

STRUNKENWHITE

A new computer virus is spreading throughout the Internet, and it is far more insidious than the recent Chernobyl menace. Named *Strunkenwhite* after the authors of a classic guide to good writing, it returns e-mail messages that have grammatical or spelling errors. It is deadly accurate in its detection abilities, unlike the dubious spell checkers that come with word processing programs.

The virus is causing something akin to panic throughout corporate America, which has become used to the typos, misspellings, missing words, and mangled syntax so acceptable in cyberspace. The CEO of LoseItAll.com, an Internet start-up, said the virus has rendered him helpless. "Each time I tried to send one particular e-mail this morning, I got back this error message: 'Your dependent clause preceding your independent clause must be set off by commas, but one must not precede the conjunction.' I threw my laptop across the room."

A top executive at a telecommunications and long-distance company, 10-10-10-10-10-123, said: "This morning, the same damned e-mail kept coming back to me with a pesky notation claiming I needed to use a pronoun's possessive case before a gerund. With the number of e-mails I crank out each day, who has time for proper grammar? Whoever created this virus should have their programming fingers broken."

A broker at Begg, Barow & Steel said he couldn't return to the "bad, old" days when he had to send paper memos in proper English. He speculated that the hacker who created Strunkenwhite was a "disgruntled English major who couldn't make it on a trading floor. When you're buying and selling on margin, I don't

think it's anybody's business if I write that 'i meetinged through the morning, then cinched the deal on the cel phone while bareling down the xway.'"

If Strunkenwhite makes e-mailing impossible, it could mean the end to a communication revolution once hailed as a significant time saver. A study of 1254 office workers in Leonia, New Jersey, found that e-mail increased employees' productivity by 1.8 hours a day because they took less time to formulate their thoughts. (The same study also found that they lost 2.2 hours of productivity because they were e-mailing so many jokes to their spouses, parents, and stockbrokers.)

Strunkenwhite is particularly difficult to detect because it doesn't come as an e-mail attachment (which requires the recipient to open it before it becomes active). Instead, it is disguised within the text of an e-mail entitled "Congratulations on your pay raise." The message asks the recipient to "click here to find out how your raise effects your pension." The use of "effects" rather than the grammatically correct "affects" appears to be an inside joke from Strunkenwhite's mischievous creator.

The virus also has left government e-mail systems in disarray. Officials at the Office of Management and Budget can no longer transmit electronic versions of federal regulations because their highly technical language seems to run afoul of Strunkenwhite's dictum that "vigorous writing is concise." The White House speech writing office reported that it had received the same message, along with a caution to avoid phrases such as "the truth is..." and "in fact..." Home computer users also are reporting snafus, although an e-mailer who used the word "snafu" said she had come to regret it.

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FROM THE EDITOR



RUDY JOENK

Letter to the Editor

Professor Grammar calls for better indexing (November/December 2000 issue, page 10). I agree. But indexing isn't straightforward.

Word processors have eased individual document indexing, but indexing multi-document/file publications, such as technical handbooks, remains a manual task, just as in the pre-PC/Mac days. Is there a software shortcut?

Some tools, such as FrameMaker + SGML, can handle the task, provided that you have one of them on hand and have a suitably trained operator. But, for the writers who compile handbooks, that's a step back to the pre-PC/Mac days when professional indexers manually indexed books.

We writers need a simpler approach. We need a software tool that will accept indexed, unaltered documents, written on a word processor such as Microsoft Word, and insert them as chapters in handbooks (to be printed out or published on CD-ROMs or Web sites) with an overall index that can be used to generate links.

Any suggestions?

— Michael Brady
Asker, Norway
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This Issue

As you peruse this relatively slim issue please hold two good thoughts: (1) The previous issue was filled with conference reports so they would be as timely as possible, and that swelled its size to 32 pages; and (2) there's room for your contribution.

Please review the information for authors at the end of my column.

You will also find a tad more humor in this issue than in most. I like to use items (both text and graphics) that illustrate our problems with written and spoken language or that encourage us to have a sense of humor about our profession (see page 18). Let me know if you have a problem with that, but if your response would be "Not a problem!" first see page 12.

Because of my penchant for well crafted lists, or perhaps my abhorrence of bad ones, I looked up another Professor Grammar lecture on the art of making lists (page 14); see PG and also Good Intent, Poor Outcome in the January/February *Newsletter*. I promise I won't return to this topic for a while.

AdCom

On page 5 you'll find PCS secretary Ed Clark's summary of our recent online Administrative Committee meeting. That was our first such meeting and my first experience with the Microsoft NetMeeting program. We used the chat feature and application-sharing for visuals that would have been projected onto a screen. On the whole I thought the experiment quite successful. Chances are we'll try some committee meetings that way.

The downside is the perceived slowness of chatting even when facile keyboarders are at work. President Hayhoe generously declared that "There's no such thing as typos in this chat room, Rudy." (I'm still a one-finger typist.)

Within NetMeeting an audio connection only works for two people so we're look-

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PRESIDENT'S COLUMN



GEORGE HAYHOE

LESSONS LEARNED FROM AN ELECTION

I was in Tampa, Florida, in mid-November to attend the last of three IEEE Technical Activities Board (TAB) meetings for 2000. TAB includes the presidents of all the IEEE societies and councils, so it's very much an international body with members from many different countries. Of course, at that particular moment, it seemed that Florida was the hub of the universe because of the contest over the state's vote in the U.S. presidential election the week before.

During conversations over meals and during breaks, the election was usually the center of attention, especially because the candidates and their supporters were constantly on television news programs. The question I heard repeated by attendees from both inside and outside the U.S. was, "How could something like this happen in a country that prides itself on being the most technologically advanced in the world?"

The answer is easy, actually. This kind of thing happens everywhere, everyday, but the consequences aren't usually so important to so many people.

Technology Is Fallible

On 31 January 2000, an Alaska Airlines jet fell from the sky, killing everyone aboard, apparently because a jackscrew—one of the least expensive and least sophisticated parts of the aircraft—failed. Unfortunately, that low-cost part was crucial to the operation of the plane's horizontal stabilizer and, without it, the pilots were unable to control the pitch of the jet's nose, thus dooming the craft, its five-person crew, and its 88 passengers.

Compared to that tragedy, the tale of the "butterfly ballot" and hanging chads seems trivial, except that the future of the U.S. and the world could hinge upon failures of technology this past November in Florida. The pundits were quick to point out that the large number of punch card ballots

rejected by the tabulating machines as invalid (about 150 000, or 7.5% of the total votes cast in Florida) was not unexpected for that type of voting system; what was unusual was the very small number of ballots (about 500, or 0.025% of the total votes cast in the state) that would prove decisive in determining the winner.

In today's high-tech world, both the jackscrew involved in the airliner crash and the punch card involved in the election controversy are rather primitive technologies; their origins can be traced back hundreds of years. And, like the O-rings that caused the *Challenger* explosion on 28 January 1986, the jackscrew and the punch card are simple, inexpensive devices whose failure at a critical moment had consequences out of all proportion to their complexity and significance.

Because the unexpected happens, the discipline of engineering demands that critical systems be no more complex than they need to be, that equipment be carefully maintained and correctly operated, and that redundancy protect against failure whenever possible. Designers of new voting systems would be wise to learn from these principles and the lessons of last November.

Communication Expertise Is Ignored

For more than 100 years, the discipline we know as document design has promoted the use of plain language, legible typography, effective spatial cues, and integrated text and graphics to ensure successful communication. The Florida election, however, shows that a century's good work in this arena had essentially no impact on the ballots that might be legitimately called the most important public documents of a democracy. In two important instances, this expertise in document design was ignored—expertise that might have resulted in a different outcome had it been noted and heeded.

Failure of simple components may have consequences out of proportion to their complexity and significance.

It is ironic that the butterfly ballot was designed with the intention of making the names of presidential candidates large enough to be read easily by the many seniors voting in Palm Beach County, Florida. Unfortunately, because of the number of presidential candidates, it was impossible to fit them all on one page if they were set in a suitably large type size. Instead, the ballot featured two columns of candidates' names flanking a single column of chad-to-be marks, one of which should be punched. The marks corresponded, alternately, to a candidate in the left-hand column and then a candidate in the right-hand column. To complicate matters further, the instructions circulated with sample ballots called for voters to punch the mark to the right of the intended candidate's name.

Electrical engineers know that they must post warnings and cautions when use of a product could cause injury to people or property, or other serious consequences. The problems associated with punch card ballot technology have been widely known to election officials throughout the U.S. for many years. Nonetheless, most polling places and punch card voting machines did not feature instructions to alert voters that they must punch the ballot with sufficient force to dislodge the perforated chads corresponding to the candidates for whom they intended to vote. When notices were present, they were not displayed prominently. As a result, the county supervisors of elections failed to observe another principle of document design: that documents to facilitate the use of products be provided when needed and that those documents be clear, precise, and prominent.

Document design should not be delegated to amateurs who mean well. Decisions about when and how to document products and their operation should be made by those who are experts in the field of communication and should not be left to

chance. These should be conscious choices made with full knowledge of the consequences that those choices will have. We need to do a better job of promoting our expertise in document design to those outside the field of professional and technical communication. That expertise can indeed change the course of history.

The Users Get Blamed

The saddest lesson of all is that innocent parties (the voters in the recent U.S. election) are often blamed for technological problems. But did anyone test the usability of the ballots? Did anyone ask what types of assistance would support voters in performing this occasional task? Did those who conducted the election think carefully about who their "users" were and what problems those users might encounter in doing their civic duty? For the most part, the answers to those questions are "no."

Are those answers surprising? They shouldn't be to most engineers and professional communicators because we seldom take the time to analyze the users of our products or the tasks they need to perform with those products. Too often we assume that users are just like us, when most of the time we share very few traits in common. Too often we assume that our product interfaces are transparent, that our procedure documents are clear and precise, and that documentation is a luxury which can be forgone if the budget or schedule is tight.

It's no wonder that users frequently blame themselves when they aren't able to operate products successfully. The fact is, we regularly blame the users despite the fact that it is our products that fail them. Woe is us if our users ever realize that the failures of technology must be laid at the feet of those who created the technology.

The bottom line? When technology fails, we owe it to our users to accept the blame and act to ensure that it doesn't fail again.

*Too often we assume
that our product users
are just like us.*

Find out what you like doing best and get someone to pay you for doing it."

— *Katherine Whitehorn*

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE JANUARY ADCOM MEETING

BY EDUARDO H. CLARK

The Professional Communication Society's Administrative Committee (AdCom) convened virtually via computer for its winter meeting on 20 and 21 January 2001. Two four-hour sessions were held remotely, for the first time in PCS history, to save on travel and meeting room expenses. A Boeing Company server hosted our use of the Microsoft NetMeeting program for chat, whiteboard, and application sharing facilities. Luke Maki, a Boeing employee and chair of our Electronic Information Committee, provided training and support.

President's Report

George Hayhoe reported that the main challenge for PCS in the year ahead is dealing with finances. He mentioned that PCS must adjust its strategic plan in response to financial problems by making hard choices (see the treasurer's report). He stressed that although we made remarkable progress last year, we must continue to recruit new members and project volunteers.

Appointments

The AdCom approved the following appointments:

- Corporate Memory (new ad-hoc committee): William Kehoe
- Publicity and Marketing Committee: Sherry Steward
- Treasurer: Steve Robinson

The AdCom also approved the committee chairs, editors, Webmaster, and secretary who continue in their posts from last year.

Treasurer's Report

Financial results are still preliminary for 2000 but it seems likely that PCS will have a deficit of about \$50k for the year, the first year ending in a deficit since 1994. For this reason, \$50k was converted from long-term investment into cash reserve on 1 September 2000. Fortunately, the

investment was cashed in at almost the year's highest value.

Conferences

IPCC/SIGDOC 2000, held last September in Cambridge, Massachusetts, was a great success in terms of quality of presentations, attendance, and financial results for PCS. Reports of the conference are in the January/February issue of the *Newsletter*.

The theme for **IPCC 01** (24-26 October) in Santa Fe, New Mexico, is Communication Dimensions. A call for papers was initially distributed to attendees of IPCC/SIGDOC 2000, is included in the January/February *Newsletter*, and will soon have a broad mailing. For more information about the event, visit the conference Web page at <http://www.ieeepcs.org/2001>.

The **Suzdal Colloquium** (15-16 August) was also discussed at the meeting. The AdCom voted to proceed with the event and to negotiate with the Russian sponsors for ways to keep the cost within PCS's previously planned budget.

PCS Representative at TAB Meetings

An IEEE-suggested PCS bylaw amendment, pending Board of Directors action in March, was discussed. The issue is who and how PCS chooses alternates to attend Technical Activities Board (TAB) meetings when our regular representative, the president, is unable to attend.

Awards

The Best *Transactions* Paper Award was renamed in honor of Rudy Joenk. A newly created education award was named in honor of Ron Blicq. These changes are expected to be ratified by TAB at its meeting in February.

PCS Web Site

The PCS Web site (<http://www.ieeepcs.org>) has been redesigned and is being accessed

*Visit the Web site
and get involved in
PCS activities.*

by an increasing number of visitors. It contains a wealth of information about PCS activities and opportunities for you to get involved. PCS always welcomes member feedback and suggestions. Visit the site for information on how to reach the AdCom and about getting involved in volunteer activities. Let the AdCom know how PCS can serve you better.

Future Meetings

The next AdCom Meeting is scheduled for 27-28 April 2001 in Troy, New York, at the Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute. The third and last AdCom meeting of 2001 will be held in conjunction with IPCC 01 at the La Fonda in Santa Fe, New Mexico, on 24 and 27 October 2001.

Ed Clark is PCS secretary.

STRUNKENWHITE

(continued from page 1)

The virus can have an even more devastating impact if it infects an entire network. A cable news operation was forced to shut down its computer system for several hours when it discovered that Strunkenwhite had somehow infiltrated its Teleprompter software, delaying newscasts and leaving news anchors nearly tongue-tied as they wrestled with proper sentence structure.

There is concern among law enforcement officials that Strunkenwhite is a harbinger of the increasingly sophisticated methods hackers are using to exploit the vulnerability of business's reliance on computers. "This is one of the most complex and

invasive examples of computer code we have ever encountered. We just can't imagine what kind of devious mind would want to tamper with e-mails to create this burden on communications," said an FBI agent who insisted on speaking via the telephone out of concern that trying to e-mail his comments could leave him tied up for hours.

Meanwhile, bookstores and online booksellers reported a surge in orders for Strunk and White's *The Elements of Style*.

This bit of satire is being passed around the Internet without attribution. Submitted by Stephanie Rosenbaum.

*More effective than
common spell and
grammar checkers*

JOURNAL EDITOR FELLOWSHIP

Up to \$10 000 will be provided to successful applicants for the Society for Technical Communication's Journal Editor Fellowship. This program is intended for communication professionals who are interested in, are being recruited for, or are newly employed in editorial positions with a refereed journal, to help prepare them for their roles. Fellows will have a mentor.

"Guidelines for Journal Editor Fellowship," which includes the program, the application proposal, and example activities, are available on the STC Web site <http://www.stc-va.org>. For further information, communicate with Lottie Applewhite, lottieapplewhite@mindspring.com, +1 919 918 3436. Programs begin in January and July with the respective application deadlines being 1 August and 1 March.

Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day; teach him to use the Web and he won't bother you for weeks.

FLOCCINAUCHINIHILIPILIFICATION

ONE GOOD TURN

BY MICHAEL BRADY

Arguably, an inverse rule of challenge governs technical description: the simpler the device, the more difficult it is to describe it proficiently, so as to attract and hold reader interest.

Recently, writer, architect, and Wharton School professor Witold Rybczynski responded well to that challenge. In 1999, *New York Times* editor David Shipley approached him to write an article for the Sunday magazine on the best tool of the past millennium. After mulling over the assignment, Rybczynski settled on the screwdriver, the ubiquitous hand tool whose origins he found could not be traced back to antiquity.

That set the stage for *One Good Turn*^{*}, the book-length expansion of the essay. In it he welds disparate historical fragments into a cohesive tale highlighted by his account of pursuing it. Screwdrivers are, of course, used to drive screws. So wherever screws have been used, there must also have been screwdrivers, save for the first known screw, the ancient Archimedes water pump. He finds screws in a 16th century musket in a museum, which leads him to ponder a 15th century manuscript. He finds early evidence of cutting threads on screws and convincingly traces that task as it evolved into precision engineering. The related paraphernalia

^{*} Witold Rybczynski, *One Good Turn*, New York, September 2000, Scribner, ISBN 0-6848-6729-X; and London, November 2000, Simon & Schuster, ISBN 0-7432-0849-8.

provide illuminating detours, such as the development of the lathe that triggered the 18th century vogue for woodworking as a hobby.

Along the way, other screws turn up, such as the socket-head Robertson screw patented in 1907 in Canada and the Phillips screw developed over a decade in the U.S. and first used in the manufacture of the 1936 Cadillac. The origins of these screws and their mating screwdrivers are well known. But what of the simple slotted-head screw and the blade screwdriver; where and by whom were they invented? Along the way, he provides clues and, in the best whodunit style, reveals the conclusion only at the end. I won't spoil the suspense of the mystery by revealing the outcome, but I can give you one clue: It wasn't the ancient Chinese, who apparently independently invented almost all other commonplace mechanical implements.

Rybczynski makes no claim for the book's being a reference, yet there are 10 pages of notes and text illustration sources, as well as an illustrated glossary of 16 hand tools, including four versions of the blade screwdriver. His asides on how he interprets his observations and follows up leads are as entertaining as the main themes of the meandering plot.

One Good Turn is scholarly writing at its best, a slim, light-touch page-turner that is as informative as it is illustrative of excellence in the practice of our art.



BLOG

Arguably, “a *blog* is a frequently updated Web page consisting of brief, dated entries, with new ones pushing the old to the bottom of the page.” Typically, blog entries are like a personal journal, the author’s chronological musings, with links to other blogs that caught

the blogger’s fancy. (Blog is used as a verb as well as a noun.)

Blogging is made simple by software tools; knowing how to create a Web page is not even necessary. Visit <http://www.blogger.com/>.

— Holly J. Morris in
U.S. NEWS & WORLD REPORT

TOOLS OF THE TRADE

HOW TO BRIGHTEN YOUR STYLE



PETER REIMOLD AND
CHERYL REIMOLD

Part 2: Writing Clear, Concise Sentences

A sentence can be beautiful or boring, but its most important criterion in business writing is that it transmit the writer's thought quickly and correctly. You can ensure that your sentences meet this need by following three simple rules.

1. Put only one message in a sentence.

Please read the following sentence once. Then close your eyes and restate the message.

It should further be noted and is described in detail in the application that the ABC plant, as all plants in that particular area, can only be expected to discharge in times of great precipitation, when any impact on the wood yard's discharge would furthermore be minimal compared to the effect of runoff from the surrounding areas.

Well? Was it enjoyable? To encourage people to read what we have written, we must make the transfer of thought easy and pleasant. This means one thought to a sentence. The sentence above contains at least five messages:

1. You should pay attention to the information that follows.
2. The application describes this information in detail.
3. The ABC wood yard will discharge only in times of great precipitation.
4. This is true of all wood yards.
5. In heavy rain, runoff from the surrounding areas has a greater effect than the discharge from the wood yard.

Decide what you want to stress and put only that in your sentence. Extra information that you think may be useful can follow.

2. Put the essence of your message into the main parts of the sentence: the subject, verb, and object (if there is one).

Consider this sentence:

The fact that we had a new manager had the effect of initiating many changes in the department.

Now, let's strip it down to the basics. The subject of the sentence is *fact*, the verb is *had*, and the object is *effect*. Together, they give us this message: ***Fact had effect.***

Hmm. This has no meaning, let alone immediacy or accuracy.

So let's rewrite the sentence, putting the essence of the message into the subject, verb, and object:

The new manager initiated many changes in the department.

Stripped down to the basics of subject, verb, and object, the message is this: ***Manager initiated changes.*** That is, indeed, the essence of the message we wish to convey.

3. Use no useless words.

Words that add no significant information have no place in your sentences. How many words could you remove from this sentence?

Considering all the dimensions involved, the Departmental Task Force set out to develop a productivity measurement system that would be a tool plant management could use to guide decision-making and to direct action toward successful productivity improvement.

Well, first we have to decide what the message is. We decided it is the following (and we removed 17 words):

The Departmental Task Force set out to develop a system that plant management could use to measure and improve productivity.

Next time we'll see how to connect effective sentences.

Cheryl and Peter Reimold (telephone +1 914 725 1024, e-mail perccom@aol.com) have taught communication skills to engineers, scientists, and businesspeople for 18 years. Visit their new educational Web site at www.allaboutcommunication.com.

A good sentence gives one message quickly and correctly, with no useless words.

AUDIENCE QUEST



VICKI HILL

*To persuade your
reader, dramatize
your points.*

IMPASSIONED CONTEMPLATION

If you haven't noticed, this column uses more than one way to find out about audience reactions. Frequently, the audience is really me: I'm reporting my reactions to a work and trying to tease out "writerly" lessons (positive or negative). My columns on the film *Peter's Friends* and the novel *A Hazard of New Fortunes* by William Dean Howells are examples of this type of audience analysis. Other times, my method is to find works reporting on audience reactions and to try to draw some helpful conclusions from others' viewpoints. For example, I compared two articles, one describing the bored audience of *Brill's Content* and the other the cyber-hip *Blair Witch Project* film/Web site phenomenon.

Looking at film criticism (of movies I've seen) seemed to be another potentially interesting method. Not just any film criticism, though. I realized when browsing through *Writers at the Movies: Twenty-Six Contemporary Authors Celebrate Twenty-Six Memorable Movies* (edited by Jim Shepard, Perennial, 2000) that I did not merely want to be informed (go see this flick; starts at 7). I wanted to be swept off my feet. I wanted to discover some truth, some theme that I had sensed when I saw the movie but had not been able to articulate or even know that there was something worth articulating. Then I could use techniques learned from the film reviewers to communicate to my readers in this column and to enrich my own work.

Illustrative Tale 7

In her critique of *The Godfather*, Francine Prose describes this film's famous opening sequence (a father is asking for help from Don Corleone): how "the storyteller's voice assumes sufficient authority to perform its psychic surgery and take us out of ourselves, out of our world, and into the darkened room." Yes! I want some of that authority, to capture my reader so completely. After reminding us how *The Godfather* in the beginning has infinite protective powers, which are withdrawn throughout the movie, Prose gives us her

insight: "*The Godfather* reminds us of how vivid, how moving, and, as is less widely acknowledged, how profoundly entertaining it is to find ourselves in the presence of art... the terrifying awareness of everything that is out of our control."

If *The Godfather* is about the universe's spinning out of control, *Babette's Feast*, as critiqued by Ron Hansen, is its mirror image—a world where the finest qualities of humankind are evident. Madame Babette Hersant is a famous chef who has to leave Paris because of an 1871 civil war. She winds up in a small isolated village in Norway. When Babette wins the lottery, she spends all her money on a magnificent feast for the village. Her feast, according to Hansen, "symbolizes a joyful, magnanimous God." The film is a "masterpiece of awareness, of saying yes to existence and the exaltations of art."

Both the films and the critiques written by their wonderfully perceptive and articulate reviewers capture us completely and leave it up to us to sort it all out at the end. I think that David Denby (*Great Books—My Adventures with Homer, Rousseau, Woolf and Other Indestructible Writers of the Western World*, Simon and Schuster, New York, 1996, p. 144) has one of the best explanations I've seen on why novels and films capture us: "We were manipulated by the play of dramatic forces, and we were forced to think things out.... We had to sift and weigh, and if the work possessed some measure of truthfulness to the complexity of experience, the sorting out was a tough slog through uncertainties, reversals, and misfortunes." Or, from a description of audience reactions to Greek tragedy: "The mood of the audience as it witnessed the acting out of these climactic experiences has been described as one of impassioned contemplation" (<http://www.britannica.com/bcom/eb/article/printable/9/0,5722,119379,00.html>).

Last month I wrote about Proust, the consummate expert on his own life and on time, and how his themes could not help but emerge because of his persistence and intensity. When you want to persuade your reader that your themes are important, don't be afraid to present "the complexity

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ELIZABETH MOELLER

PLAN? YOU MEAN I HAVE TO PLAN?

This subject was touched upon briefly two years ago in “Developing a Web Site—Part 3” (September/October 1999, pages 19-20) but it bears repeating and enhancing. Entering an agreement with a Web developer is not inexpensive. Sometimes you work hard to find one who meets your organization’s goals and ideals, only to find you have completely different visions for your Web site. When both groups lay out the expectations ahead of time, the process is much smoother in the long run. Those expectations should cover these areas: design style, content development, navigation and layout, and any interactive features.

Design Style

It is most helpful to the designer if you provide examples of your printed materials and of Web sites that you like. Samples of your printed material, especially logos, letterheads, business cards, and brochures, give designers a starting point. It is very important that your site reflect your organization’s look and feel. If you are in the process of redesigning your logo or brochures, keep your Web developer in the communication loop or wait until the new materials are available before designing the look and feel of your site.

It is also a good idea to provide examples of Web sites you like, which will give the designers another dimension to pull information from. Designers do not want to copy other sites, but knowing why you like particular sites is very helpful. Is it the clean design? The coloring? The layout? The features? How the features are implemented? All these provide good information for the designers and help them move in the right direction as they begin designing your site.

There are some clients who feel that telling designers what they like or want is the same as doing all the creative work for them. I don’t agree with that. Good designers are creative enough to take the information you provide and create a design uniquely you.

You should receive at least two designs to choose from in the first review. One or more will likely follow convention, incorporating your current look with the likes and dislikes you identified. Very often, however, a third design will break all the rules. It will incorporate your current look with your identified likes and dislikes but it will do so in an unconventional manner. We’ve found that about one-third of the time our clients choose the unconventional route.

Content Development

A good Web site relies on its content to keep visitors coming back. The most important part of developing site content is outlining the pages and what pieces of information will be on each page. We create a preliminary site map to help our clients identify the information they need. Many times this content can come from existing sources and can be used successfully with minimal editing. Other times this content needs to be created from scratch.

Who will develop the content for your site? Some Web development firms have writers on staff who can identify and prepare the content for your site. Some organizations believe it’s more important to have their in-house people develop content. The most difficult part for people who have never developed content for the Web is breaking out of the print mentality. Web content can be changed quickly, unlike a print document that cannot be changed once it reaches the printer. They must also throw out all prior notions of a page. Content for the Web must be concise. Some Web pages will incorporate only one or two paragraphs of text while others may incorporate four or more 8.5” x 11” printed pages.

Navigation and Layout

Creating a preliminary site map helps organize the information and set the navigation and layout of the site. How will visitors to your site find the information they are

*Accommodate visitors
who are familiar
with your site as well
as first-time visitors.*

looking for? How many clicks will it take to get from your home page to the information they need? Ideally, you want to keep this number as low as possible. Think about ways to accommodate visitors who are familiar with your site and information as well as first-time visitors.

What will your navigation look like? Will it be a series of buttons down the side? Across the top? Either way, I do not recommend the use of frames. They cause more problems for visitors than they are worth. For one, visitors cannot bookmark a specific page within your site if the site is framed off the home page. When they bookmark, they will be given the home page.

Where will visitors be able to go from any given page? There should always be a link back to the home page but where else from any page can they go? Some sites allow navigation only within a section, whereas other sites permit navigation to any other page on the site. It really depends on the type of information you have and how you choose to organize it. However, you need to be consistent throughout the sections of the site.

Interactive Features

The next item to discuss with your developer is the level of interactivity and how you want that implemented. A form that visitors fill out and e-mail to you is a simple level of activity. Graphics that change when a mouse rolls over them is slightly more complicated. A simple shopping cart is more complicated still, and a shopping cart that interacts with a back-end database and

includes enterprise software to remember visitors and their preferences is a very complicated level of interactivity. Whatever type of interactivity you desire needs to be clearly communicated to your developer. Obviously, as the vision of your site becomes more complicated, you need higher-end developers and a larger budget.

This is where giving your developer a list of Web sites you like comes in handy. You can provide a site URL and explain how you like the interactivity, or that the site knows your name when you return, or that you want a form just like that one, and so forth. The important part, however, is to map this out ahead of time so both you and your developer know what to expect going in to the project.

Summary

I cannot stress enough how important early planning and strong communication between you and your Web developer are. If you understand how the Web site will look to visitors as you start the project, your results will mirror that. If you just “wing it,” your site may not meet your expectations and could take considerably longer to develop than planned.

Elizabeth Weise Moeller is vice president of PCS and chair of the Meetings Committee. She owns Interactive Media Consulting (+1 518 587 5107, <http://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.

Provide examples of Web sites you like.

AUDIENCE QUEST

(continued from page 9)

of experience” and to dramatize your points. My first drafts are timid and certainly devoid of any climactic experiences or passion. Then I delve deeper; hey, it was there all the time. Give the reader your passion and thus the desire to contemplate the ideas you have to offer them.

Vicki Hill (vghl@erols.com) is a consultant in the areas of business process improvement, software life-cycle processes, and telecommunications applications. Special interests include the presentation of complex technical information, the magazine scene, biographies, films, and Web surfing.

NOT A PROBLEM!

BY DAN DANBOM

Want carp? Not a problem. Have you noticed that more and more customer-sensitive retailers have adopted the mantra of “Not a problem”? Wherever I am, and whatever I ask for, whoever is waiting on me or helping me always responds to virtually every request with “Not a problem!” Could I get my shirts by Tuesday? Not a problem! Could I substitute gravy for water? Not a problem! Could I have my meat cooked beyond all recognition? Not a problem!

*Don't get caught
carping.*

On the way to work the other day, I was stopped at a light when a vendor tried to sell me a copy of a newspaper. “I get it at home,” I said, “where it’s delivered at lightning speed.”

He said, “Not a problem!”

I couldn’t help but wonder, what if my getting the paper at home *was* a problem? Fortunately for me, he didn’t scream something like, “Hey, that is a *big problem*, pal!” while he yanked me out of my car through the window and kicked me into a pulpy heap, leaving me to die before I even got to the sports pages.

I blame this phenomenon on Nordstrom, the retailer that is so sickeningly accommodating that it has made all other businesses look bad. People have written books about how Nordstrom practices the concept of “not a problem.” One customer wanted a blue shirt with white collar and cuffs. Nordstrom didn’t have that particular combination so they cannibalized a white shirt and a blue shirt to make one. They let another customer exchange a pair of snow tires, even though they don’t carry snow tires.

This kind of behavior makes me want to challenge them. I want to go in and say, “Hey! Do you have any snow tires with white *and* blue cuffs?” They would say,

“Not a problem!” On this kind of behavior they have built their shining image, which naturally brings us to carp.

Unlike Nordstrom, carp are struggling with their image. In a test conducted by the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the University of Arkansas (slogan: Want a degree? Not a problem!), consumers ranked carp as better than or equal in taste to canned tuna, right before being told what they actually ate and becoming violently ill.

If you are unfamiliar with carp, let me paint you a word picture. Carp are bug-eyed and desperate-looking. Their backs and sides are the color of offal, their bottoms jaundice-yellow. Their mouths are the size of the circle made by your index finger and thumb and are constantly sucking. They breed faster than viruses and have insatiable appetites that will lead them to beach themselves in search of a dead fly or speck of popcorn. The nature of carp is why, in a story in the *Wall Street Journal*, one of the U.S.D.A. guys insightfully understated that carp “have an image problem.”

The official said that if the fish were to be marketed as “carp in a can,” no one would purchase it, so they’re thinking of calling carp something else, like “lake fish” or “aquatic source of protein” or “duck-discharge vacuums.”

I can second the opinion that carp have a bad image. When I’m fishing and I catch a carp, the first thing I do when I get it ashore is to pin the fish against the ground with my boot as I remove my harpoon.

I then stomp it into a bloody pulp. Then I exchange it at Nordstrom.

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“I believe in punctuality, though it makes me very lonely.”

— E. V. Lucas

GOOD INTENT, POOR OUTCOME



JEAN-LUC DOUMONT

A THOUSAND AND ONE WORDS

Is a picture worth a thousand words? While it has been debated by many, this ageless saying still holds fast. As pragmatic evidence, most everyone remembers some little drawing or other that came in handy to clarify an otherwise plainly unintelligible discourse. “I see,” one then usually exclaims in relief.

This saying, and possibly the desire to shun Belgium’s multilingual issues, recently prompted a nearby supermarket to replace the verbal descriptions hanging above its aisles with equivalent pictures, at the occasion of a major staff reshuffle. Now, if you are looking for coffee, you no longer encounter a sign bearing the word “coffee” (or “café/koffie”); instead, you must look for a photograph of coffee. Everyone I mention this system to seems to find it a good idea. Everyone I observed in the supermarket, however, seemed to have difficulty finding the desired items.

I must admit it took me a while to locate the coffee on the basis of the pictures. What I buy are brown granules in a glass jar, yet the photograph I had to look for showed a heap of beans instead. Of course, a picture of granules in a jar would be equally unsuggestive to someone who buys coffee powder in rectangular packs.

Pictures, in other words, do a poor job of expressing abstract concepts, even when the concept is as specific as “coffee.” The supermarket photographs simply lost their intended visual power, turning into a word exercise. I found myself scanning them one by one and interpreting them verbally: “Hmm...this one must be ‘sugar’...or maybe ‘flour.’ And what about that one? Ah, that might be ‘coffee!’”

Pictures, moreover, are often ambiguous in spite of much intellectual goodwill. How should one, for example, interpret the picture of generic bluish glass bottles? Does it designate drinks in general, or soft drinks only, or mineral water, or mineral water in glass bottles, or those brands of mineral water that feature blue bottles?

Technical illustrations, whether they be drawings, graphs, or photographs, easily suffer from the same drawbacks as our supermarket signs. Improperly labeled, they require verbal, in addition to visual, interpretation. Improperly commented, they are intrinsically ambiguous, much like a Rorschach test: Everyone might see something different, and yet be unable to imagine anyone else’s seeing anything else.

Illustrations, therefore, benefit from two recommendations:

- Make the illustration immediate to decode, for example by preferring direct labels (“90°C” next to the red curve) to separate legends, thus avoiding the need for a verbal step in the interpretation (“Let’s see now, what does *red* mean?”).
- State the main concept in words, too. As a rule, replace captions that describe the illustration (“Evolution of sales as a function of time”) by captions that state the message (“Sales doubled last year, as a result of our new ad campaign”).

The so-called “graphical” user interfaces of our computers naturally evolved toward conveying concepts not only graphically but also verbally. Even seemingly unambiguous desktop icons such as the trash bin are labeled. Similarly, the button bars of most applications describe the action of each button, if only in mouse-over fashion.

Communication does benefit from careful redundancy. Yes, let’s have a photograph of coffee beans in the corresponding aisle of the supermarket; it will be a lifesaver to the illiterate and the non-native speakers. But let’s add the word “coffee” next to it: Let’s make it a thousand *and one* words.

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

Pictures, in other words, do a poor job of expressing abstract concepts.



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GENERAL RULES FOR LISTS

The topic [again] this month is lists. Not grocery lists or Christmas lists, but the lists you all like to throw about willy nilly in your technical information, disregarding rules that would help you understand the purpose and use of lists. We don't mean to be harsh, and we apologize for generalizing. The Professor is sure that the majority of you are very careful in all aspects of your writing. So we would just like to present this lesson as a gentle reminder of certain rules regarding lists.

Rule 1: Consider the appropriateness of the list. Does it have only one item? Then what is it listing? A list by definition contains more than one item. Does it have only two items? Perhaps it would work perfectly well as a sentence. For example, you could say:

One thing
Another thing

Or, you could say one thing or another thing.

Rule 2: Introduce lists. Please don't plop a list right in the middle of something without letting the reader know what it's all about.

1. Head down Main Street.
2. Turn left at the river.
3. Take the first right through the woods.

Did we lose you? We should have started that list with, "To get to Grandmother's house:"

It isn't always necessary to make a list lead-in be a complete sentence, especially when it's introducing a task. We prefer a lead-in just like the one in the preceding example. But do remember that when you write an introduction to an *unordered* list, you need to make it clear whether what you're saying applies to all items in the list, or one.

Rule 3: Present list items consistently. We have a whole list of sub-rules here:

1. Start each list item with a capital letter.
2. If one list item ends with a period, use periods on all items.

3. If none of the list items is a full sentence, don't use periods on any.

4. Use consistent language in the list items.

We'd like to expand upon that last item. Notice that each item is a complete sentence; the items are also each written in the imperative mood. If we had wanted to do it improperly, we could have written the last item like this:

4. Each list item should use consistent language.

It's different, right?

Here's an example perhaps a little more obvious:

What I want for Christmas:

- An airplane
- If you look in the Eddie Bauer catalog, just about anything from there
- You can get me suspenders, but make sure they're leather
- Silk long johns
- I need to be able to return anything that doesn't fit

The first and fourth items work nicely together. The second would fit the list if rewritten as, "Just about anything from the Eddie Bauer catalog." The third item would fit as "Leather suspenders," that is, if the suspenders really are desired. And the last item has no place within the list. (The Professor *never* returns gifts.)

Rule 4: Use an ordered list only when sequence is important or when you're listing rules to follow. If you're giving instructions, which nearly always must be done in sequence, use an ordered list. If you're conveying priority, an ordered list is useful. But if your Christmas list is filled with items you want equally, an unordered list is the best way to get that message across. If you are presenting the user with a list of anything where sequence and priority are not important, please do not put numbers or letters on the list items; they will only confuse your user.

Rule 5: Keep lists to a manageable size. A well known and reasonable formula is: 7 plus or minus 2. That means to use from

*More about lists;
some rules make them
more effective.*

5 to 9 items in a list. Fewer items are OK; more items should give you serious reason to reevaluate your presentation. Do you really think Santa wants to read through all 27 items on your Christmas list? Wouldn't he rather just pick from the top seven? Additionally, reconsider the appropriateness of a list if the items are quite long, say more than six or seven lines in total.

Copyright 1996 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. The Council recently authored the Prentice-Hall book Developing Quality Technical Information: A Handbook for Writers and Editors.

FROM THE EDITOR

(continued from page 2)

ing for an audio supplement for our next online meeting. DSL could be one such but it's not universally available. NetMeeting is free and can be downloaded from the Microsoft Web site.

The first face-to-face AdCom meeting of the year will be 27-28 April at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute in Troy, New York, and the second will be 24 and 27 October in Santa Fe, New Mexico, along with IPCC 01. PCS members are welcome at these meetings.

Potpourri

In the new made-for-TV movie *Pretender 2001*, the word "occurrence" is prominently misspelled (with an *a*) on stationery in a clearly marked (U.S.) National Security Agency building.

"All right" and "a lot" are always two words each.

Which letter of the alphabet is the first letter of the most words? According to Michael Quinion, editor of electronic newsletter *World Wide Words*, the answer is S, followed in decreasing order by P, C, D, M, and A. Obviously, the frequency of initial letters is not the same as the frequency of use in English (E, T, A,...).

Label on a camera: "This camera only works when there is film inside." Richard Lederer.

Bad gymnast: *acrosplat*. Rodney Stevens.

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.

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 specialized formatting and highlighting (boldface, 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.iceepcs.org/pub.html>) can be used as examples.

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

Deadlines

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

*Contributions for
Potpourri would
be welcome.*

MASTERS OF STYLE

RAYMOND QUENEAU'S
EXERCISES IN STYLE

RONALD J. NELSON

Fortunately for the English-speaking world, many of Raymond Queneau's works have been translated from the French. Among them are *The Bark Tree* (1971), *The Blue Flowers* (1967), *The Flight of Icarus* (1973), *A Hard Winter* (1948), *Pierrot Mon Ami* (1987), *The Skin of Dreams* (no date), and *The Sunday of Life* (1977). Unfortunately, there are only about a dozen scholarly works translated into English to shed light on this extraordinary poet, novelist, humorist, encyclopedist, linguist, mathematician, philosopher, journalist, art critic, songwriter—in short, Renaissance man.

For my purpose here, however, I want to bring before readers his *Exercises in Style*, translated by Barbara Wright (1947; New York: New Directions, 1981). It is a fascinating book that is sure to assist professional communicators to improve their style.

This book takes the following two-paragraph narration and provides 98 other versions of the same situation with essentially the same information. Queneau seems to have been content with 99 versions, although in the luxurious 1963 edition (each version printed in a different typographical form) he suggested many more possible exercises. As a *tour de force*, the work proves indisputably that it is possible to say the same thing in almost countless ways. Here is the basic narrative, which appears at the beginning of the book under the heading "Notation":

In the S bus, in the rush hour. A chap of about 26, felt hat with a cord instead of a ribbon, neck too long, as if someone's been having a tug-of-war with it. People getting off. The chap in question gets annoyed with one of the men standing next to him. He accuses him of jostling him every time anyone goes past. A sniveling tone which is meant to be aggressive. When he sees a vacant seat he throws himself into it.

Two hours later, I meet him in the Cour de Rome, in front of the gare Saint-Lazare.

He's with a friend who's saying: "You ought to get an extra button put on your overcoat." He shows him where (at the lapels) and why.

What follows in the book is thoroughly engaging and worthy of close study. Comparing the various versions to the original yields insights into the possibilities of language to give different slants to a subject. The principle, of course, applies to virtually any subject. As a brilliant example of multiples, the book enables a person to compare and contrast each version with any other version, thereby disclosing nuances of meaning. This work therefore gets at the essence of the intermingling of form and content. Ultimately, readers will have at their fingertips as many possible ways to say something as they will ever need. In the process of acquiring that knowledge, they will find themselves immersed in a kind of delightful game, which is a not inconsiderable side effect of reading this book.

Let us take a glimpse at some of the versions (or parts thereof).

Antiphrasis (expression by the opposite)

"Midnight. It's raining. The buses go by nearly empty. On the bonnet of an AI near the Bastille, an old man whose head is sunk in his shoulders and who isn't wearing a hat thanks a lady sitting a long way away from him because he is stroking his hands."

Awkward

"I'm not used to writing. I dunno. I'd quite like to write a tragedy or a sonnet or an ode, but there's the rules. They put me off. They weren't made for amateurs. All this is already pretty badly written. Oh well. At any rate, I saw something today which I'd like to set down in writing."

Double Entry (redundant)

"Towards the middle of the day and at midday I happened to be on and got on to the platform and the balcony at the back of an S-line and of a Contrescarpe-

*...the possibilities
of language to give
different slants to
a subject.*

Champerret bus and passenger vehicle which was packed and to all intents and purposes full.”

Dream

“I had the impression that everything was misty and nacreous around me, with multifarious and indistinct apparitions, amongst whom however was one figure that stood out fairly clearly which was that of a young man whose too-long neck in itself seemed to proclaim the character at once cowardly and quarrelsome of the individual.”

Haiku (unrhymed syllabic Japanese poem, three lines [5-7-5 syllables], mention of season)

“Summer S long neck
plait hat toes abuse retreat
station button friend”

Litotes (plainness, simplicity; denial of the contrary; opposite of amplification; understatement that intensifies)

“Some of us were traveling together. A young man, who didn’t look very intelligent, spoke to the man next to him for a few moments, then he went and sat down. Two hours later I met him again; he was with a friend and was talking about clothes.”

Metaphorically (transference; changing a word from its literal meaning to an analogous meaning; assertion of identity rather than similarity)

“In the centre of the day, tossed among the shoal of traveling sardines in a coleopter with a big white carapace, a chicken with a long, featherless neck suddenly harangued one, a peace-abiding one, of their number, and its parlance, moist with protest, was unfolded upon the airs. Then, attracted by a void, the fledgling precipitated itself thereunto.

“In a bleak, urban desert, I saw it again that self-same day, drinking the cup of humiliation offered by a lowly button.”

Official Letter

“I beg to advise you of the following facts of which I happened to be the equally impartial and horrified witness.

“Today, at roughly twelve noon, I was present on the platform of a bus which was proceeding up the rue de Courcelles in the direction of the Place Champerret. The aforementioned bus was fully laden—more than fully laden....At each stopping place the perambulations of the outgoing and incoming passengers did not fail to provoke a certain disturbance which incited one of these passengers to protest, though not without timidity. I should mention that he went and sat down as and when this eventually became possible.”

Olfactory (sense of smell)

“In that meridian S, apart from the habitual smell, there was a smell of a beastly seedy ego, of effrontery, of jeering, of H-bombs, of a high jakes, of cakes and ale, of emanations, of opium.”

Passive

“It was midday. The bus was being got into by passengers. They were being squashed together. A hat was being worn on the head of a young gentleman, which hat was encircled by a plait and not by a ribbon.”

Precision

“In a bus of the S-line, 10 metres long, 3 wide, 6 high, at 3 km. 600 m. from its starting point, loaded with 48 people, at 12.17 p.m., a person of the masculine sex aged 27 years 3 months and 8 days, 1 m. 72 cm. tall and weighing 65 kg. and wearing a hat 35 cm. in height round the crown of which was a ribbon 60 cm. long.”

Prognostication

“When midday strikes you will be on the rear platform of a bus which will be crammed full of passengers amongst whom you will notice a ridiculous juvenile: skeleton-like neck and no ribbon on his felt hat.”

Speaking Personally

“That’s something I do understand: a chap who goes out of his way to tread on your dogs, it makes you bloody wild. But after you’ve made a fuss about it to go and sit down like a bloody coward, that personally I don’t understand. I saw it with my own

*...as many possible ways
to say something as
[we] will ever need.*

eyes the other day on the back platform of an S bus.”

Surprises

“How tightly packed in we were on that bus platform! And how stupid and ridiculous that young man looked! And what was he doing? Well, if he wasn’t actually trying to pick a quarrel with a chap who—so he claimed! the young fop! kept on pushing him! And then he didn’t find anything better to do than to rush off and grab a seat which had become free! Instead of leaving it for a lady!”

Telegraphic

“BUS CROWDED STOP YNGMAN
LONGNECK PLAITENCIRCLED HAT APOSTROPHISES UNKNOWN PASSENGER
UNAPPARENT REASON STOP QUERY

FINGERS FEET HURT CONTACT HEEL
ALLEGED PURPOSELY STOP.”

John Updike, in *Hugging the Shore* (page 401), refers to Queneau as “that most learned and light-hearted of experimental modernists.” He indeed is that as he points our minds toward stylistic variations that may well enrich what might otherwise be humdrum prose.

Excerpts from Exercises in Style by Raymond Queneau, copyright 1947, 1958 by Editions Gallimard and Barbara Wright. Reprinted by permission of New Directions Publishing Corp.

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Questions without answers:

- Why is a person who plays the piano called a pianist, but a person who drives a race car is not called a racist?
- Why are a wise man and a wise guy opposites?
- Why do overlook and oversee mean opposite things?
- If horrific means to make horrible, does terrific mean to make terrible?
- Why isn’t 11 pronounced onety-one?

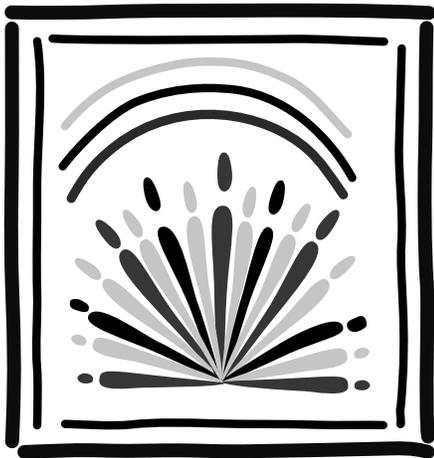


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BUTTERFLY COLLECTING IN SANTA FE

BY JOE CHEW

By the time this story and the IPCC 01 call for papers have reached you, the biggest story related to the profession in years may have come and gone from the headlines. Yes, I mean the “butterfly ballot”—the best thing that the electoral process *per se* (rather than the results) ever did for editorial cartooning. But you might still be able to use it as inspiration for reaching out to colleagues who don’t know that they’re colleagues, and for service to other professions.



IPCC 01
COMMUNICATION DIMENSIONS

Though the importance of the mass media in politics is an old story, the butterfly ballot used in a pivotal Florida precinct (see the President’s Column on page 3) is different: This may well have been the first time that a presidential election turned on information design. The design was performed by a local election official who was, apparently, not educated in that subject (as indeed most people are not).

As technical communication professionals, we know that when the desired action is either very important or prone to mistakes, the instruments that direct that action ought to be not only reviewed but also tested. (We diplomatically ignore the question of whether, in the rush of daily life and work, we honor that rule mostly in the breach.) A few hours with random test users and a one-way mirror could have pointed out the problems; perhaps inspired either a new layout or a simple graphical trick or two, compatible with the butterfly layout, that would have made it much clearer which hole to punch for whom; and led us efficiently to accurate results.

So what does this have to do with IPCC 01 and us? Far too few people know that handling such matters is both a science and a profession. What’s more, communities of

people, each with a partial body of knowledge and with one perspective, can and do work organizationally and even physically near each other without really getting together for a better approximation of seeing all of it.

How many of us know everything we could put to use to do our jobs as well as possible? Depending on the task at hand, sometimes it’s all I can do to know everything that I ought to know in order to do my job adequately. We have to solve our personal equations for not one but three or even four variables (subject matter, theory, technique, and technology) and not all of the answers are necessarily found within the strictly construed profession of technical communication. That’s where you come in, you and your network and your capacity for turning observation into inspiration.

The world may be awash in bad communication, and in mediocre communication that squanders opportunities for excellence, but it also offers many good examples, some of them constructed quite intentionally according to the principles and values of another field. We can learn from others who find and develop and disseminate information from colleagues (even if we don’t think of them as such from day to day) in journalism, marketing, management, and a host of other fields and they can learn from us.

So, if you see a shining example of people doing something useful and relevant that we don’t usually do, or if you interact with someone in a field that borders on ours or who is in another profession that incorporates some of our skills, do what we do best: Communicate! We’re all the better for sharing ideas. And a fine way to do that is by attending IPCC 01 this October. Point your colleagues to <http://www.ieee pcs.org/2001> and let’s make each other better at what we do.

Joe Chew is chair of IPCC 01.

SUZDAL ON THE HORIZON



The Professional Communication Society is actively participating in the International Colloquium on Professional Communication, which will be held this summer in Russia. The colloquium is scheduled for 15-16 August in Suzdal, which is approximately 200 km northeast of Moscow and is one of the Golden Ring of ancient Russian towns with 12th-to-17th-century architecture. A delegation of 12 will represent PCS and make presentations.

There the delegates will meet a different type of technical communicator than they normally meet at conferences in the U.S.

We expect the audience to include highly technical professionals who must communicate their research and

Top photo:
Sts. Kosmas and Damians Church (18th century)

Left photo:
St. Alexander Monastery (17th-18th century)



ideas to other specialists. The techniques and skills we use as professional technical communicators to develop user documentation and product specifications are relevant to our technical counterparts also. Our group will present topics including proposal writing, using graphics to replace words, and the history of technical communication.

This year's colloquium will commemorate the 10th anniversary of PCS and Popov Society collaboration, which was initiated by Dr. Henrich Lantsberg. Dr. Lantsberg, the recipient of the 2000 PCS Schlesinger Award for service to the society, is coordinating the efforts in Moscow and Suzdal and will welcome our delegation.

Although a few of our delegates have been to Moscow before (e.g., 10 years ago when PCS held another colloquium with the Popov Society), for most this will be a first time. We look forward to hearing and reading about their impressions and experiences in future *Newsletters*. *[The editor wishes this were a condition of attendance.]*

For more information about the colloquium visit <http://www.ieepcs.org/suzdal/> or e-mail Lisa Moretto at RGI_Lisa@compuserve.com.



I E E E
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NEWSLETTER