Agile Methodology, presented by John Hartigan. John is a product manager for Orbitz Worldwide, where he runs a team using Agile methodology. He is also Treasurer of STC Chicago.

#### **Wednesday, November 4**

**12:00 – 1:00 pm CDT**

**FREE STC Members | \$5 Non-members**

**Register now!**

**Stay tuned:** December 2 – STC Certification Program Overview by Liz Pohland, STC's Director of Communications

## Judging for the 2015 Competition

The annual STC Chicago competition has begun, and we need your expertise. We rely on our members to assess competition entries. Please consider applying to be a judge in this year's competition.

### Why should I be a judge for the STC Competition?

We are recruiting judges for the annual STC-Chicago Technical Writing Competition. Judges have a unique opportunity to review entries from different categories and industries. Entries have included websites, manuals, help documentation, newsletters, etc. Past entries have come from industries as diverse as aerospace, manufacturing, agriculture, software, and medical associations. Seeing such different work can be educational as well as inspiring. You also get to interact with other judges and benefit from their experience.

### How does judging work?

Judges are placed in three-member teams with a designated team lead. The team members receive 3 - 8 entries that must be reviewed over a two-month period. Each judge reviews the entries using a four-page form that highlights different elements of technical communication. Responses are shared within the team and modified if necessary. Once the judging team agrees on an award level for an entry, the team lead communicates with the judging coordinator.

### What does a team lead do?

Team leads need to set up a review schedule. Ideally, each team should be completing a least one entry per week. If there are difference of opinion, the team lead brings the team together (either by phone, online, or in person) to discuss. Once consensus is reached, the team lead emails all entries to the judging coordinator along with the recommended award level.

### Where do I sign up?

Go to [www.stc-chicago.com](http://www.stc-chicago.com) and apply.

### When will I get my entries?

Entries are handed out at the judging orientation in November. The orientation will be held at the office of the CARA Group in Oakbrook. Note: Entries cannot be mailed. Ω

## August Program Recap

### Tips from the Tech Comm Contractor Panel

At our meeting on August 27 at the Carleton Hotel in Oak Park, panel members Rebecca C. Hall, Chris Hester, and Andi Dunn shared the following suggestions, among others:

- ◆ Never work without a contract.
- ◆ Have multiple rates depending on what you're doing.
- ◆ Don't settle—start with the amount you need to make and allow time for networking, sickness, and vacation.
- ◆ If your package price is too high for the client, you can renegotiate and remove parts they don't need. Design projects modularly with pieces you can add or subtract.
- ◆ Know the value of your skills and your knowledge. Don't provide a detailed outline. Don't leave anything behind.
- ◆ Find out up front what resources are available and which you supply.
- ◆ Get a lawyer to help with the first contract. Also hire an accountant.
- ◆ Your contract should say you're not responsible for errors and omissions and/or contain a disclaimer of warranty.



*(l to r) Linda Jansak moderates for panel members Rebecca C. Hall, Chris Hester, and Andi Dunn.*

- ◆ Don't just do what a client asks for. If there's a gap and you can fill it, do it.
- ◆ Set your rates higher than you think you should to cover benefits (software, computer, Internet, phone, insurance, double Social Security, repairs, etc.)
- ◆ Beware of scope creep.
- ◆ Keep in mind that a consultant is not only the tech writer but also the project manager, relationship manager, etc.
- ◆ Instead of a portfolio, you can write up case studies of what you've worked on.
- ◆ Help the customer to build long-term value. Build trust, so that when they have a need, they'll come back to you.
- ◆ At the end of the project, provide a document that explains the final product and what they've got—the files, macros, template, etc.—and gives them ownership.
- ◆ Be prepared to bill monthly and then wait as many as 50-80 days before the client pays the first installment.
- ◆ If the work dries up temporarily, add additional technical expertise and training. Network, send emails, use LinkedIn— let people know. To stay motivated, get outside, do volunteer work, challenge yourself to learn, take an online class, find a coach, take free workshops.
- ◆ Recommended books: *The Trusted Advisor* (book and workbook) by Robert M. Galford and *What Clients Love* by Harry Beckwith. Ω
- ◆ Tech writers are often perceived as a loss center. Document everything you do that makes or saves your company money.
- ◆ Review your goals at the end of the year to see what you've accomplished and what you need to do next year.
- ◆ The most desired tool skills for online authoring are Acrobat, hard coding or editing HTML, single-source authoring, XML, CMS, and DITA.
- ◆ Find a job site aggregator like Indeed and enter your ZIP code to see what companies in your area are looking for.
- ◆ Go to LinkedIn to find the hiring manager. Contact them or find another tech writer at that company and ask if you can send them your resume to submit to HR for you. If there's a referral bonus, they may be willing to do it.
- ◆ Ask a hiring manager to tell you a little bit about what they're looking for so you have a context to answer their questions. Then say, "I have that—let me show you how."
- ◆ Don't be afraid to cut the interview short if you don't like the interviewer and don't want to work for them.
- ◆ Volunteer at a charity to get experience—write press releases, policies and procedures, etc.
- ◆ You can ask for other perks besides money (conferences, education, etc.). Ω

## September Program Recap

### Advancing Your Career

On September 17, at RAM Restaurant & Brewery in Schaumburg, the always entertaining Jack Molisani shared his thoughts (and chocolate) about identifying and acting upon your career strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. Here are some things we learned:

- ◆ Strengths and weakness are internal, opportunities and threats are external. Examples of strengths are good verbal communication skills and experience; examples of weaknesses are age, lack of experience, and poor skills; an example of an opportunity is showing how you posi-



*Jack Molisani presents at our September program meeting.*

## Member Spotlight

### Kayla Womack



*Kayla Womack is a graduate student at DePaul University in the Writing, Rhetoric, and Discourse program. She currently works as a Development Intern for Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Chicago.*

#### What are you working on now?

Right now, I'm working on creating a one-page resume using HTML5 and CSS3, using Dreamweaver.

#### How long have you been working in tech comm?

3 years.

#### When and how did you first get involved with STC?

My undergraduate Technical Writing professor suggested I get involved with STC, especially if I wanted to be a tech writer.

#### What's the strangest job you've had?

Working in fast food. It was so out of the box for me which is what made it strange. I had never pictured myself working in that industry, but it was fun while it lasted!

#### How long have you lived in Chicago?

I was born and raised in Chicago. I've lived here my entire life.

#### What are you currently reading?

I am currently reading "Going Clear" by Lawrence Wright.

#### What would be your ideal vacation?

One week, with no technology, on the island of Guam!

#### Where would you like to be 10 years from now?

10 years from now I want to be well traveled. I hope I will have traveled the world and even have lived abroad for a year or so. I will have a PhD and will most likely be teaching at a university. Ω

### Save the date for our holiday party!

**When:** Thursday, December 10

**Where:** Carleton Hotel, Oak Park

**Guest speakers:** Bernard Aschwanden (President of STC) and Christopher Ward (WebWorks, a 60th anniversary sponsor)

## Wanted: Technical Communicators to Help with this Year's Annual Chapter Competition

Have you been looking for a way to become more involved with the Chicago STC chapter? Have you wished you could see technical material from other industries? Have you wanted to meet other writers, designers, and content specialists? If so, the annual Chicago Chapter Competition is right for you.

Needed: Volunteers who can

- ◆ Help publicize the competition.
- ◆ Answer entrant's questions.
- ◆ Train judges.
- ◆ Coordinate entries and responses.
- ◆ Organize and run a review team.
- ◆ Follow up with entrants and judges.
- ◆ Order awards.
- ◆ Plan the annual banquet.

The call for entries and judges has already gone out this year, and the response has been good, but there is still plenty of time to enter. Coordination of judges and entries has already begun and continues until the competition ends the first week of December. The award and banquet planning will begin in February 2016. No matter what your schedule or skill set, there are many ways you can help with the competition.

Members and non-members are welcome. Email [competition@stc-chicago.com](mailto:competition@stc-chicago.com) to sign-up or for more information. We look forward to hearing from you! Ω

## Congratulations to... Steve Johnson

Copresco Company President and CEO (and longtime STC Chicago member) Steve Johnson has won an APEX Award for Publication Excellence from Communications Concepts, Inc. Steve was honored for the "Johnson's World" column he writes for *Quick Printing* magazine. The monthly feature serves as a forum for his insights of the rapidly changing communication arts industry.



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2015 is STC Chicago's 60th year as a chapter of the Society for Technical Communication. Thank you to our generous sponsors!



## STC Chicago Chapter Leaders | 2014-2015

### President

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**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](mailto: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](mailto:byline@stc-chicago.com).

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