

Byline



Quarterly Newsletter for STC Chicago Members

President's Message - We Survived the Financial Meltdown, and All We Got Was This Funky Designer T-Shirt

By Dan Dornbrook - Chapter President

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As most of you who are reading this message know by now, the economic mess that has engulfed our nation and our world in the past year or two has hit STC hard, and the ripple effects have hit our chapter.

STC depends mainly on two sources of income: member dues and the annual conference. The economy has hurt both. Historically, the worst drops in membership renewal have been in recessions, most notably the "Dot Bomb" at the start of this decade (which wiped out much of the technological growth that fueled the growth of technical communication and STC in the 1990s) and the various slumps that followed it (including the telecommunications crash, which hit the Chicago area hard).

Members (and potential members) who are unemployed or unemployed often feel that they cannot afford STC membership, even though they are the ones who most need the networking and other connections that can lead to future work. Indeed, STC is expecting barely 60% of members to renew for 2010, in light of both the economy and the substantial dues increase to offset STC's estimated \$250-a-year cost of serving members.

Members who are still working, in this decade's "do more with less" environment, often

feel hard pressed to contribute either money or time to anything other than staying employed. For our chapter, the resulting decline in volunteer effort has hurt even more than the decline in event attendance, because chapters depend totally on volunteers.

Likewise, the Technical Communication Summit, as a revenue generator for STC, is especially vulnerable to the cuts in "discretionary expenses" like travel and training that our employers or clients when their revenue is down. As a global transportation hub, Chicago – like Atlanta, the host of this year's Summit – feels the pain of travel reductions especially hard; our dominant airlines were hurting long before the 2001 terrorist attacks on which their troubles most often were blamed.

Finally, just as many of us saw our retirement funds and home values shrink in the market meltdown, STC saw its investments suffer – not as severely as many other non-profit organizations, but enough to hurt.

Sharing the Pain

Like any family, STC is sharing the pain. The \$25 per member per year that chapters received from STC was suspended this year and will not resume until 2011, if ever. The online

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renewal form says members "may purchase membership in chapters ... at a cost of \$25.00 for each chapter," but that \$25 actually goes into a fund to be allocated by STC to chapters that apply for need-based assistance, not to chapters chosen by the renewing member. At the same time, chapters that had set money aside in case of a loss of STC support have been asked to turn over most of those savings to STC to try to offset the society-level deficit.

The whole situation, like the larger economy, reminds me of some lyrics from the 2006 Broadway musical "Spring Awakening."

*But the thing that makes you really jump
is that the weirdest **** is still to come.*

You can ask yourself, "Hey, what have I done?"

Perhaps this is inevitable. At this year's Summit, chapter leaders were told that most members join STC mainly for the society-level publications (*Intercom* and the quarterly journal *Technical Communication*), and that only a minority of members value geographic communities or events.

Weathering the Storm

After several recent missteps, for which I take full responsibility as your president, our chapter is doing what we can do continue to serve you while weathering this storm:

- We are making meetings more affordable by reducing advance orders of food (the biggest cost for most of our events) and seeking less expensive locations.
- We are including past and potential members in our reduced event prices, in the hope that they will see the value we offer and rejoin STC when their finances permit.
- We are updating our technical workshops, starting in

spring 2010, to offer more current topics that we hope will revive attendance.

- We are continuing to offer our free email digest, *At a Glance*, to past and potential members who "opt in" as well as to current members.

In short, we will be here for you as long as we can, in any way we can, because you, our members, are the ones who make everything possible. As a volunteer organization, we dare not forget that.

Please let your chapter leaders know your thoughts.

You can call me at 847-204-3002 or email

president@stc-chicago.org. Ω

Byline Wins Fourth Consecutive STC Newsletter Competition Award

Byline has received another Excellence Award in the 2009 STC International Newsletter Competition for the fourth consecutive year.

Editor Tom Lunde is responsible for managing this year's publication, and Francis Bao has served as the Advertising Manager. During Tom's four years as editor, *Byline* also received two awards of Merit and one award of Excellence in the STC International Newsletter Competition. *Byline* also received two APEX awards of excellence for 2008 and 2009.

Tom and Francis attribute *Byline's* success in no small part to the help they receive from members of the chapter's Administrative Council and from chapter members who contribute their time and knowledge. The benefits to STC Chicago members are considerable. As one of the largest chapters in the society, its members need a wide variety of information at any given time, from job-seeking tips to professional skills development. Ω

Upcoming Meetings

Thursday, December 17: Year-End Social

Join us for our Year-End Social at Howl at the Moon in Chicago's lively River North district. This festive event includes a complimentary buffet and discounted drinks as well as The World's Greatest Rock 'n' Roll Dueling Piano Show (starting at 6 p.m., with requests and audience participation encouraged).

When: 5:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m.

Where: Howl at the Moon at 26 W Hubbard St.

Register at: Contact program09@stc-chicago.org by December 10 with your contact information so we can include you on the guest list.

Rates: Free for members, but please RSVP before December 10.

For directions: Call 312-863-7427, email [chi-cago@howlatthemoon.com](mailto:chicago@howlatthemoon.com), or visit <http://howlatthemoon.com/locations/location-chicago>.

Thursday, January 14: Making Your Work Style Work for You

Paula Giovacchini of Gio Group Inc., will discuss how you can identify your own work style and leverage it to enhance your relationships with colleagues and clients.

When: 6:30 p.m. (presentation at 7:00). Coffee, soft drinks, and desserts are included.

Where: DePaul University Rolling Meadows Campus, 2550 W. Golf Rd. Suite 255, Rolling Meadows.

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

Rates: \$10 online, \$20 at the door

For directions: Call 847-437-9522 or visit <http://suburbancampuses.depaul.edu>. Ω

STC Offers Specialized Logos for Member Use

STC members in good standing may use a specialized version of the STC logo beginning in 2010. Renewing members will have access to several logos in PNG (Portable Network Graphics) format to acknowledge their status as member, senior member, associate fellow, or fellow.

Members may use one of these specialized logos – not the standard STC logo – on business cards, personal stationery, or websites to proudly indicate their connection to the society.

According to wavemetric.com, the PNG format is ideal for web use but can also be used for high quality print-

ing. It is much higher quality than the older GIF format and is supported by all major browsers. For high quality printing, members can choose to export at high resolution.

A task force of members developed the concept of the specialized logo at the direction of the board. The group chose to incorporate chevrons (^) into the design: one for member, two for senior member, three for associate fellow, and four for fellow.

For more information, see

www.stc.org/stcmembers/specialized-stc-logos.asp. Ω

Recap of Second Annual Chicago eLearning & Technology Showcase

By Francis Bao and Linda Jansak

The second annual Chicago eLearning & Technology Showcase was held at Roosevelt University in downtown Chicago this past August. We at STC Chicago were proud to collaborate with the Chicago International Society for Performance Improvement (CISPI) and the Chicago Chapter of American Society for Training and Development (CCASTD) in organizing this celebration of adult learning and performance.

For those new to the event, the Showcase is a one-day conference that provides a full day of presentations on the role of new media and interactive methods in business and institutional training. Speakers explore a wide array of elearning topics, including those related to instructional design, development tools, media resources, virtual classrooms, social and interactive applications, mobile learning, and rapid elearning. In 2009, the conference was comprised of three keynote speakers, 36 educational sessions, and 200 attendees. These numbers represent a significant increase over those of last year, when the event attracted 125 attendees and featured 20 sessions.

This year's invited speakers were enthusiastically received by Showcase attendees. Anna Belyaev, founder and CEO of Type A Learning Agency, served as the opening keynote speaker. She drew from her experience as a prominent Chicago-area consultant and business owner as she discussed the challenges and opportunities elearning specialists encounter in today's

difficult business climate. Mid-day speaker Nancy Munro gave a presentation on "The Marketing of Training." Founder and CEO of Knowledge Shift, Nancy has a distinguished background in helping organizations implement learning strategies. She is also passionate about helping small businesses use low-cost social media tools to promote their products and services. Jennifer DeVries served as closing keynote speaker. Jennifer is president of BlueStreak Learning and a pioneer in the field of rapid elearning. She is also an accomplished elearning professional, with experience in managing elearning programs for companies like IBM, Motorola, and ThomsonNet. In her presentation, Jennifer highlighted the essential project management skills needed for the successful implementation of rapid elearning projects.

The Chicago eLearning & Technology Showcase has quickly become a favorite event for Chicago-area elearning professionals. Attendees have told us that the event provides important networking opportunities—both professional and social. This year, event organizers encouraged virtual networking at Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn sites established exclusively for the event. If you did not attend the Showcase this year, you can still detect the spirit of the event by visiting www.chicagoelearningshowcase.com. Or, follow us on Twitter, where we have begun talking about and planning for next year's Showcase. You'll find us at www.twitter.com/elearning2010. Ω

Showcase Sponsors



Volunteers Wanted for 2010 Chicago eLearning & Technology Showcase

By Mike Tillmans

The Chicago eLearning & Technology Showcase has been a great success in its first two years for STC Chicago and our co-sponsors, the Chicago International Society for Performance Improvement (CISPI) and the Chicago Chapter of the American Society for Training and Development (CCASTD).

In order to continue that success in its third year (2010), the Showcase needs volunteers in the following areas. Please contact info@chicagoelearningshowcase.com for details.

1. Showcase coordinator

- coordinates all activities below; could be viewed as an executive director
- 2-4 hours a week, January to March
- 4-6 hours a week, April to June
- 8 hours a week, July
- 10 hours a week, August
- could warrant a paid position

2. Business planner and financials

- initial business plan, pay bills, financial summary
- participate in selection of new registration and tracking system
- 40 hours
- 25% January and February, 75% August 10-31

3. Catering

- locate and negotiate with caterer, supervise delivery
- 40 hours, July 15 to August 20

4. Registration

- select new online registration system
- open registration site June 15 to Aug 20
- create and manage online site, staff and manage day of event
- 40-60 hours, June 1 to August 20

5. Editor and layout

- edit proposals, bios, website, program, communications
- 40-60 hours, June 1 to Aug15

6. Speaker acquisition

- recruit keynote speakers and select session speakers; collect bio, content, handouts, speaker evaluations
- 120 hours
- 10% January and February, 20% March and April, 50% May and June, 20% July

7. Facilities

- rooms and technology, coordinate with site host
- 40 hours, 10% Jan and 90% July and August

8. Marketing and Communications

- marketing strategy, eblasts, and website
- 80 hours
- 10% Feb, 20% May, 40% June, 30% July and August

9. Networking and social media

- mixing before, during and after the event; blogging, Facebook, Twitter, Flickr, LinkedIn
- 40 hours, June to September

10. Sponsor acquisition

- acquiring sponsors for the event
- need representation from each host organization
- as needed, March to August

What it Costs STC to Serve a Member

Reprinted from www.stc.org

For years, STC added services and activities while having only modest periodic increases that did not fully cover those costs. Periodic and modest increases in dues and other fees have not covered costs. The society has greatly subsidized member benefits.

It costs STC, on average, just under \$250 to serve a member, yet, as you know, our current dues rates are well below that amount. The surplus from the annual conference and our earnings from invested reserves have covered the difference up to now. This will no longer work.

The figures below summarize actual expenses from 2009 year-end projections.

Communications/Publications	912,420
Community Relations*	294,303
General and Administrative	442,000
Governance	321,602
Marketing/Public Relations	23,259
Membership	554,394
Professional Development	252,343
Total Expenses	\$2,800,321
Number of Members	11,250
Cost To Serve A Member	\$249
Classic Dues Amount	\$150

*Does not include chapter dues payments (pass-thru) of at least \$250,000. (Some individuals do not opt for chapter membership.) It does include: SIG funding, program expenses (i.e., legal services), a portion of G&A, and personnel.

Where Your Dues Dollars Go

Over two-thirds of STC's \$3.7 million 2009 budget are direct costs of member services. The annual conference and other professional education (e.g., web seminars)

account for the remaining \$1 million, which is not supported by dues.

- The largest portion of dues (28%) is spent on providing membership benefits, such as personal subscriptions to STC's Publications: *Intercom*, *Technical Communication*, and email newsletter *News & Notes*.
- General and administrative costs, e.g., rent, insurance, supplies, account for 23% (includes the cost of items, such as coverage of chapter officers under STC's Directors and Officers Liability insurance.)
- The operation of the Membership Department requires 16% of funds to create and maintain member records and additional member benefits, such as the online Career Center.
- STC devotes 13% to Community Relations, reflected in STC's enhanced support of chapters and SIGs [through the first quarter of 2009, when the \$25 annual pass-through ended].
- Governance (Board and committees) require 11%.
- Professional Development and Recognition (e.g., competitions) use 7%.
- Public Relations projects account for 2%. Ω

STC Membership at a Glance

Total members: 13,263

Members residing in the U.S.: 11,236

Members residing in Canada: 1,206

Members residing elsewhere: 821

Total communities*: 155

*Includes 104 professional chapters, 30 student chapters, and 21 SIGs.

Questions and Answers About STC Finances

Reprinted from www.stc.org

The following questions and answers are provided by STC in regard to finances and the dues increase.

Could you please clarify what are the basic membership benefits that are included in the 2010 dues?

There is a list on the website titled “The ‘New STC’ Membership Includes All of These Benefits,” such as:

- Electronic Subscriptions to four STC Publications
- Promoting the Profession
- Network of Peers
- Use of the New STC Member Logo (NEW!)
- Exclusive Access to Jobs Database
- Unlimited Use of the Jobseeker Boot Camp
- Big Savings on Continuing Education—STC gives members preferred pricing on:
 - Annual Summit
 - Web Seminars
 - Online Certificate Courses
 - SUMMIT@aClick
 - Exclusive Discounts on Products
 - Free Sponsored Seminars
 - Free Community Leaders Seminars
 - Body of Knowledge
 - Recognition for Your Work

Why is STC not printing its publications anymore?

STC will save about \$200,000 annually by going green and shifting to online versions of the publications. Our earlier surveys found that a substantial percentage of members would prefer to receive the publications electronically. For the smaller number of members who still prefer hard copy, print versions will be available at an added cost.

Why has STC dropped the “pass thru” of monies to chapters?

Chapters are not separate entities. They are an integral part of STC and, as such, receive a number of services

from the parent organization. The “pass thru” was suspended temporarily for 2010 because of the significant surpluses held in some chapter bank accounts. Chapters were asked to create zero-based budgets for 2010, utilize the surplus funds for 2010 activities, and return the remainder to STC to help resolve the cash flow deficit anticipated for the fourth quarter of 2009. A portion of the returned funds will be set aside to fund chapters that lack sufficient resources for 2010 budgeted activities. The Board is very grateful to the chapters for returning their surplus funds and the collegial support given the leadership during this difficult and stressful period.

How are the funds collected for chapters and SIGs being used?

Chapters and SIGs are an integral part of STC. The money collected is used for their support. STC provides communities with a variety of services, such as legal IRS compliance, liability insurance, payment processing, marketing, sales, advertising, online publications, education (some is free to members), conference planning, negotiation, and management.

Chapters: The funding model for chapters has permanently changed in 2010 to a zero-based budgeting model similar to the SIGs.

Each chapter submitted budgets for the last quarter of 2009 and FY 2010. These budgets went through (and some are still going through) a Society approval process. Based on their plans, reserves, and estimated members, some chapters will need funding from STC in 2010.

It is expected that many chapters will need funding from STC in 2011. One of the factors to determine fund-

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ing levels for 2011 will be the number of members a chapter has in 2010. This is similar to the funding model for SIGs. Therefore, it is to a chapter’s benefit to encourage members to renew their STC and chapter memberships.

When a chapter member pays the \$25 chapter dues, the funds are aggregated to support both individual chapters and overall community support.

SIGs: The SIG funding model has not changed. SIGs will continue with zero-based budgeting and receive funds as necessary based on a combination of programs and membership numbers.

As in the past, when a SIG member pays the \$10 SIG dues, the funds are aggregated to support both individual SIGs and overall community support.

I have been unemployed for 6 months and I love STC. Is there any way you could let me renew at the current amount? Or give me some kind of discount?

Knowing that a significant number of members are already unemployed or may become unemployed before the economy rebounds, STC is offering laid-off technical communicators a lifeline to their profession in the form of Recovery Packages. This will be funded by the Marion Norby Scholarship Fund so no monies will be taken out of the general operating expenses and thus not impact service to other members. STC will offer up to 400 Recovery Packages that would include:

- Basic Membership with one chapter and one SIG
- Job Seeker Boot Camp which includes a variety of resources including 3 podcasts specifically for technical communicators looking for work

Why should the paying members of STC subsidize those who get the Recovery Package?

Members are not subsidizing the effort as the money is

from the scholarship fund and not the general operating accounts.

- Because it’s the right thing to do – members helping members by extending a lifeline to those in need to continue in the profession and the organization.
- Unemployment could strike anyone during this recession. Wouldn’t you appreciate help from your professional society?

How can it cost so much (\$250) to support a member? That seems awfully high.

The cost of providing services has been rising for years. Activities and benefits have been added without thought to how to sustain them. Activities that do not have a revenue source to sustain them are absorbed into staff time and overhead. The Finance and Investment Committee, the Board, and the staff have spent the last several months examining every aspect of costs and revenue sources.

- Since 2008, almost \$1 million has been cut from the budget.
- A new business model with a pay-as-you-go approach has been implemented.
- Zero-based budgeting ensures each activity is necessary.

What have you done to reduce expenses?

Since 2008, STC has cut almost \$1 million from the budget. Some of those areas are:

- As fewer members registered for the annual conference STC was renegotiating its hotel and vendor contracts to adjust to smaller attendance.
- We use zero-based budgeting to ensure each activity is scrutinized each year.
- Renegotiated hotel contracts for future venues
- Rebid all services and products
- Moving publications online
- Reduced staff
- Senior staff took a pay cut

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Raising dues will lose members. How will you achieve enough revenue to offset the loss of members?

The retention rate is not a direct function of the dues amount. Nor does it determine the total membership size. Members choose to renew or not, some change professions, some retire, etc. STC has a historic retention rate of 71% because it reaches out to a broad spectrum of individuals involved in technical communication. Some will try the association for a while and drop off. Others try it, like it, and stay members for many years. We anticipate (for budgeting purposes) that an additional 10% will not renew for 2010.

- A split payment plan will be offered for those that request it.
- STC will recruit about 1500 new members.
- We have planned for the worse with a very conservative 2010 budget that considers fewer members.

What other sources of revenue does STC have besides dues?

STC has relied on dues for about 60% of its revenue.

The other 40% comes from a variety of sources:

- Summit registrations
- SUMMIT@aClick sales
- Advertising, sponsorships, and exhibit sales
- Corporate Value program
- Live seminars, workshops, and certificate programs
- Several new revenue producing programs will be introduced in 2010.
- Subscriptions Ω

STC Chicago Membership at a Glance

Total Affiliated Members: 298

Associate Fellows: 7

Fellows: 7

Members: 92

Senior Members: 178

Student Members: 14 Ω

Byline

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Byline is a quarterly 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* at byline@stc-chicago.org. Preferred format is a Word for Windows document file via e-mail. 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 printings. For details, go to our web site and click on *Byline* Advertising.

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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Subscriptions: STC Chicago membership includes a subscription to *Byline*. Contact STC at:

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