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Find the Fun of "Germanisms"

By Arthur Plotnik

From my student days in the Iowa Writers Workshop years ago, I still recall some of the extended, hyphenated modifiers or so-called "Germanisms" with which we critiqued each other's literary attempts: the oh-my-God-the-pain poetry; the everyone-lets-you-down short stories; the isn't-this-great-because-it-happened-to-me novellas.

With our hyphen-mad modifiers it seemed we could nail down anything, including characters or settings in our own works: "...a love-conquers-all dreamer in a cesspool-of-the-cosmos trailer park." Of course, as our writing matured (ahem), we came to use such Germanisms with discretion, knowing how quickly they can grow tedious.

Those hyper-hyphenated, compound adjectives get their nickname from the Germanic pattern of stacking modifiers in front of the thing modified. Thus the English "beer brewed with malt and hops" becomes "with malt and hops brewed beer" in the Germanic syntax. But English front-loading, with its hyphens, does more than change word order. It lends itself to quirky, theatrical expression, as well as to jargon ("mission-critical implementation") and campy excess. How excessive? Recently a National Public Radio commentator went to this length:

...the oh-my-God-I-can't-believe-you-just-did-that-especially-in-light-of-what-you-said-at-the-beach-house-yesterday cringe.

Seductive Form

One is easily seduced by the charms of Germanisms. First of all, they save words and simplify sentence structure. For example, why are schools of thought so often preceded by a Germanism, as in "the people-can-damn-well-decide-for-themselves school of thought"? Answer: Because school would be out by the time one said "the school of thought in which people are considered to be able to decide damn well for themselves." An in-flight-magazine author came up with this jet-speed labeling of Stephen King bashers:

...subscribing to the King-is-trashy-fun-but-not-real-literature school of thought is a bit clichéd....

Also seductive is the whimsical or sarcastic tone of Germanisms, as if spoken with exaggerated finger quotes. The form borrows the cachet of new or existing phrases—idioms, catch phrases, titles—when it turns them into compound adjectives. "I-am-woman-hear-me-roar vibes..." snipes a *Time* reporter. Because any word can appear in a Germanism, a writer's stock of modifiers suddenly encompasses every utterance in the universe—a daunting if empowering notion.

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Rudy Joenk

This Issue

This issue includes the seventh and final installment of the Persuasive Presentations column by Jason Palmeri and Paul Tuten, a team combining academic and industrial experience. Their articles have emphasized presentations designed to produce a result beyond informing the audience. We wish them well and look forward to further contributions.

Here's my contribution to Arthur Plotnik's "Germanisms": "...and not the Nebraska-Ghost-of-Tom-Joad Springsteen, but the Born-to-Run-Two-Hearts-Are-Better-Than-One-Rosalita-(Won't-You Come-Out-Tonight) Bruce." This is from *Mystic River* (same as the movie) by Dennis Lehane, copyright 2001, page 42 in the paperback version.

I'm always interested in receiving proposals for single articles or columns. See the information for authors farther along in this column.

AdCom

This year the AdCom will convene by conference call on 24-25 January;

meet in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, 21-22 May; and meet after IPCC 2004 in Minneapolis, Minnesota, 2-3 October. PCS members are always welcome at AdCom meetings.

Potpourri

Do you remember the old nursery rhyme...
Pease porridge hot,
Pease porridge cold...?

Pease was the original Middle English word for *pea*. It was erroneously considered a plural and people began using *pea* as singular. This is an example of "back-formation," a reverse process whereby words are formed by the subtraction, rather than addition, of an affix. *A Word A Day*, 9 November 1998.

Computer Haiku by Jenifer Edens in *Smart Computing*, January 2004:

The download complete,
My system has not crashed yet.
This is nirvana.

Reincarnated,
The same spam arrives each day.
Cursed caste system.

"Not I. It's me. Texting, lazy jargon, management-speak: Never has the English language been so abused. But a new book called *Between You and I* [by James Cochrane] is pointing out the worst errors—and demanding higher standards. In his introduction John Humphrys explains why bad English makes him cross." *The Guardian*, Manchester, England, 20 October 2003; <http://www.guardian.co.uk/print/0,3858,4778095-103680,00.html>.

Are you among those who know that the title of Marshall McLuhan's popular 1967 book is *The Medium Is the Message*?

"One must be careful to distinguish between *unobtanium* and *handwavium*. Unobtanium is something that might conceivably exist. Contrariwise, handwavium refers to a way of circumventing a problem by breaking the laws of physics, as if one might banish an insuperable objection by waving a hand at it." *World Wide Words*, 29 November 2003.

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Eduardo H. Clark

To Grow and Prosper Worldwide

Before I discuss my strategy to meet the upcoming PCS challenges, let me tell you how I became president of PCS. I joined the IEEE in 1980 and PCS in 1983, according to the membership database and my not-so-reliable memory. For many years I was a passive member and my only contact with PCS was reading the publications, mostly the *Newsletter*.

Sometime in the mid nineties, when I was working for Texas Instruments in Stafford, Texas, documenting digital signal processor software tools and hardware applications, I had the opportunity to attend a documentation usability workshop at the community college in Austin, Texas. Roger Grice was the instructor and I really liked what I learned at the workshop. He was the first PCS leader I met and the one who inspired me to get more involved in PCS. He has also inspired and mentored many other AdCom members who currently serve PCS in leadership positions.

In the late nineties I finally decided to get involved and presented a paper at IPCC 98 in Québec City, Canada, and ran for an AdCom position. (The paper was about telecommuting, which was a cool topic back then.) The conference was a great experience for me and I met many interesting people there including, again, Roger Grice, who was PCS president at the time, and I remembered him from that weekend workshop a few years earlier.

At the meeting during IPCC 98 I was elected to the AdCom. In early 1999 I attended my first meeting in Houston, Texas. By then I had moved to Temple, Texas, my current home town, to work at the Texas Instruments notebook computer and printer production facility, to document those products. At the Houston meeting I met George Hayhoe who, as PCS vice president, presided at the meeting because Roger could not get a flight out of the snowed-in Northeast. George, and later Beth Moeller, became my mentors and their example in leadership at PCS motivated me to become increasingly committed to PCS by serving in several positions.

At the recent AdCom meeting in Orlando, Florida, before IPCC 2003, I was elected PCS president after having served two years as secretary and two more as vice president and meetings chair. Being elected president is a real honor and privilege for me. I am probably the first Hispanic, foreign-born (in Mexico) person elected to this position and clear indication of the commitment of PCS leadership to diversity and globalization.

I am really excited for the future of PCS and I am depending on an AdCom of bright and dedicated members who are serving PCS. We have an AdCom member from Belgium, our current secretary Jean-

luc Doumont, who has done a fantastic job in the last two years, and a newly elected member from the Netherlands, Michaël Steehouder, who will certainly help us reach our constituency in Europe. The leadership of PCS has become in recent years more representative of PCS worldwide. The society is ready for worldwide representation and participation. We, the leaders, are ready for the challenge of making PCS the society of choice for many more IEEE members around the world.

Following IPCC 2004 in Minneapolis, Minnesota, we are ambitiously organizing a conference in Ireland in 2005, with Marj Davis as chair, to attract our members in region 8 and to continue showing our commitment to globalization. That region—Europe, the Middle East, and North Africa—is the part of the world where PCS has the most members outside of North America. We are reaching out to region 8 and we expect to see large numbers of members and prospective members participating in IPCC 2005.

I am certain that PCS has a bright future ahead, but to make it happen we must first take care of the issues that we face now: membership and finances. I am very concerned about the declining membership in PCS; we are not attracting enough new members nor retaining existing ones.

One cannot be successful in the information age without communication skills.

Because of the current economic situation, PCS (and IEEE as well), like other professional associations, has lost many members in recent years. Our financial reserves have taken a hit, a big one, and PCS is now the smallest of the IEEE societies.

I think we need economies of scale in growing our membership. We must reach thousands of prospective members to be able to get hundreds to join as full members. The way I see it, the IEEE's 300 000+ members are where our big market is. We keep joking about the fact that PCS is the best-kept secret in the IEEE. Not anymore: I will focus this year on getting PCS value into the minds of IEEE members.

I plan to get PCS involved in high-profile issues such as standards development. We have already had discussions to that effect within the AdCom. An ad hoc committee chaired by Mark Haselkorn is in place for 2004. The IEEE is known to many around the world through its standards work and we can leverage that. There are potential standards such as internationalization (I18N) of documentation, which involves consideration of interoperability such as

platform portability; use of double-byte character sets for non-alphabetic languages; units of measurement (metric for all the world except Liberia and the U.S.); format for date, time and currency; simplified English; etc. The IEEE has already developed directives that we can use.

Additionally, PCS should get involved in issues that affect our profession. Just as IEEE-USA has been involved in issues such as recruitment of engineers outside the U.S. at the expense of American engineers, exporting jobs to lower wage nations, and such, PCS can take a position on domestic and global issues affecting professional communicators. Examples of such issues are privacy infringement resulting from increased national security concerns, intellectual property rights for digital publications, information overload, and so on.

We are not the grammar police or the custodians of the English language, and we are not involved with telecommunications. We deal with the other kind of communication, the human kind, which is so crucial to the success of engineers and all other professionals. Communication is a "soft" skill but an important one.

Most IEEE members, whether engineers or information technology experts, are involved in business practice or in research and academic pursuits. They all have to communicate with peers, clients, and others who can affect their professional success, as part of their daily endeavors. One cannot be successful in the information age without communication skills.

We are not only about engineering speech and writing, either, like we were decades ago. In almost 50 years of existence PCS has evolved along with information technology development. I would never have become a communicator if I had had to communicate via a typewriter. It was the development of software and the Internet that made communication appealing to me and to many others. We must spread the message that we deal with current technology issues such as content management, archiving and version control, reusability, knowledge management, and many other pervasive digital technologies used today to control and disseminate information.

I know that growing our membership is not an easy task but we are more ready and motivated now than ever. I am counting on an AdCom who are some of the best talent that PCS has ever seen. We are prepared to grow and prosper and lead the way for communication academics, consultants, and practitioners.

If this copy of the *Newsletter* you're reading isn't yours, consider joining the Professional Communication Society as either a member of the IEEE and PCS or an affiliate of PCS. Visit our Web page (<http://www.ieeepcs.org/>) for information; applications are online. On the other hand, if this copy is yours, please lend it to a friend.

Find the Fun of “Germanisms”

(continued from page 1)

As a shorthand with attitude, front-loaded modifiers are naturals for conversation, especially among youth. Germanisms lend authenticity to juvenile speech in fiction. “Is this the why-don’t-you-grow-up part, Dad?” “Did you hear about my so-incredibly-embarrassing-I-wanted-to-die-on-the-spot thing at the dance?” A parent might prefer that the child build a vocabulary—“Did you hear about my contretemps?”—rather than rely on the relatively mindless and often sloppy Germanism. But would it ring true as dialogue?

Adults, too, including writers, sometimes use the form in a lazy way, avoiding the struggle for precision. One could say, “He’s got that boy-do-I-love-it-when-my-enemies-get-shafted way of thinking,” or, alternatively, “he feels *schadenfreude*.” But sometimes the lazy form can be livelier or even more precise. Germanisms certainly abound in quality writing. They abound in vulgar expression, too, where name-calling lends itself naturally to stacked-up shorthand. Hyphens used to fly like bullets in the old American west-

erns: “Why you dad-blamed, no-good, yellow-bellied tub-o-guts!” In quoting some modern writers (in genteel company), one needs a bandoleer of bleeps as well as hyphens:

You’re a skinny-bleep snake mother-bleep nobody-to-nothing piece of street bleep. (Richard Price, *Clockers*)

The fun of strung-out Germanisms lies partly in their frenzy, the rapid-fire fusillade of words and images aimed at one noun, pronoun, or adjective:

Hyphen-happy Germanisms, high and low

To inspire your own agglutinations, here’s a sampling from expressions high and low. But remember: Don’t overdo it.

“...it’s some retro Knights-of-the-Round-Table Camelot-and-chivalry deal.” Salman Rushdie, *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*

“I’m not a food person in the let’s-go-to-Spruce-I-hear-they-have-a-new-chef way.” *Chicago Reader*

“...a standard-issue will-she-or-won’t-she-get-the-guy romantic comedy...” *The New York Times*

“The whole let-me-tell-you-what-they-won’t craze.” *The New Yorker*

“...a Grow-Your-Own-Warts kit...” J. K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone*

“...pledge-drive-friendly aesthetic...” *Time*

“...highest curl-up-with-it-under-an-afghan quotient.” *Editorial Eye*

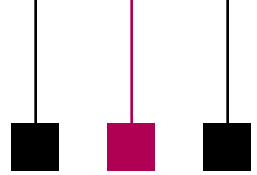
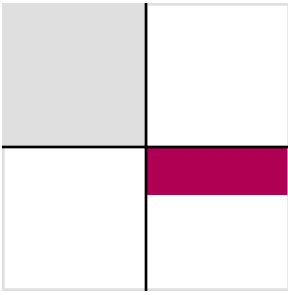
“...a low-center-of-gravity guy.” John Madden (sports-caster)

“...electrons—organized into do-with-me-what-you-will currents and let-me-tell-you-what-I’m-thinking pulses.”

“...alligators-in-the-sewers myth...”

“...the crate-broken-open-at-Kennedy theory of the origin of feral parakeets...”

“...this would seem to demand a crate-broke-open-at-O’Hare-right-around-then-too theory.” Adam Gopnik, *The New Yorker*



I'm just the cream-soda-swilling...overalls-over-candy-colored-latex-mini-kimono...don't-bother-me-till-half-time kind of guy that society has made me. (Mark Leyner, *Et Tu, Babe*)

But two- or three-word Germanisms can have their own charms, including offbeat juxtapositions and plays on meanings: "Psychedelia-tinged guitar slingers"; "click-and-mortar retailers"; "content-free reflections." Today such Germanisms are commonplace, almost expected in American prose, even if awkward new formations such as "faith-based charities" cause initial wincing. But it wasn't long ago that Germanisms were as welcome as a pestilence among America's language authorities.

Anti-Germanism Kind of Guys

Writing in the 1920s, H. W. Fowler had no use for Germanisms, which he said reflected "the compression characteristic of journalese." In the 1960s Wilson Follett blamed American advertisers for burdening our nouns with these mixed parts of speech agglutinated by hyphens. Such Germanisms, he charged, substituted contrived adjectives for articulated expression. His bugbears included "easy-to-read books" and "ready-to-bake food."

Rudolph Flesch hailed the creativity of certain hyphenated modifiers. He liked "barefoot-boy-born-in-a-cabin credentials" and "come-as-the-person-you-like-best-or-least parties." But, like Fowler, he considered such hyphenates as "a Chinese-dominated town" too forced, preferring "a town dominated by the Chinese."

The New Fowler's, too, suggests restraint when hyphenating becomes burdensome, as in "a nuclear-weapon-free world." Restraint, however, is hardly the hallmark of American writing. In 1987 Tom Wolfe's *The Kandy-Kolored Tangerine-Flake Streamline Baby* helped elevate both journalese and Germanisms into high art. And the 1996 *Wired Style: Principles of English Usage in the Digital Age* counseled us to "embrace over-the-top writing that relies on a string of hyphenated words," such as "Russian-blood-and-Russian-soil-Green-back-to-nature mystic ideology...."

The Rules

In using Germanisms, *Rule No. 1* is to consider the mood of your work and its audience. Playful? Sober? A touch of the wacky or whimsical may be just the ticket or a big sore thumb. Germanisms created for effect may be out of place in high-minded prose, while those used for precision or economy seem natural.

When Philip Roth writes "a full-to-the-brimming ready-made East Orange world" in a paragraph of *The Human Stain*, it is only for economy. Most of his Germanisms are of the conventional or standard type, meaning they are made up of familiar word combinations (e.g., ready-made, high-minded, cut-and-dried). The other type of compound adjective is called nonce or improvised ("tangerine-flake," "don't-bother-me-till-half-time"); those are invented for the

occasion. The line between the two may blur, but the invented, nonce Germanisms are clearly the more affecting—or obtrusive.

Rule No. 2 is to insert a hyphen between all the words of a compound adjective when the words act together as a modifier. "Crystal-ball-toting literati" means literati toting crystal balls. But "crystal ball-toting-literati," as one magazine punctuated it, means literati made of crystal who are toting balls. Maybe the writer saw it that way.

Toy with some hyphenated-to-the-brink-of-madness modifiers.

Rule No. 3: Be sure to separate compound adjectives with commas when each compound acts independently on what is modified. For

example, in "...a muscle-twitching, wide-eyed specimen," the specimen is modified in two stages, not by a single compound of linked modifiers as in "a pectoral-and-gluteus-maximus-muscle-twitching specimen."

But now we're entering a grammar-is-taking-the-fun-out-of-this-article area. You get the idea. Be inventive, but stop when you feel you're hyper-hyphenating to the point of passing out.

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The author is a contributing editor to The Writer and a former publishing executive who has written six books, including The Elements of Authorship and two Book-of-the-Month-Club selections: The Elements of Editing and The Elements of Expression.

From the Editor

(continued from page 2)

The Web site <http://www.nanowri mo.org> is host to thousands of people who signed up to churn out a 50 000-word novel between 1 and 30 November 2003. NaNoWriMo is in its fifth year and “It’s all about quantity, not quality,” said creator Chris Baty. March is the month designated for heavy duty editing of those novels (<http://www.nanoedmo.org>). *The New York Times*, 27 November 2003.

“Every day we drive around, we see a sign: FREE RENT.... Since rent is something people pay, it bugs us when we see a sign offering free rent when it should say *rent-free*.” Dave and Sunny Hoffman, letter to the editor, *The Denver Post*, 19 November 2003.

“**typosquatting:** Registering a domain name, such as <http://www.mocrosoft.com>, that closely resembles the name of a popular Web site. Typosquatters rely on users’ typos and present the misdirected user with content unrelated to the intended Web site.” *Smart Computing Term of the Day*, 4 November 2003.

“Add another word to President Bush’s unique lexicon, a moniker bestowed upon National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice at a recent news conference. Bush noted she must work with many agencies ‘to help unstick things that may get stuck. That’s the best way to put it. She’s an *unsticker*.” Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, *Patriot-News*, 3 November 2003.

Last October a miscellany of headline typefaces in *The New York Times* was replaced by the Cheltenham family of typefaces with fonts specially designed by Matthew Carter and designated Times Cheltenham. “Our goals were to enhance legibility and bring a more orderly look to the pages while preserving the ability to convey a clear hierarchy of news values.” *The New York Times*, 21 October 2003.

“Why should childless parents pay taxes to fund schools?” From a letter in *The Guardian*, Manchester, England, 24 September

2003; <http://www.guardian.co.uk/letters/story/0,3604,1048372,00.html>.

Enter a word on <http://www.rhymezone.com> and the site will tell you all the words that rhyme with it. You can also ask for antonyms, synonyms, similar-sounding words, words with the same prefix or consonant pattern, and other features.

Information for Authors

One thousand words makes a nice page-and-a-half article, though longer and shorter articles may be appropriate. Proposals for periodic columns are also welcome. Write about what you know, things that you’re familiar with. If you live outside North America, consider writing about technical communication in your country. ***You needn’t be a PCS member to contribute.***

If you use a wp program, **keep your formatting simple;** multiple fonts

and sizes, customized paragraphing and line spacing, personalized styles, etc. have to be filtered out before being recoded in *Newsletter* style. Headers, footers, and tables lead the casualty list. Embed only enough formatting and highlighting (bold-face, italics, bullets) to show me your preferences.

If you borrow text—more than a fair-use sentence or two—from previously published material, you are responsible for obtaining written permission for its use. Ditto for graphics. Always give credit to the author or artist.

The *Newsletter* issues on our Web site (http://www.ieee pcs.org/activities_publications_newsletter.php) can be used as examples. Issues are posted about one month after distribution of the print version and now have active e-mail, Web, and table-of-contents links.

I prefer to receive articles by e-mail; most WordPerfect, Word, RTF (rich text format), and ASCII files are acceptable. My addresses are in the boilerplate at the bottom of p. 2 along with our copyright notice.

Deadlines

The 15th day of each odd-number month is the deadline for publication in the succeeding odd-number month. For example, the deadline is 15 March for the May/June issue, 15 May for the July/August issue, etc. You won’t be far off (and never late) if you observe the Ides of March, May, July, and so on.

Deadlines
are the 15th
of the
odd-number
months.



Peter Reimold and Cheryl Reimold

Tips for Making Writing Easier

Part 6: Toning Your First Draft Up – Or Down

Perhaps the greatest help for speedy style editing is knowing what kind of “drafter” you are. Some people who write their drafts quickly, letting their ideas pour out without thinking about the form they take (as we are advocating), produce chatty, somewhat sloppy prose that needs toning up; others produce long-winded paragraphs full of stuffy language and complex constructions. If you know where your troubles tend to lie, you’ll find it easier to apply quick editing touches.

In this column we give you some tips for both streamlining a chatty draft and simplifying convoluted prose. To explore your own style needs in more depth, you can visit our Web site, <http://www.allaboutcommunication.com>, and take the style test posted there. Review the eight style rules in the test. Are there any that you often violate in your first drafts? Then learn how to fix those weak spots quickly.

Toning Up

Getting Rid of Awkward Transition Clutter

In a previous column we discussed one organizational remedy for chatty prose: Add headings and turn text into lists where appropriate. This immediately gives your piece a crisper, more businesslike flavor. For instance, suppose you find many

clumsy transition phrases such as “With regard to X...” or “As far as Y is concerned...” Then simply create subheadings for X, Y, etc., begin each section with the main idea, and present details as a bullet list. After that quick touch there may be little else left for you to change!

Smoothing Out a Choppy Style

Do your paragraphs typically contain many short sentences in a row, or is there some reasonable balance between long and short? If you have nothing but short sentences, the piece will appear choppy. The remedy is simple: Group some ideas that belong together and join them with informative connectors such as *because*, *if*, *when*, *but*, or *although*. For instance, take this paragraph of four short sentences:

We evaluated new and used XYZ machines. We concluded from our tests that it was sufficient to install a used XYZ machine. The installation would require an initial capital investment of less than USD 30 000. The annual savings from this investment were calculated as USD 45 000.

This can be made clearer and less monotonous by grouping the material into two sentences with helpful transitions:

From our evaluation of new and used XYZ machines, we concluded that it was sufficient to install a used machine. Such an installation would require an initial capital investment

of less than USD 30 000 *but* yield annual savings of USD 45 000.

Sharpening Your Word Choice

“Write as you speak” is great advice for producing a natural style, but it can backfire if you tend to speak imprecisely. If you know that is your habit, check that your words express your message accurately.

Take the ugly verb *impact*, as in *impact our bottom line*. Is the impact good or bad? The reader has no idea. Words such as *improve*, *worsen*, *raise*, or *lower* give that helpful information.

One frequent trouble spot is the word *and* used as a sentence connector. Often a more specific transition word such as *nevertheless* or *therefore* would be more helpful to the reader. For instance, consider the *and* in the following sentence: *As you might guess, no single test has all the answers and we like to look at a range of tests to understand a particular printing system issue.*

Replacing *and* with *instead* would be a good way to make the sentence more informative and professional: *As you might guess, no single test has all the answers; instead, we like to look at a range of tests to understand a particular printing system issue.*

Toning Down

Now let’s confront the opposite problem: convoluted first drafts with

overly fancy words and complex, long sentences that are hard to read. We offer three simple ways to fix such common problems.

Simple Words

One easy way to make your piece shorter and more energetic is to replace long, Latin-based words such as *cognizant* or *possess* with shorter, simpler ones such as *aware* or *have*. Here are some other stuffy expressions and their simpler versions:

- a sufficient number of* = **enough**
- afford an opportunity to* = **allow**
- in reference to* = **about**
- provide a means whereby* = **enable**
- pursuant to these guidelines* = **under these guidelines**
- remunerate/remuneration* = **pay**
- render assistance to* = **help, assist**

Some of your fancy words may also invite misunderstanding. For instance, *exceptionable* means *objectionable*, and is not to be confused with *exceptional* (= *out of the ordinary*). Since readers may not know the difference, it's best to stay clear of such dangerous words altogether.

Simple Sentence Constructions

Take a look at your sentences. Do many have more than two clauses or span more than two lines? This happens most frequently with technical writing, as in this example:

Visual and microscopic inspections of the samples, which were coated with three layers of formulation 1 and

dried in an IR oven at 300°F after each coating, showed that samples 1-6 had very good surface quality, and they also passed the tape adhesion test, while gloss was somewhat lower than in the control sample.

This sentence boasts four clauses and several thoughts. To simplify, break up some of the sentences, at least those with more than one thought. If you follow the rule of “one thought to a sentence,” you will change that overloaded monster into three readable sentences:

Visual and microscopic inspections of the samples showed that samples 1-6 had very good surface quality but somewhat lower gloss than the control sample. They also passed the tape adhesion test. These samples had been given three coats of formulation 1 and were dried in an IR oven at 300°F after each coating.

Active Verbs

One weakness in almost all business writing is overuse of the passive voice, as in:

The study, which had been requested by management a year ago, was completed by the team in late May.

Simply state *who does what* (active voice) rather than *what was done* (passive), unless knowing the agent is of no interest to the reader. It cuts out words and avoids many grammar

errors introduced by the passive voice. The example then becomes:

The team completed the study, which management had requested a year ago, in late May.

Similarly, the 14-word passive sentence:

It is recommended that this matter be brought up at the next team meeting.

Becomes the clearer 11-word active sentence:

We recommend taking up this matter at the next team meeting.

Whether your drafts need toning up or down, it can

be a pleasure to watch these few simple techniques allow the clarity of your thought to shine through! As Robert Frost put it, “All the fun’s in how you say a thing.”

*Cheryl and Peter Reimold have been teaching communication skills to engineers, scientists, and business people for more than 20 years. Their latest book, **The Short Road to Great Presentations**, is available at a discount to IEEE members from the IEEE Press. Their firm, PERC Communications (+1 914 725 1024, perccom@aol.com), offers businesses consulting and writing services, as well as customized in-house courses on writing, presentation skills, and on-the-job communication skills. Visit their Web site at <http://www.allaboutcommunication.com>.*

To tone it down, replace verbose expressions with simple words, break up complex sentences, and turn passive constructions into active voice.

Developing Effective Presenters II: Research and Training

By Jason Palmeri and Paul Tuten

Continuing our previous column in the November/December 2003 *Newsletter*, we offer three more managerial tips for increasing presentation effectiveness within organizations.

1. Uncover and Document Best Practices

Almost every organization has strong speakers who are recognized widely for their presenting skill. Yet, while we all can identify those who have the speaking gift, we rarely are able to articulate the skills and knowledge that those presenters possess. Indeed, many excellent presenters are themselves unable to articulate their rhetorical skills, as most of their knowledge of presenting is intuitive. While many managers might assume that they should concentrate on encouraging critical reflection and providing feedback to weak presenters, there may be even greater organizational benefits in paying close attention to (and documenting) the speaking practices of strong presenters—as those organization-specific best practices may provide models that can assist struggling speakers.

While managers and strong presenters can do much to uncover and document best practices, outside researchers can also play an important role. Since they are unfamiliar with the organization, outsiders are often much more able to ask the fundamental questions that reveal tacit,

or taken-for-granted, knowledge. Furthermore, many of the qualitative research methodologies and theoretical perspectives employed in academic professional communication research are particularly useful for uncovering the tacit knowledge, assumptions, and contextual factors that influence workplace communication practices. To tap into those academic resources, managers can develop collaborative partnerships with professional communication academics in designing research studies that produce both consultative value for the organization and research publication for the academic. Indeed, this column resulted from that kind of academia-industry collaboration.

2. Use Video Constructively

Speakers often benefit from watching videos of their presentations. By viewing themselves on tape, speakers recognize problems in their content organization or delivery. Yet, for videotaping to be effective, it cannot be a one-shot occurrence. One viewing of a presentation may help a speaker recognize his or her needed areas of improvement, but it rarely produces significant change. Rather, speakers should continue to videotape (and watch) their presentations so that they can note improvements over time and move on to consider less obvious speaking concerns. Furthermore, speakers should consider videotaping the audience as well.

By closely studying the audience's nonverbal and verbal reactions, speakers can gain a much more nuanced understanding of their presenting strengths and weaknesses than they would be able to garner just by analyzing their rhetorical performance in isolation.

While we do think that videotaping has a place in speaker development, we want to caution that it may not be useful for all presenters. Some speakers may find that the videotaping makes them so nervous that it actually impairs rather than helps their performance. Other speakers may be so self-critical of themselves on tape that the video experience actually harms their presentation skills by deadening their self-confidence. Thus we suggest that videotaping should not be a mandated form of speaker training; rather, speakers and managers should work together to find ways of providing feedback (with or without video) that best serve the speaker's needs. Additionally, if videotaping seems appropriate, we advocate sensitivity for, and careful avoidance of, creating any negative legal or ethical complications that may arise from videotaping in front of a customer audience.

3. Avoid Quick Fixes and “One Size Fits All” Approaches

Organizational presenters can benefit greatly from speaker training workshops, which review basic concepts, provide interactive practice and feedback, and allow for critical reflection.

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The return on investment for presentation training can be very high.

Writing Effective Meeting Minutes, Efficiently

By Elizabeth Wilde

Do you dread having to take minutes of an important meeting? Do you frantically try to scribble down everything that everybody said? Does it take you more than a day to post the minutes for everyone to see? If your answer to any of these questions is *yes*, the following tips should help you.

What To Record

Who attended: Sometimes who didn't attend is also important. A helpful way to record attendance is to list everyone who was invited, then highlight the name of each person who actually participated.

Decisions: Record any agreements reached during the meeting. For example, "The group agreed that a new form is needed in the database. This form should have the following fields:"

Action items: If somebody volunteered or was assigned to complete a task, you need to document what the action is and who is responsible. For example, "Shannon will create a draft of the new form and send it to workgroup members for review." Highlight action items for easy retrievability.

Indecision: Sometimes the goal of a meeting is not achieved. Record this fact and any relevant issues that still need to be addressed. For example, "The group could not reach a decision on whether to include the word

universal in the name of the server. Without this distinction, customers might not realize that the server has been enhanced. However, *universal* is ambiguous for the following reasons:"

Dates: Always record the date something is scheduled, due, or expected to be complete.

Summary of lengthy discussion: Note the pros and cons of long discussions so that people can recall the discussion if the topic gets put on hold for a while.

Links to related topics: For example, if one of the

action items was for everyone to review a document on the intranet or in a database, provide a link to that document.

What Not To Record

Everything that everybody said: Most discussion is not important enough to record. You're not a court reporter. Keep the purpose of the meeting in mind when determining how much of the discussion should actually be recorded.

Who said what: Again, this is not a trial. Sometimes it's important to record who had the dissenting opinion, but this can often be dealt with by not "naming names." For example, "A decision on what day to hold the education session could not be reached, because one instructor might not be available."

Arguments or details of disagreements: See Indecision in the What To Record section.

Confidential or personnel issues: Record confidential information in a place that is secure and authorized for such use. Certain personnel matters might be discussed in a meeting, but should not be recorded without prior management approval. For example, "Professor Grammar's frequent absences make it difficult to close on any of the discussion topics that she owns" is not appropriate for minutes, and if the Professor's absence is really creating problems, meeting minutes are not the vehicle for addressing those problems.

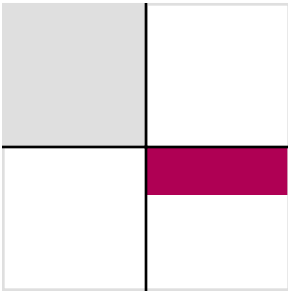
Tone

In general, good meeting minutes are direct and succinct, and the tone is straightforward. Depending on the group that met, the intended distribution of the minutes, and the creativity of the minute-taker, humor sometimes has a place. If you want your minutes to entertain and know that there is no possibility of offending someone, do not be afraid to inject a little humor. However, remember that the main purpose of the minutes is to record decisions, action items, dates, and so on. People don't read minutes for the purpose of being entertained—they want to recall or learn what went on in the meeting.

Format and Retrievability

Make minutes easy to read by grouping discussion topics under relevant

Group discussion topics under relevant headings; distribute the minutes quickly.



headings, such as the agenda items. Minutes need not be ordered chronologically according to the flow of the meeting. Highlight action items and dates. Provide links to all related or supporting documents, and provide a description of where the link goes. For example, “The list of action items is in the Projects database in the Work category: <link>.”

Timing

Don't make people wait a week or more to see the minutes of an important meeting (and all meetings are

important, or they shouldn't be taking place!). An efficient way of taking minutes, if you have access to a computer during the meeting, is to copy the agenda and record the minutes while the meeting is taking place. As soon as the meeting is over you can make any necessary changes or additions and send the minutes out right away. If you can't do it this way, try to finish writing the minutes within a day or two of the meeting; if you wait longer, you might forget important details. When action items are included, it's best to send them out

as soon as possible so that people can start meeting their commitments. And the people who miss a meeting probably want to know sooner, rather than later, what the outcome of the meeting was.

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The author is a technical editor at the IBM Silicon Valley Lab and a long-time colleague and companion of Professor Grammar; wildblueink@yahoo.com.

Persuasive Presentations

(continued from page 10)

When multi-million dollar contracts are on the line, the return on investment for presentation training can be very high. Yet, in seeking out presentation training, managers should be wary of quick fixes. Although a brief one-time workshop can improve presenters' knowledge of effective communication practices, it will not necessarily improve their presenting practices unless the knowledge is continually reinforced, refined, and adapted through critical reflection and managerial feedback throughout the year. The best speaking consultants not only provide organizational members with tips for good speaking, they also suggest processes that can

enable managers to continue improving presentational communication beyond the limited time of a training session.

Managers should also be wary of “one size fits all” approaches to speaker training. Persuasive speaking is a deeply contextual activity, varying according to audience and purpose; while there are some good general guidelines, there are no rules for persuasive speaking that can apply universally. Thus managers should seek out communication trainers who do more than just teach the rules; rather, managers should seek out trainers who engage participants in

a constructive dialogue about how to adapt and modify speaking rules to the particular environments in which they work.

Paul, an AT&T employee and information systems doctoral student, is a subject matter expert and frequent presenter on networking technologies, specifically virtual private networks. Jason is an experienced professional writer/trainer and a graduate student in rhetoric and professional communication at Ohio State University. Paul can be reached at tuten@nova.edu; Jason is available at palmeri.2@osu.edu.

Internet-Assisted Foreign Language Instruction in Armenia

By Marina Karapetyan

In this age of sophisticated information technologies, myriad teaching and learning opportunities are available via the Internet. The wide choice and convenience of user-friendly educational programs have made electronic learning a popular and fast-growing tendency in the world; they prove particularly effective in foreign language acquisition.

There are a lot of frameworks in which learners can progress by performing tasks for reading and writing, speaking and listening, pronunciation and spelling, and more. The Internet provides extended practice, urging learners to use the target language to satisfy their cognitive demands, such as writing cover letters and filling out job applications, corresponding, negotiating, solving business problems through e-mail, gathering information about a topic of personal or professional interest, doing online shopping, advertising, etc.

If a college or university has a computer lab with Internet access, it can provide an integrated model of language instruction: learning through using. The Web offers a wide choice of electronic libraries with access to millions of newspapers, magazines, encyclopedias, and dictionaries. It is such a rich source of constantly revised and updated information that it can be used to hunt for knowledge in any field, even for grammar and meanings of words. It's also good for teaching the style and language of business correspondence or legal documents through hundreds of sample

resumes, cover letters and letters of recommendation, credit requests, memos, reports, business plans, etc. This is a step toward a liberal education, wherein students get the opportunity to make an independent choice of reading material.

In addition to elaborate language-teaching courses, the Web provides a great collection of related activities, such as online training in typing and phone skills, for instance. In an organized curriculum, typing practice fits as a spelling drill, testing not only typing speed but also pointing at mistakes, whereas phone-skill training provides listening and speaking ability practice as an integral part of social and business skills. Unfortunately, the speaking proficiency test is usually administered over the phone, and that can be an obstacle because many educational institutions in Armenia are not funded adequately to cover the costs of phone calls overseas.

Reading and Writing Exercises

Here is an example of creative use of Internet resources for a reading class: Assign your students to surf the Web for information in the target language about exceptional people. You can restrict the topic to inventors or political figures or actors or singers, etc. Prepare questions to fit any context (e.g., where and when the person was born, what he or she was interested in doing in childhood, what influenced

his or her choice of career, etc.); also have your students think of their own questions. After they have gathered the necessary information online, have them quiz each other for appropriate answers.

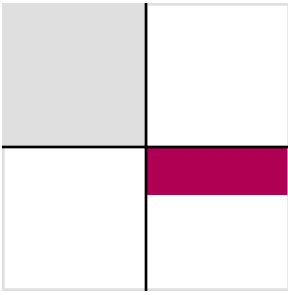
The Internet is an invaluable support for writing in the target language, too. The previous task, for instance, can be combined or alternated with writing activities as a means of reacting to reading.

Activity 1: Students write an article about a famous person based on their reading; the article must contain three untrue facts added to the person's biography that classmates are to identify (the idea is borrowed from

<http://www.eslcafe.com>). Activity 2: Students express their critical reflection of the online article.

Students also like to comment on photos available on the site. One of the topics that encourages creative writing based on pictures is describing vacation spots. When the compositions are ready, warn your students not to announce the names of the places before reading their compositions aloud. The class is supposed to guess what places are being referred to. Another motivating writing task is the reproduction of a movie using the pictures from its photo gallery. I suggest doing this with movies your students haven't seen. When evaluating their writing don't stick to the original content; let the authors cook up their own stories.

...interacting with target-language speakers in the absence of a face-to-face environment.



Complementary Activities

While doing online research for Internet-assisted language activities, I found ideas about how to encourage students to write creatively. Heidi Shetzer (<http://www.iei.uiuc.edu/resources/TESOL/Heidi/Ptesol.html>) recommends creating the class's own home page. I thought it would definitely intrigue my students if they had their own Web page where I would post their best writing. With some technical expertise they would be able to design a Web site by themselves, which would open another door for practical use of the language they learn.

The most significant benefit of the Internet, however, is the opportunity to apply the learning in real life situations like interacting with target-language speakers in the absence of a face-to-face environment. Think of e-mail, for instance; it provides learners with a framework for authentic communication (they don't have to imagine the people to write to and the situations to write about). In their letters students write about their lives and describe their families and houses; share hobbies and interests; tell about their home town, country, and its history. Such letters are not only writing and reading drills, they also involve cultural exchange.

Another important feature is that being a means of *personal* communication, e-mail writing makes students feel responsible for their work. Composing messages for e-mail takes well-thought-out and -planned work.

While writing, learners consult a dictionary and look through grammar material to make correct sentences. They expect to get intrinsic feedback on their communicative competence and also learn from their correspondents. Thus the acquired knowledge is repeatedly revised, reinforced, and reiterated in a meaningful way, which leads to improvement in students' language accuracy.

Different from regular e-mail, Instant Messenger and Chat functions require spontaneous writing and reading skills. Learners get immediate replies to their short messages and have to react instantly. Those activities expand the range of language-using opportunities by including speaking and listening (through enabling voice communication using a microphone). In the absence of a genuine foreign

language environment, those electronic means can become the best way of applying the acquired language in personal practice. They are motivating and interactive, and hence deliver dynamic, balanced, and culturally authentic language education.

What's Ahead

Speaking of the prospects of Internet-assisted language learning in Armenia, I have to mention two major problems:

- Many instructors hold on to traditional methods and demonstrate hostility toward any change because they lack technical expertise and computer skills
- Most educational institutions in Armenia are not equipped with computer labs, nor can they provide students with free Internet access

Useful links

<http://ask.elibrary.com>

<http://languagecenter.cla.umn.edu/lc/surfing/InetTandL>

<http://polyglot.cal.msu.edu/llt/backissues.html>

<http://romanticmovies.about.com/library/weekly>

<http://www.eslcafe.com>

<http://www.etni.org.il/jack.htm>

<http://www.euronews.net>

<http://www.iei.uiuc.edu/resources/TESOL/Heidi/Ptesol.html>

<http://www.learn2type.com/typingtest>

<http://www.ordinate.com>

<http://www.study.com>

AdCom Meetings

By Rudy Joenk

I believe, however, that the breakthrough in our minds has already occurred, and the idea of using the Internet is rapidly gaining currency. Information is disseminated by the many alumni of international academic fellowships, who provide training courses throughout the country. In their drive for success, today's Armenian students demand well-organized, multilateral, and harmonious teaching that will not only be effective but also innovative. Therefore, developing curricula and technical means to adapt to the fast-shifting needs of our society must be a primary goal of the education authorities, as well as of each language instructor.

In sum, Internet resources must not be seen only as substitutes for printed books. Traditional classes can be conducted with the Internet supplementing topics discussed in textbooks. Nevertheless, the Web has one irrefutable advantage: It provides us with diverse options and viewpoints that we can bring into our classrooms, instead of just relying on one information source.

The author's major field is applied linguistics and she has taught business English at Yerevan State University in the Republic of Armenia since 1993. As an alumna of the Junior Faculty Development Program (sponsored by the American Councils for International Education for countries in eastern Europe), she is currently developing the course she describes for teaching in her home university; marina_karapetyan@yahoo.com.

Nowadays the PCS administrative committee (AdCom) usually has one electronic and two face-to-face meetings each year. But that's a relatively new pattern.

After we were founded in 1957, five or six meetings per year were common and most of them were at the old IRE (later IEEE) headquarters at 1 East 79th Street (at 5th Avenue) in New York City. That era lasted until early 1965 and included some meetings at IBM, McGraw-Hill, and RCA buildings. The first meeting away from NYC was at the Bismarck Hotel in Chicago, Illinois, on 12 October 1960. A 1963 seminar at the Delmonico Hotel (59th Street and Park Avenue in NYC) offered rooms at \$17 single, \$22 double!

On 24 June 1965 our meeting was at the United Engineering Center, 345 East 47th Street in New York City.

From then until 1994 many meetings were at the UEC, usually in the 10th floor conference room, with a few sprinkled around at NYC hotels and elsewhere. Always enjoyable in good weather or bad was lunch at the nearby United Nations building. For the 12 January 1970 meeting minutes the secretary put seven names in the Present column and "Everyone else" in the Absent column. The first AdCom meeting I attended was at the UEC on 17 December 1976 when I became editor of the *Transactions*.

In the late '70s the meetings became almost quarterly and we began choosing venues a little farther afield but still near the east coast. When we got in the mode of having annual confer-

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Photo courtesy of the IEEE History Center



Left: IRE headquarters at 1 E. 79th St. was sold and later torn down after the IRE and the AIEE merged in 1963 to form the IEEE; it was replaced by an office building.

Right: United Engineering Center at 345 E. 47th St. was sold to Donald Trump in the 1990s after the IEEE moved to Piscataway, New Jersey. Trump replaced it with a 91-story residential tower. Photos courtesy of the IEEE History Center.

Photo courtesy of the IEEE History Center



Starting Off on the Right Foot: The Importance of Outline Edits

During the holidays the Professor delighted in simple pleasures, such as wagering on college football, copy-editing the multitude of grammatically embarrassing holiday cards that she received from her acquaintances, and, most of all, trimming the noble fir with help from her beloved flock of nieces and nephews.

Last year the Professor decided to let her nieces and nephews trim the tree on their own so that she could retire to the kitchen to concentrate on making her world-famous, high-octane rum balls. Imagine her dismay when she returned to the living room to see the tree decorated in a most lopsided and unorganized fashion: Her prized Austro-Hungarian soldier ornaments were clinging haphazardly to only the upper branches; all of the large red globes were confined to the lower branches; the strings of red lights vastly outnumbered the strings of green lights; and the Waterford crystal swan was nowhere to be seen. As she gazed upon the tree, the Professor could not help but think that this monstrosity would have been avoided had she played a larger role in the initial planning of the tree trimming. This experience reminds the Professor of the importance of involving an editor in the planning stages of new information.

When we create any significant body of information, be it an entire library, an information center, a book, a chapter, or online help for a product, we have a golden opportunity to get it right the first time. The Professor laments over the quantity of informa-

tion that she has edited over the years that could have been so much better had more attention been given to developing and fine-tuning an outline for the information unit before a single word was written.

Here are a few reasons why you should include your editor whenever you create an outline for new information:

- Your editor can help identify holes that might exist in your outline, which in turn can help improve the completeness of your information unit. Upon discovering that their information unit is missing some important item, some writers (certainly none of the Professor's faithful readers) might think to themselves, I'll simply add a topic or an appendix titled "Miscellaneous information" or "Additional considerations" and put the information there. You can avoid such haphazardness by asking your editor to help you identify all of the pieces that your information unit requires.
- Your editor can help you organize your information, which will help you avoid large organizational changes late in the cycle or even during a subsequent release. After an information unit goes to production, it's difficult to implement large-scale organizational changes because of time and resource constraints. Typically, you are struggling to find the time to document new functionality, let alone to fix big organization problems. If you couldn't find the time to organize the information unit correctly as

you were writing it, how are you going to find the time to organize it correctly after it has shipped? And after your information unit is translated, it's even more difficult to implement large-scale organizational changes.

- The edit of the complete information unit will be easier for both you and your editor. Because your information will be more complete and better organized, your editor can focus on other quality characteristics in later edits. As the Professor is sure you are aware, comments related to the organization or completeness of an information unit are often the most difficult and time-consuming to implement.

Remember that your editor is a resource you can and should rely upon during all stages of information development, not just after you've recovered from a technical review and are preparing to ship your books or topics. So trust the Professor when she tells you that your editor would be delighted to help you start off on the right foot when planning new information.

*Copyright 2002 by IBM Corporation. Used with permission. Professor Grammar is an advisor to the IBM Santa Teresa Laboratory Editing Council. Each month she sends a lesson to the technical writers at the Laboratory. Many of the Professor's lessons are based on tenets described in the Prentice-Hall book *Developing Quality Technical Information: A Handbook for Writers and Editors*, recently authored by the Council.*



Jean-luc Doumont

No News Is News

As I check my e-mail upon returning from a short vacation, I find a pressing message from Cindy, the human relations manager for a regular client: She must set up communication training on short notice for her management team and wants to know if I am available to help. It is quite late on Sunday night already, but I decide that the request is worth an immediate answer, so I postpone unpacking and write her a short note about my limited but nonzero availability, inviting her to call me the next day at her convenience to discuss possibilities and perhaps schedule a prompt meeting.

Monday goes by without news from Cindy. “She must be awfully busy,” I think. Tuesday goes by with no call or e-mail from her either. “She is probably trying to coordinate a meeting with other people,” I reason. Wednesday goes by: still no news. “She must have had an emergency to attend to,” I console myself. Thursday goes by: same situation. “I wonder if she got my message,” I begin to doubt. Friday I am out teaching all day, but find nothing on my answering machine or in my in-box. “Now what do I do?” I wonder.

My dilemma is one of appropriateness. I could try calling Cindy myself, but I would hate to seem pushy. On the other hand, if she did not receive my e-mail note for any reason, I would seem neglectful. On Saturday, I decide to fax her the note, with a handwritten comment explaining that I'm afraid she might not have received it by e-mail.

Five days later I finally get an e-mail message from Cindy, confirming that she had received my note by e-mail and by fax. Meanwhile, there had been some questioning of the training and it finally got shelved. “If I did not reply earlier,” she writes, “it is because I heard about the decision this morning only.” I understand, but how was I supposed to know that she was awaiting a decision?

To err is human.
So is, therefore,
the need to be
reassured that
we did not err.

To Cindy as to many other people, there is no reason to communicate until there is news. Yet the very fact that there is no news is usually worth communicating, too, to avoid what might otherwise be unsettling radio

silence. A short reply from Cindy would have solved my week-long dilemma to insist or not to insist—perhaps just “Thanks for your reply. Meanwhile, the training has been questioned. I'll keep you posted.”

“To err is human.” So is, therefore, the need to be reassured that we did not err and hence need not do more, especially when doing more involves risks, if only face-threatening ones. In many situations, we can see that we did what we had to do and must now simply wait. Whenever there is nothing to see, however, we must be told. Three more examples come to mind.

Software applications have evolved towards informing users more and better of what is going on while they wait: changing the pointer into a clock or hourglass icon, animating it to show that the system is still alive, indicating the nature of the activity

performed, and the progress of it, etc. E-commerce sites similarly warn buyers to wait for the completion of their credit-card transaction, which may take 30 seconds, and not press the Submit button several times, lest they generate multiple payments.

Call-center operators have much to learn from user interfaces. Often, they leave the caller in an awkward silence as they complete a task, instead of reassuring him or her by describing what they do. Callers then wonder whether they are supposed to say anything more—or whether they are still connected with the operator.

Waiting rooms, such as those of large hospitals, can create similar issues. Suppose that you are dispatched to waiting room R2, consisting of a few seats next to a closed door that says *Radiography*. Should you merely sit down and wait? If so, does anyone on the other side of the door know that you are there, waiting? Or should you knock on the door, at the risk of interrupting something and being told, perhaps curtly, that they will call you? Reassurance would be welcome.

Few of us design waiting rooms, I suppose, but most of us use e-mail. Acknowledging e-mail messages that need no (immediate) reply is a small, yet much appreciated gesture.

Dr. Jean-luc Doumont teaches and provides advice on professional speaking, writing, and graphing. For over 15 years, he has helped audiences of all ages, backgrounds, and nationalities structure their thoughts and construct their communication (<http://www.JLConsulting.be>).



Elizabeth Weise Moeller

Content Management Tools

You've got a Web site. Great! Now what? We find that among many of our clients the biggest challenge for them is keeping the Web site up to date. Without a budget for enterprise-level content management systems (e.g., Documentum or Vignette), how can groups keep their site current without paying consulting fees or learning HTML? We have found a few alternatives that keep our clients happy and their sites current.

What Is Content Management?

Content management is one of the biggest buzzwords in the field of technical and professional communication today. We primarily see it in reference to single sourcing (creating all publications and online information from one source of information) and Web site development and management. This column focuses on the Web-site angle of content management, specifically smaller projects that are often outsourced to a Web development firm.

A typical development process for an outsourced project includes a design meeting, design review, content development and coordination, beta site review, beta site test, and Web site launch. Once the site is launched, the organization often has to go back to the development firm for updates—or they don't update at all due to cost constraints.

Small-scale tools to help organizations keep their sites current are necessary as enterprise level systems are much too expensive (often topping

USD 500 000 for software alone). Enterprise level content management systems are designed so that Web site designers can create the templates and handle the programming issues while the subject matter experts maintain their own portions of the site simply by updating content as it changes.

There are benefits and drawbacks to this model. The obvious benefit is that everyone can work within their specialties: Designers are designing and subject matter experts are creating the content. For extremely large corporate intranet or Web sites, this is often the only way to keep content current without an in-house staff dedicated to content development. This model also separates the design and content portions. Once a design is approved and ready to go, it's uploaded to the server and, ideally, the content flows smoothly into place.

Some of the drawbacks are obvious as well. Some subject matter experts will take ownership of their content, make sure it is accurate and well written, and keep it up to date; other subject matter experts will not. Some may even take ownership of their content enthusiastically, but prove to be poor communicators. Since the Web site is a public face of your company, it should be well written using a common voice. This model can hinder that appearance. The other major drawback is cost. The software

is very expensive, with additional installation and training costs as well as ongoing maintenance costs and support staff.

While there are some mid-level solutions, such as Microsoft Content Manager Server, those would still require a significant investment (USD 100 000 or more) in the software, installation, and training.

Smaller, independent non-profits and organizations without the budget, staffing, or need for an enterprise content management system still need to update their sites. There are tools Web developers can use to help people maintain their sites without having to call for help every time a small change is required. The content management tools mentioned here often involve a larger up-front cost, but realize significant savings over time.

Custom Solutions

For our clients who do not need access to every page of the site, we often create a custom solution designed to update specific dynamic pages. This can be as simple as a calendar entry page or as complex as an order tracking system. On the lower end, we can use a database to store something like calendar data, give the site owners a password-protected area to add items to the calendar, and then program the page so that it pulls only calendar items from the current date forward. This type of system can be

Your Web site is a public face of your company; it should be well written using a common voice.

used in a variety of applications, all of which make it appear that someone is actively updating the site.

On larger scales, we have built systems that let site owners maintain and change the look of pages by uploading new images and customizing text. In one case a site owner can even choose which images she or he wants displayed on specific pages and can rearrange them as desired. These types of systems are more complicated but give the site owner much more control over the layout of the site.

The implementation of custom solutions depends on the expertise of the developer and the limitations of the server hosting the site. Most of our development is done in a Linux environment using MySQL (<http://www.mysql.com>) and PHP (<http://www.php.net>). However, VBScript, ASP, and Microsoft .Net (<http://www.microsoft.com>) are alternatives.

The benefit of this type of content management system is that site owners have a solution that is custom to their Web site. The drawback is that this is not necessarily a piece of software that can be taken to another server or applied to a different page on the site without going back to the developer for assistance. However, costs are much more affordable. Depending on the complexity of the solution, costs can range from USD 500 to over USD 10 000.

Macromedia Contribute

Macromedia (<http://www.macromedia.com>), well known for their

Web site development tools such as Dreamweaver and Flash, moved into the content management arena in 2002 with Macromedia Contribute. Contribute works in conjunction with Dreamweaver. When we develop a site with Dreamweaver, we can make it Contribute-ready by determining which pages clients can edit and which parts of the pages they can edit. Users can add text and images in preapproved portions of the site, as well as create pages from templates created by the Web developer.

Contribute provides an administration system that prevents more than one person from working on a file at any given time. It also allows users to send pages via e-mail for review before publishing them to the server. Another feature allows users to roll back to a previous version of the page. Clients are especially appreciative of this feature as they feel that if there is a problem, they can always go back to a known good version of the page.

This is a very cost-effective solution for many organizations. At the time this column was written, Contribute sold for USD 99. There is often a fee from the Web developer for their time to make a site Contribute-ready, but it is generally less than USD 500.

Other Options

There are a multitude of other low-cost options, including Microsoft FrontPage, TikiWiki (<http://www.tikiwiki.org>), and Wiki (<http://www.wiki.org>). Each solution should be

based on the needs of the site owner, the computer skills and comfort level of the person responsible for updates, and the budget.

Elizabeth Weise Moeller was president of PCS 2002-2003. She owns Interactive Media Consulting, LLC (+1 518 587 5107, beth@imediaconsult.com), a World Wide Web and Internet training firm in Saratoga Springs, New York, which provides Web site design and Internet training for businesses in the Northeast.

Four Granamas to Solve

The letters in each of the following expressions can be rearranged to form another expression containing the number of words shown in parentheses. How many can you unscramble? Answers are on page 24.

1. Twelve plus one (3)
2. Here come the dots (3)
3. A dot in place (3)
4. Genuine class (2)

Why English presents problems in learning:

- A seamstress and a sewer fell into a sewer.
- The wind was too strong to wind the sail.



Ronald J. Nelson

Rube Goldberg's Inventive Genius

In these troubling times, professional communicators can profit considerably from acquainting (or reacquainting) themselves with the cartoons of Reuben Lucius ("Rube") Goldberg (1883-1970). His work is contained in ten primary sources: (1) *Foolish Questions* (1909); (2) *Chasing the Blues* (1912); (3) *Seeing History at Close Range* (1914); (4) *Is There a Doctor in the House?* (1929); (5) *Rube Goldberg Plan for the Post-War World* (1944); (6) *Music in the Zoo* (1946); (7) *Guide to Europe* (with Sam Boal, 1954); (8) *How to Remove the Cotton from a Bottle of Aspirin and Other Problems Solved* (1959); (9) *I Made My Bed* (by Kathy O'Farrell as told to Rube Goldberg, 1960); and (10) *Rube Goldberg vs. the Machine Age* (edited by Clark Kinnaird, 1968).

In addition, at least seven major books have been written about Goldberg and his work: (1) *Rube Goldberg: His Life and Work*, Peter C. Marzio, 1973; (2) *Bobo Baxter*, Bill Blackbeard, 1977; (3) *The Best of Rube Goldberg*, Charles Keller, 1979; (4) *Rube Goldberg: A Retrospective*, Philip Garner, 1983; (5) *Inventions* (post-card book), 1996; (6) *Chain Reaction: Rube Goldberg and Contemporary Art*, Ian Berry, 2001; and (7) *Rube Goldberg Inventions*, Maynard Frank Wolfe, 2000. Wolfe's book, which is available from Simon & Schuster (Rockefeller Center, 1230 Avenue of the Americas, New York,

New York 10020 for USD 25), is the main source for this column.

Rube Goldberg was a remarkable man for many reasons, among them the following: He finished more than 50 000 single-panel cartoons and comic strips; he created more than 60 cartoon series, many of which ran for more than 20 years; he founded the National Cartoonists Society (NCS) in 1946 and served as its president; the NCS named its award the "Reuben"; he won the Pulitzer Prize for his editorial cartoon "Peace Today" in 1948; he became a sculptor at the age of 80; and Purdue

University holds an annual Rube Goldberg Machine contest. In addition, he is honored by his own entry in *Webster's New World Dictionary*: "U.S. cartoonist of comically involved contrivances; designating any very complicated invention, machine, scheme, etc. laboriously contrived to perform a seemingly simple operation." And *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language* contains a similar entry as well as a paragraph on how a proper name like Rube Goldberg can become a part of everyday language, illustrated by a Rube device intended to shell an egg.

Some of his famous cartoons (and the dates of their runs) were *Boob McNutt*, 1915-1934; *Bobo Baxter*, 1927-1928; *Mike and Ike—They Look Alike*, 1915-1934; *I'm the Guy*, 1911-1934; *Foolish Questions*, 1909-1934;

and *The Inventions of Professor Lucifer Gorgonzola Butts*, 1914-1964. The last three were published for more than 50 years, taking reruns into account.

Among the rewards of studying Rube Goldberg's work are being delightfully reminded of the need to (1) think through a question before asking it, to make sure that we don't sound like utter fools when we ask it; (2) use language that will be readily accessible to the audience and so ensure comprehension; (3) reflect on the makeup of the words we use; (4) value humor, thereby helping put the complexities of life into perspective and in the process become more effective communicators; (5) think "outside the box" to solve problems (or at least move toward solving them) in the spirit of creativity and experimentation; that is, use associative thinking in connection with linear or sequential thinking; (6) interweave a variety of elements within a piece of writing, drawing, or other form of communication; (7) keep a particular objective in mind, then engage in a kind of retrothinking; that is, going backward rather than forward to identify specific steps or devices that might accomplish sub-goals which would, in turn, lead to the ultimate goal; (8) use graphics or visual aids to reinforce the points at hand; (9) identify or label each step of a process and double-check that the prose matches the notations on the graphic; and (10) frame the content within the dimensions of the page or screen so as to make efficient

Interweave a variety of elements within any form of communication.

use of space—a matter of sound document design.

According to Maynard Wolfe, *Foolish Questions* was Goldberg's "first major national success" (p. 25). A typical installment shows a man answering the phone with "Hello, do you wish to speak to someone?" The caller gives the recipient an appropriate response to such an inane question: "No, I'm only trying to squeeze some noodle soup out of the receiver" (p. 24). Regular readers of this cartoon, I suspect, quickly learned by negative example to phrase themselves circumspectly.

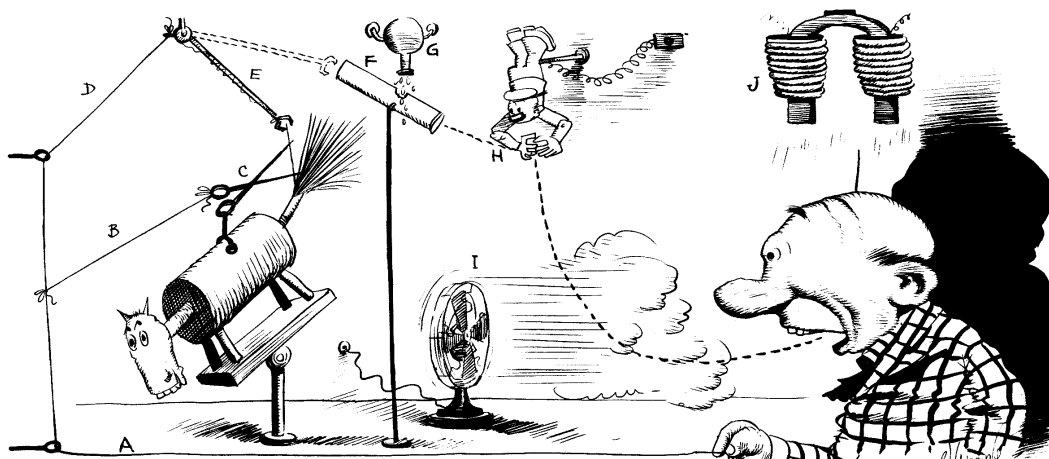
Goldberg's popular daily cartoon *I'm the Guy* illustrated his interest in words and their makeup. He and his slogan became even more popular because cigarette companies gave *I'm the Guy* pin-backed badges as premiums (p. 30). An example of how Goldberg got people to think about words was the badge, "I'm the Guy That Put the Con in Congress." Typically, there is a mixture of humor and insight in each of them.

Goldberg's *Professor Butts* invention cartoons framed entire processes, the steps of which were positioned perfectly, and thereby maximized the use of space, creatively solving problems using bizarre, implausible elements that presented the juxtapositioning of absurdity

with logic, chaos with order, irrationality with rationality. The reader who follows Goldberg's processes from beginning to end cannot help but emerge—Dare I say it?—in a better frame of mind. His "Solution for Growing Hair on Balding Men" (p. 96), for example, surely obviates the need for modern day, highly advertised remedies for those in search of top hair. All one needs to get the job done are a wooden horse with tail, string, pair of scissors, clutch, beaker with tincture of iron, toy soldier, fan, and powerful magnet. What could be simpler? A tight cause-and-effect relationship holds here, an inevitability even, as one realizes that he or she is totally under Goldberg's zany control. As Maxwell Smart would say, "And loving it."

His charming "Keeping a Buttonhole Flower Fresh" (p.104) is introduced with a sentence of orientation, a crucial matter in professional communication: "Professor Butts strolls between two sets of gangsters having a machine-gun battle and is struck by an idea for keeping a buttonhole flower fresh." Luckily, he was struck by an idea rather than a bullet. This cartoon again illustrates a brilliant blending of various elements to achieve the goal indicated in the title. One need only have access to a breeze and gather a few items: pin-wheel, cords, trigger, bow and arrow, cigar lighter with button, flue, block of ice, pan, derby hat, baby seal, basin of water, trough, and flower. A piece of cake, one might say. Goldberg even covers Plan B: "If

Solution for Growing Hair on Balding Men



PULL STRING (A) WHICH CAUSES SECONDARY STRING (B) TO MOVE SCISSORS AND CUT ONE HAIR FROM WOODEN HORSE'S TAIL - CLUTCH (C) GRABS HAIR, LIFTS IT AT PULL OF STRING (D) AND DROPS IT IN TUBE (E) - TINCTURE OF IRON DROPS ON HAIR FROM BEAKER (G) - HAIR FALLS INTO HANDS OF TOY-SAILOR (H) WHO TIES A SAILOR'S KNOT ON THE END OF IT. WHEN IT LEAVES SAILOR'S HANDS, FAN (I) BLOWS IT INTO MOUTH OF BALD-HEADED MAN - STRONG ELECTRIC MAGNET (J) PULLS IRON-SOAKED HAIR THROUGH THE TOP OF HIS HEAD - SAILOR'S KNOT PREVENTS IT FROM LEAVING HEAD - OPERATION IS REPEATED UNTIL THERE IS ENOUGH HAIR ON TOP OF HEAD TO COMB.

RUBE GOLDBERG is the registered trademark of and is copyrighted by Rube Goldberg Inc.

there is no breeze to start the pin-wheel, sneak up behind a bride and steal a fresh flower.” Not bad advice for a professional communicator, either: Have a backup plan.

It is, of course, often necessary to use graphics or visual aids that reinforce

the point at hand. As Goldberg illustrates, one must label the parts or steps and make sure that the labels correspond to the appropriate parts or steps in the process, no matter how implausible the connection. Indeed, that is the essence of Goldberg’s work: It combines order and chaos,

in an absurd yet somehow appropriate order. As in life, rationality and irrationality seem often to be inextricably interwoven.

The wit and charm of Rube Goldberg are indeed refreshing in these disturbing times. With technology develop-

(continued on page 24)

EDWIN J. PODELL

Edwin J. Podell of Huntingdon Valley, Pennsylvania, died on 24 September 2003.

Ed Podell, a Navy veteran of World War II and the Korean conflict, was a Life Senior Member of the IEEE. He received his bachelor of arts degree in physics from Temple University in 1950 and served as an engineer-writer for Philco, AEL, and RCA. He retired from RCA in 1987 after 30 years of service as a writer and editor of proposals for major defense systems and other publications. He was a member of the IEEE and the Professional Communication Society since the 1950s (SM’86, LS’95).

Ed founded the Philadelphia Section PCS chapter in 1985, acting as its chairman until 1999, when



he received the Chapter of the Year Award for displaying outstanding activities and efforts. In 1991 he organized the first Philadelphia Section student writing contest and was its chief judge until 2001.

For the last seven years, Ed presided over the highly successful seminars of the IEEE Professional Activities Committee for Engineers (PACE) on “Communication and Motivating Talents That Enhance Your Career.”

Since 1986 he coordinated the IEEE participation in the annual Delaware Valley science fairs and served as a judge of student projects. In 2000 he was awarded the IEEE Third Millennium Medal in recognition of valued service and outstanding contributions. He was editor of the *Almanack* newsletter and member of the section executive committee since 1986. In 2002 he was awarded the IEEE Professional Achievement Award. His citation read, “For outstanding sustained editorial and media contributions in the Philadelphia Section.”

Excerpted from the Almanack (newsletter of the Philadelphia Section), November/December 2003.

Facts, Not Opinions

By Michael Brady

On screen, it's horrific: The roadway twists, buckles, and breaks into chunks that fall from the bridge into the waters far below. The sequence might have been computer-simulated. But it wasn't. It's real; the short film of the collapse of the new bridge at Tacoma Narrows on the Puget Sound on 7 November 1940 remains a classic, studied since by civil engineers and analyzed to this day in journal papers and texts.

From the analyses of the Tacoma Narrows Bridge collapse to the reports of the Columbia Accident Investigation Board released last August, describing failure is a veridical task. In most technical prose, opinion is permissible and error tolerable, but in documenting failure, there's no leeway for opinion; only fact will do. And the facts of a failure have permanence: Nobel laureate physicist Richard Feynman's demonstration on TV that a frozen O-ring caused the Challenger disaster of 1986 stands as a classic of succinct analysis. Failure reports often are the milestones of a technology, worthy of study, not least of how adroitly the topics were

handled. Arguably, an ability to describe failure may be one of the ultimate skills of the professional communicator.

Just as the industrial revolution gave birth to technology and hence to the study of its failures, disasters due to technical failures brought about the failure report. The landmark incident occurred more than 60 years before the Tacoma Narrows Bridge collapse. In the night of 28 December 1879, as the evening train from Edinburgh to Dundee, Scotland, crossed it, the bridge over the Firth of Tay collapsed, dropping the train into the waters below. None of the 75 people on board survived; the disaster remains Britain's worst civil engineering failure. An inquiry into the disaster began in 1880 and early concluded that samples of the failed structural elements of the bridge

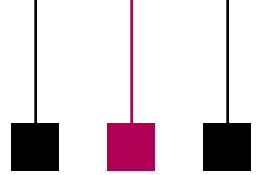
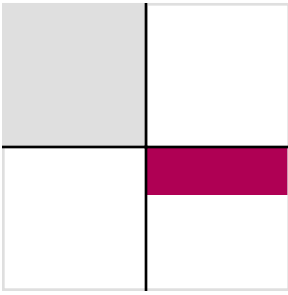
should be "subjected to test at Mr. Kirkaldy's establishment in Southwark."

The choice was well made. Born in 1820 near Dundee, David Kirkaldy had become interested in the properties of metals while working for the Napier foundry and shipyard in Glasgow. In 1862 he published his results of three years of testing in a monograph entitled *Results of an Experimental Inquiry into the Comparative Tensile Strength and other properties of various kinds of Wrought Iron and Steel*, one of four of his works still held by the Library of Congress (LC call no. TA465.K59). In January 1866 he set up the world's first independent materials testing laboratories at Southwark in London. The principal apparatus was a giant testing machine, 48 ft. long, weighing 116 tons, and hydraulic powered to exert forces up to 450 tons to pull, twist, bend, and tear metals and concrete. News of the testing machine and of Kirkaldy's expertise in materials testing spread fast; one of the first customers was the Krupp arms factory in Germany.

Kirkaldy's attention to and meticulous reporting of detail brought clients from near and far but occasionally clashed with the technical establishment. His report to the committee of inquiry on the collapse of the Firth of Tay Bridge showed that



Kirkaldy Testing Museum



the iron used to build it wasn't strong enough. In its final report the committee played down Kirkaldy's findings and instead blamed the design of the bridge for its failure. Kirkaldy responded by annotating and editing but not protesting the official report.

David Kirkaldy died in 1897, but the testing laboratory he founded stayed in business until 1974, completing by then myriad testing tasks for struc-

tures round the world, including elements of the Sydney Harbor Bridge, built 1923-1932, and parts of the wreckage of the 1954 Comet jet airliner crash. His contributions to materials technology and to failure reporting remain legend; in late 2003, a Google search with his name as the keyword brought up 133 matches. His giant testing machine and other instruments used by the company are on display in the Kirkaldy Testing

Museum, located in the building that he designed and had built in 1874 at 99 Southwark Street, just south of the Thames in London, easily reached by train, bus, or underground to Blackfriars or Southwark, open the first Sunday of every month or by appointment with curator Peter Skilton, tel. evenings +44 1322 332195. Wordsmiths will appreciate the company motto, in granite on the portico: "Facts, Not Opinions."

Masters of Style

(continued from page 22)

ing at a dizzying pace and bullets flying about seemingly everywhere, why not duck the head down into a delightful bunker where the absurd and the rational coexist in a book by or about Rube Goldberg? The worst that can happen is that the reader will have a good laugh. And that's not so bad. As I recall from a column in *Reader's Digest*, "Laughter Is the Best Medicine."

Readers wanting more information on this fascinating man and his contributions can go to the official Rube Goldberg Web site: <http://www.rube-goldberg.com>.

Ron Nelson is a professor of English at James Madison University, Harrisonburg, Virginia 22807; +1 540 568 3755, fax +1 540 568 2983; nelsonrj@jmu.edu.

Ye Olde...

The *thorn* was one of a group of ancient Anglo-Saxon runes (symbols used for both writing and divination) brought to Britain in the 5th century. Whereas the other runes fell into disuse after the Norman invasion, the thorn lasted for many centuries into the second millennium in competition with the more modernized English use of the letters *th*.

Originally looking something like the letter *p*, over time the character thorn grew more and more to look like the letter *y*. As its use declined in both printing and handwriting, the thorn was regularly mistaken for the letter *y*, leading to the common misreading of the word *the* as *ye*. A business named "Ye Olde Pie Shoppe" today is a modern misreading of what would have been meant to read "The

Olde Pie Shoppe"; *ye* in such a context was never a real usage.

Excerpted and adapted from "The English Alphabet" by Liz Clayton in History Magazine, January 2004.

Answers to Four Granamas to Solve

1. Eleven plus two
2. The morse code
3. A decimal point
4. Alec Guinness

If you have some tricky anagrams to add to the list, send them to ronblicq@cs.com.

Spam I Am

By Dan Danbom

More and more persons are arguing that we should consider outlawing spam, leading me to think that more and more persons should try to find something better to do.

That's because I think their well-intentioned efforts may end up killing the goose that laid the safely enlarged, inexpensive, more partner-satisfying, lower-interest rate, free preview, now-available-without-a-prescription golden egg.

Here's my reasoning: America has succeeded because of its free-enterprise system. The free-enterprise system is based on competition. Competition is based on giving consumers choices and showing them the advantages of one choice over another. Showing them those advantages often means using advertising, a small part of which is spam. Advertising pays my salary. Therefore, persons opposed to spam are anti-free-enterprise communists who are trying to starve me.

Advertising is so pervasive that I don't understand why we would want to single-out spam as something to ban. America clearly loves advertising. Restaurants and bars post ads in restrooms, and in men's restrooms those ads are often placed in locations where you may be standing for a minute, with nowhere to look but straight ahead at an ad that gives you important consumer information on lawyers who handle divorces and doctors who perform hair replacement. But do people talk about outlawing those ads? No.

Elevators are a new and popular location for advertising. *The Wall Street Journal* reported, "Architects and interior designers are searching hard for something to offer [in elevators] besides the old notices of passenger maximums, weight capacity, and inspection certificates. Little TV screens illuminate hundreds of elevators, many flashing headlines and commercials." But is public indignation aroused? No.

My mail carrier delivers lots of commercial mail daily to my mailbox, including an estimated 4.2 million pizza coupons yearly. Do I threaten her? Of course not. Even the stadium where I watch football games has three adhesive ads on every beverage holder in front of every seat in the stadium. But have I stopped drinking beer? No.

So I don't think it's such a big deal that you get two or three hundred pieces of spam daily. If you are opposed to spam, don't try to have it prohibited. Respond to it. Here I offer myself as a selfless example.

I received an e-mail from someone named Sunday Diko, who touched my heart with her story about how her family was in a refugee camp in Ghana. The Dikos could achieve their freedom only if I would take USD 15 000 to an agent in Amsterdam, who would then give the money to a bank that would release the safe-deposit box containing the Diko family fortune. For this I would be rewarded handsomely, and the Dikos would be

free from that refugee camp, where inmates subsisted on little more than insects and Internet access.

For more than a month I corresponded with Sunday Diko, patiently explaining how I was raising the funds for her freedom by secretly selling my wife's fake jewelry to a defrocked gemologist, then funneling the funds to a bookie who would place bets for me on an underground ferret race in Cuba. With those winnings I would have enough gas money to drive from my home in Denver to Amsterdam, assuming I could get a confederate visa, because (1) the attorney general had confiscated my original visa in a dispute over pharmaceutical imports, and (2) a friend of a friend knew a still-living confederate. As the correspondence dragged on, I perceived a certain growing impatience on Sunday's part, culminating in her pledge never to write to me again.

I realize that many of you may not be as amiable or as chatty as I am. You may not be willing to engage persons in lengthy correspondence, or to respond to companies promising enlargement of certain of your body's organs by sending them photographs of enlarged organs.

But outlaw spam? I think it's best just to ignore it. That seems to be working for Sunday.

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How can you object to spam?

Madras, India

This was a joint meeting of PCS and Computer Society chapters.

On 13 September 2003 Prof. S. S. Narayanan (chair of the PCS group) gave a special lecture and demonstration on computer-aided conservation at the Chemical Conservation and Research Laboratories, Government Museum, Madras, for participants of the 29th refresher course on the Care of Museum Objects. An exhibition arranged by the participants of the course was displayed in the Centenary Exhibitions Hall of the Museum.

On 16 September a memento was given to Fr. Dr. A. Vijay Kiran, parish priest of St. Antony's Church, by the chapter for the best dissertation. The program was chaired by Dr. R. Kannan, Indian Administration Service (IAS), Commissioner of Museums; and the memento and certificate were presented by Mr. Gowrishankar, IAS Special Commissioner of State Government.



In the photo left to right are Dr. Kiran; Dr. V. Jeyaraj, curator, Chemical Conservation and Research Laboratories of the Government Museum; and Prof. Narayanan. In the background are the objects conserved by Dr. Kiran during the course.

PCS Members Elevated to Senior Status

Congratulations to these Professional Communication Society members who achieved IEEE Senior Member status in 2003:

REGIONS 1-6 (U.S.)

Bill W. Albing
Anthony Durniak
Nancy E. Hubing
Ray A. Luechtefeld
Luke R. Maki
Winston G. Smith

REGION 7 (Canada)

Govindan Ravindran

REGION 8

Juan H. Hernandez (Sweden)

REGION 9

Tania L. Quiel (Panama)

REGION 10

Girish A. Kalele (Bangalore)
Jok Tin Tan (Singapore)

If you have 10 years or more of professional communication experience you can apply for IEEE Senior Member status. The forms are available on the Web: <http://www.ieee.org/organizations/rab/md/smforms.htm>. For more information or help in completing the forms contact (PCS) bill.albing@ieee.org.

AdCom Meetings

(continued from page 15)

ences (1981), it became common practice to hold two of our meetings at the conference hotel, one in the spring as a preview and one in the fall just before or after the conference. One such post-conference meeting was in the Space Needle in Seattle, Washington, 7 October 1988. Starting in the late '80s we have met occasionally at the IEEE-USA office in Washington, D.C.

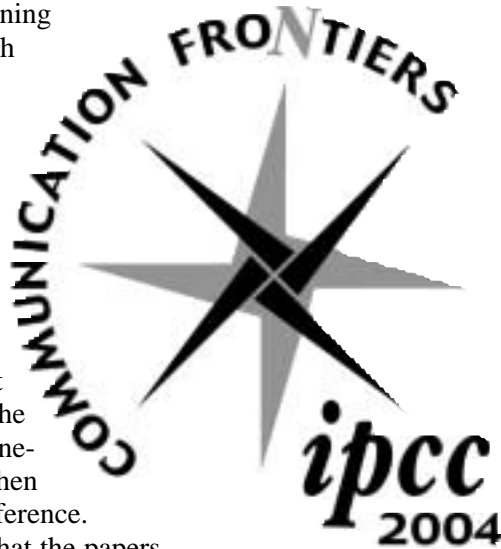
After experiencing a few bad-weather winter meetings that the president couldn't get to, our meeting mode segued in 2001 to an electronic conversation in January, a face-to-face meeting in the spring, and a conference-site meeting in the fall.

IPCC 2004 To Be Held in Minneapolis

It's time to start planning for IPCC 2004, which will be held on the east-bank (of the Mississippi River) campus of the University of Minnesota, 29 September to 1 October (with workshops possible on 2 October). This means that you will be right in the midst of all that Minneapolis has to offer when you come to the conference.

The planners know that the papers, panels, workshops, and breaks are enough to bring you to Minneapolis. But just to whet your appetite for some of the attractions that you can find outside the conference...

Minneapolis – St. Paul, Minnesota, is the game-maker Cranium's top fun city in the U.S. Some reasons why might be that Minneapolis has the largest shopping mall in the country (the Mall of America near the airport), the second-most (after New York City) theater seats per capita, the largest regional playhouse



(Guthrie Theater), "possibly America's best contemporary art museum" (the Walker; *Newsweek*, 30 Sep. 2002), the eighth best children's museum, more golfers per capita, one of the top "10 Great

Places to Inhale the Scents of Spring" (Lyndale Park; *USA Today*, April

2002). And among 64 U.S. cities "tested," Minneapolis was found to be the most literate (see the November/December 2003 issue of this *Newsletter*, p. 10).

So if you enjoy theater, shopping, museums, parks, golf, or great restaurants, you'll enjoy Minneapolis. Find out more about the city and what it has to offer at <http://www.minneapolis.org/aboutminneapolis/>.

And if it's not later than 15 January when you read this, look at the conference call for papers on the Web site http://www.ieeepcs.org/conference/minnesota/ipcc_2004_call.pdf or page 31 of the November/December 2003 issue of this *Newsletter*.

Did You Know...

Cheerios	Post-it notes	Synthetic rubber
Cream of Wheat	Rollerblades	Thinsulate
HMOs	Sandpaper	VCRs
Masking tape	Scotch Tape	Wheaties
Pacemakers		

...were all invented in Minnesota?

If you need further proof that the human race is doomed through stupidity, here are some label instructions on consumer goods:

On packaging for a Rowenta iron:
"Do not iron clothes on body."

On Sainsbury's peanuts:
"Warning: Contains nuts."

On Nytol Sleep Aid:
"Warning: May cause drowsiness."

On most brands of Christmas lights:
"For indoor or outdoor use only."

Haiku Error Messages—

Stay the patient course.
Of little worth is your ire.
The network is down.

Out of memory.
We wish to hold the whole sky,
But we never will.

Alias the AdCom

The administrative committee (Ad-Com) invites comment from PCS members about any of the society's activities. All the AdCom members have an electronic alias at the IEEE that automatically forwards e-mail to the member's actual electronic address.

You can address the whole AdCom at adcom-pcs@ieee.org or any of the members individually at the addresses listed in the table. The year in parentheses marks the end of the member's term. This list appears in the first *Newsletter* issue each year.

If you would like to obtain (or update) an alias of your own, go to the IEEE Web page, <http://eleccomm.ieee.org/personal-aliases.shtml>, and follow the procedure there (you will need your IEEE Web account ID, or your member number if you haven't established a Web account).

Members are always welcome at AdCom meetings. See the meeting schedule in the editor's column.

Bill Albing (2005)
bill.albing@ieee.org

Ed Clark (2004)
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Marjorie Davis (2006)
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Jean-luc Doumont (2004)
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Roger Grice (2005)
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Mark Haselkorn (2006)
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George Hayhoe (2005)
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Robert Krull (2006)
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Luke Maki (2004)
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Beth Moeller (2005)
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Steven Robinson (2004)
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Philip Rubens (2004)
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Kirk St.Amant (2006)
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Michaël Steehouder (2006)
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Sherry Steward (2006)
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Larry Strianese (2004)
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Julia Williams (2005)
juliawilliams@ieee.org

In addition, Kim Campbell, k.s.campbell@ieee.org, and Rudy Joenk, rjjoenk@ieee.org, are society editors.

