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NEWSLETTER

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PCS COMMUNICATION ON THE INTERNET

BY PAUL R. SEESING

PCS and its members strive to make the most effective use of all communication technologies. Therefore, PCS is in the process of expanding its use of the Internet for communication among AdCom members, with PCS members as a group, and with other organizations. This article describes the use of electronic mail, Usenet newsgroups, and the World Wide Web for PCS communication. In addition, it describes ways to find other sources of information of interest to professional communicators on the Internet. Connection to the Internet is provided by a network administrator in most companies, or by a commercial access provider. For the sake of brevity, this article refers to both as *service providers.*

Electronic Mail

Electronic mail is a fundamental part of the Internet. There are many software packages that implement this function, so the mechanics of sending and receiving mail are not described here. One feature common to everyone's Internet account is a personal identifier, often referred to as an address or mailbox. Identifiers are usually composed of a name, an @ sign, and a routing. The name and routing form a hierarchical address, much as your street address represents a hierarchy of location information for your postal delivery service.

My e-mail address, *p.seesing@ieee.org*, identifies my electronic mailbox at IEEE Headquarters. All AdCom members have addresses constructed like mine: *initial.surname@ieee.org*. A member can send a message to all AdCom members at once by using the following address: *pcs.adcom@ieee.org*.

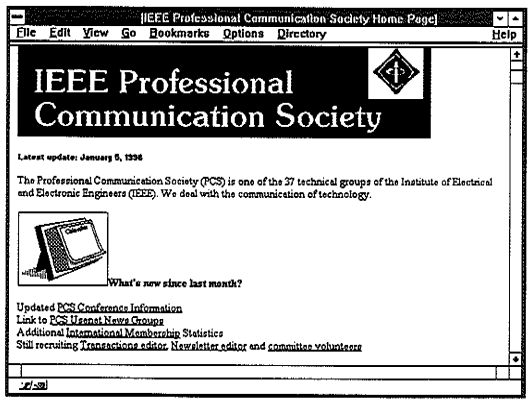
Another way to send e-mail to an AdCom member is to use the World Wide Web. The PCS home page on the WWW contains a link to another page that lists all AdCom members. Clicking on any name in the list brings up an e-mail composition window with the recipient's address already in place.

Internet e-mail is based on the transmission of (only) ASCII messages. Sending anything else (such as word processor or spreadsheet files in their native formats) either won't be transmitted or can create gibberish on the receiving end if the recipient's software cannot decipher it. Internet e-mail software packages do not all have the same capabilities, and some networks do not allow files (ASCII or otherwise) to be attached to e-mail. If in doubt about what can be safely transmitted, or if your e-mail keeps being returned as undeliverable, ask your service provider for advice.

Usenet Newsgroups

Usenet is a collection of thousands of topically oriented electronic bulletin boards (referred to as newsgroups), covering

(continued on page 3)



INSIDE

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

I am a student member of PCS, who joined in August 1995. The purpose of my letter is to respond to some of the questions David Nadziejka posed in the November/December issue.

With regard to the AdCom's thrust on electronic media in communication, I feel that the thrust is timely and critical given the recent rise in electronic media and the onset of the World Wide Web. I also feel, however, that electronic publishing will probably not be a complete substitute for old-fashioned paper publishing because it is still more convenient to flip through the pages of a book or manual (or to read my newspaper over a morning cup of coffee) than it is to scroll through pages of text on a computer screen.

Electronic publishing won't overwhelm traditional publishing.

Electronic publishing will provide a way to reach a larger market, and it may be vital to make the first impression to induce the user to explore further. Electronic archiving and retrieving will probably become more important with time. In fact, you may have heard about a project launched in late 1995 jointly by the IEEE and the University of California, in which downloadable images of all papers from IEEE publications from 1992 onwards are now available to users of the UC Melvyl online library catalog.

It is thus possible for a me to sit down with my computer in the department, browse through the most recent papers, and then print out a clear, crisp copy on the printer in our lab, all without ever leaving my desk. (You will note that to actually read the paper, I still prefer to print a copy!)

In the matter of changing the Society's name, I feel that we should stay with "Professional Communication Society" because the Society's scope is much broader than technical communication, although that undoubtedly forms the bulk of what PCS deals with. For instance, the Society covers communication issues such as ethics in the workplace (there were several articles on this theme in the *Transactions* last year), ethics in presentation of data, e-mail etiquette, and plain old communication on the job (with peers, superiors, and juniors), all of which, I believe, fall more appropriately under the category of "professional communication."

Finally, I agree with you that the capacities of 25 very active members cannot equal those of a much larger active member body. I have taken your suggestion seriously and will try to do my bit to be an active Society member.

—Vishal Sharma
Santa Barbara, California
vishal@spetses.ece.ucsb.edu

NEW IEEE CHANGE-OF-ADDRESS PROCEDURE

The IEEE has introduced a service that allows you to accomplish a change of address by e-mail. Simply send the change to: *address.change@ieee.org*. Include your name, member number, postal mail and e-mail addresses, and phone and fax numbers. Submitting your address change promptly will help keep the newsletter, *Transactions*, and other IEEE publications coming on time.

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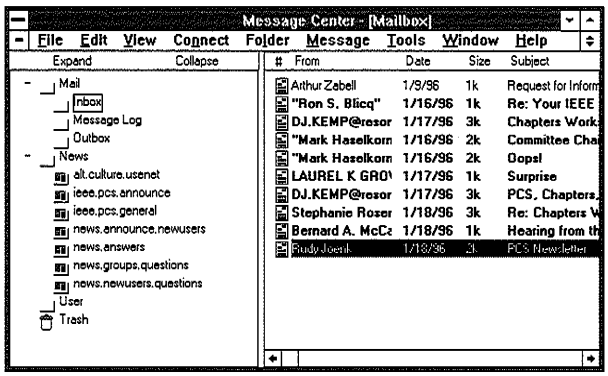
PCS COMMUNICATION

(continued from page 1)

almost every topic you can think of. It is a mechanism for communicating with people who are interested in the same things that interest you, though maybe from a different perspective. Most newsgroups are unmoderated, allowing anyone to post a message on the newsgroup bulletin board. A few are moderated, meaning that they are screened by a newsgroup moderator who weeds out inappropriate postings.



Newsgroups are organized into a few top-level categories, within which there may be hundreds of newsgroups. Many topics fit in more than one category. The category is presented in the first chunk of the newsgroup name. There are seven core categories that are distributed globally. These categories, and an example of each, are:

comp computer hardware and software (comp.sys.mac.announce)

misc topics not easily sorted into other categories (misc.jobs.offered)

news newsgroups about Usenet newsgroups and administration (news.groups.questions)

rec recreational activities and hobbies (rec.food.recipes)

sci science-oriented newsgroups (sci.astro.hubble)

soc cultural and current events (soc.culture.nepal)

talk debates on controversial topics (talk.rights.human)

In addition to the core categories, a growing number of new top-level categories may be distributed to any particular news server (the computer that your service provider uses to retrieve newsgroup postings). These include:

alt tentative, frivolous, or highly controversial topics (alt.national.enquirer)

biz business and commercial topics (biz.comp.services)

ieee newsgroups related to IEEE (ieee.tab.general)

The PCS newsgroup is called **ieee.pcs.general**. It is unmoderated and offers a way for members to post information they would like to communicate to the membership at large. The AdCom has begun to post information of general interest to PCS members on the newsgroup. Information posted to a newsgroup is often time-sensitive (as the posting ages, its message becomes less and less relevant).

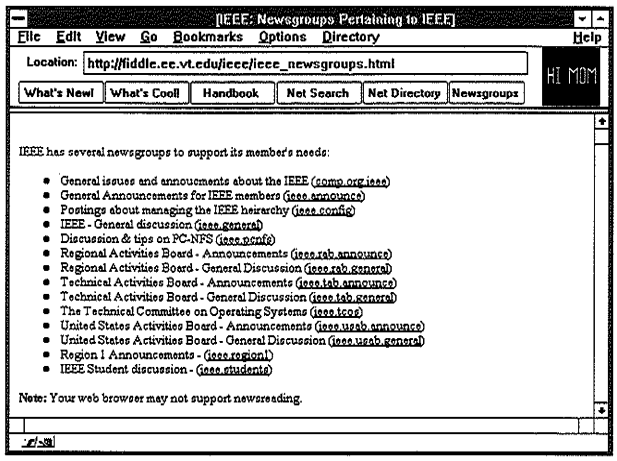
Users access Usenet using software called a *newsgroup reader*. Like e-mail software, these programs exhibit a variety of interfaces. Most have a browser that returns a list of newsgroups based on a key word search of newsgroup names. You select or specify a newsgroup to access, and the reader returns a set of the most current postings in that newsgroup. Most newsgroup readers allow you to set or change the number of postings in the set initially returned. You can retrieve older postings by requesting additional sets of postings.

Most newsgroup readers organize a newsgroup's index so that messages appear in reverse chronological order (the most recent posting heads the list). Messages always give the address of the person who posted them, so e-mailing a response directly to a message poster is possible.

Many postings represent an on-going discussion among a number of participants. Just as happens at a large party, multiple discussions are carried on simultaneously. Since all postings are chronologically ordered without regard to author or content, participants usually include a common phrase (a *thread*) in their posting titles to identify the link to the posting that started the discussion. It may be difficult to find this initial posting because it may have appeared hundreds of postings ago.

Most newsgroup readers let you *subscribe* to a number of newsgroups. Subscribing allows your newsgroup reader to keep a record of the newsgroups in which you

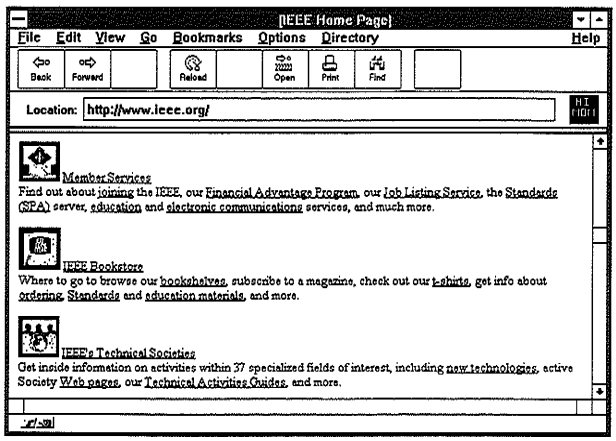
are interested and of the articles in each newsgroup that you have read. This speeds the retrieval of postings on your favorite newsgroups with minimal effort on your part. If you lose interest in a newsgroup, you can unsubscribe to that group. I strongly suggest that you subscribe to the PCS newsgroup and contribute your ideas by posting them!



Access to specific newsgroups is at the discretion of your service provider. Almost all provide access to the seven global Usenet categories, but they may not provide access to all or part of other categories. The IEEE newsgroups fall into a discretionary category, so if you find that your newsgroup reader denies the existence of **ieee.pcs.general**, contact your service provider and ask them to include the IEEE category on their news server.

World Wide Web

The World Wide Web (WWW) is one of the newest features of the Internet and it is rapidly becoming the most popular. It is a mechanism for presenting text, pictures, sound bites, and video clips to users in a set of hypertext-linked documents. These documents are created using a subset of the Standard Generalized Markup Language (SGML) called Hypertext Markup Language (HTML). An author creates a *home page* that serves as a table of contents, and then connects additional pages to the home page and to other pages via text or graphic links. To improve retrieval speed, each of these additional pages is usually a separate electronic file.



Users access the WWW using software called a *browser*. Like newsgroup readers, these programs exhibit a variety of interfaces, but they have a number of common features. The browser retrieves a page (document) that you request by typing the page's file name or by clicking on a hypertext link to the document. Web page filenames are referred to as *Uniform Resource Locators* (URLs).

The URL contains a hierarchical reference to a file's device and directory location on a specific computer attached to the Internet. The browser uses the first few characters of the URL to determine which service you are requesting and treats the rest of the URL as the document or file name that you wish to retrieve.

The URL of the PCS home page is **http://www.ieee.org/PCS/pcsindex.html**; the URL of the IEEE home page is **http://www.ieee.org/**. If your browser and service provider have enabled Usenet access, you can connect to the PCS newsgroup directly from the WWW by typing **news:ieee.pcs.general** at the URL prompt.

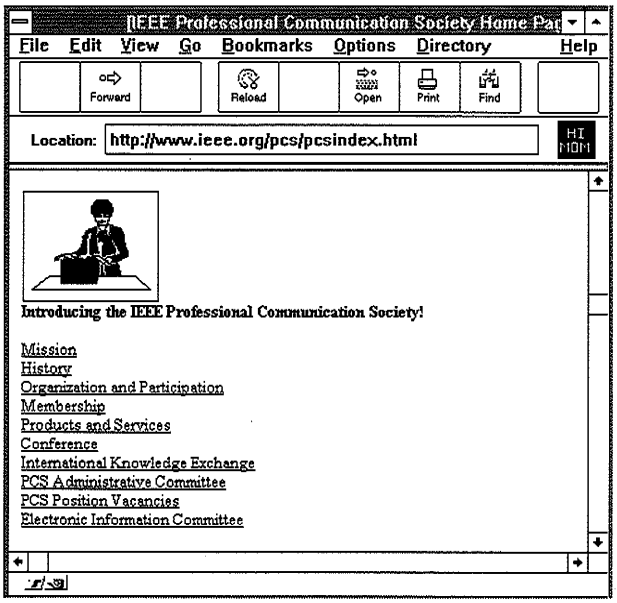
The content of Web pages is controlled by their authors. Web pages are not forums for discussion (as newsgroups are) but, rather, an electronic publishing mechanism. A well designed Web page identifies the author by name and e-mail address (often providing a hypertext link that invokes the user's e-mail program) to encourage reader feedback.

The rate of change of information on a Web page is usually slower than in a newsgroup. PCS and IEEE Web pages are updated twice a month, but not every page then contains new information. Another feature of a well designed Web page is the display of its latest revision date.

Unlike newsgroups, there is no subscription mechanism to keep track of what you've visited. Most browsers have some capability to build *hot lists* of your favorite home pages so that you don't have to type in the lengthy URL every time you want to visit. I suggest that you add the PCS home page to your hot list. The PCS home page begins with a section contain-

ing direct hypertext links to information that has been changed since the last update and concludes with direct links to the IEEE home page and the PCS newsgroup.

Many Web browsers also provide the capability to connect to other Internet services, such as Usenet newsgroups, file transfer protocol (FTP: a means of downloading files), and Telnet (a means of logging directly onto another computer), if these features have been enabled by your service provider.



Searching the Internet

The most difficult thing about the Internet is knowing where to look for particular information. A number of searching services have been created to ease this situation. One of the earliest cataloging services is called *Archie*. It searches an index of filenames at FTP sites and is helpful in determining the location of a file that you wish to download. Archie is not a stand-alone Internet feature; you get to it through your FTP software, Telnet, or Gopher.

Gopher is a menu-based system giving topically organized access to information on the Internet. Each Gopher server contains links to the menus of other Gopher servers. It builds a list of possible sites by keyword-searching the menu titles and options for you. It then uses Telnet to connect with your chosen site, retrieve the information you requested, and return a copy of it to your computer.

Wide Area Information Servers (WAIS) are collections (databases) of documents that are fully indexed on content. Search and retrieval proceed as with Gopher. WAIS has an additional feature, *relevance feedback*, that allows you to select documents which closely match what you want. These texts are then used by WAIS as keyword sources for further searches.

Gopher and WAIS services complement each other and are generally accessible from your Web browser, possibly even from a specific item or icon in your Internet access software. To invoke them from the browser, provide the URL that represents a Gopher or WAIS list. Because these lists are hierarchically organized, first-time searchers are advised to start with one of the master lists, such as **gopher://info.mcc.ac.uk/11/external/wais**.

With the explosion of information on the WWW, it was only a matter of time until services were developed to index Web sites and perform topical searches. The best known Web searchers and their URLs are:

Yahoo	http://www.yahoo.com
Lycos	http://http://lycos.cs.cmu.edu/
Web Crawler	http://www.webcrawler.com/

As technology evolves, usage increases, and commercialization continues, look for further progress on streamlining Internet access, simplifying the user interfaces, and integrating the software tools.

THE NEXT TIME SOMEBODY PROPOSES TO "MODEM" ME SOMETHING, I'M GOING TO PRETEND I DON'T SPEAK THE LANGUAGE.

—Michael Putzel
The Boston Globe

THE NEW COMMUNICATIONS SUPERHIGHWAY NEEDS AN OFF RAMP FOR JUNK MAIL.

—Gaylord Morrison
Senior Voice

NEWSLETTER LOOKING FOR AN EDITOR

Reply to:
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Boulder, CO 80302-5680
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(303) 541-0060

The newsletter is published six times per year in the odd-numbered months. The copy deadline is approximately two months prior to the month of publication. The editor obtains and edits all content and oversees typesetting and page layout by an independent contractor. Printing and distribution are handled by the IEEE. PCS provides a token honorarium per issue. The editor must be, or must become, an IEEE Member. Please send expressions of interest and qualifications, as well as requests for more information, to Rudy Joenk (see left column). Please feel free also to communicate with former editor David Nadziejka, *d.nadziejka@ieee.org.*

TRANSACTIONS LOOKING FOR AN EDITOR

For more information, please communicate with
Mike Markel, renmarke @idbsu.idbsu.edu, (208) 385-3088, or
Rudy Joenk, r.joenk@ieee.org (303) 541-0060.

The *Transactions* is a refereed, archival journal, published quarterly. The editor is responsible for planning issues; securing, reviewing, and editing previously unpublished material; coordinating with the associate editors and with the IEEE production services; and managing expenses. Of these, planning and obtaining good manuscripts is not only the most difficult task but also the key to maintaining a successful *Transactions.* The editor must be or become an IEEE Member.

At least one day per week is an estimate of the average time required, with variations occurring during the publishing cycle. There is an honorarium, but an employer's backing is extremely helpful—if not crucial—for release time, administrative support, postage, telephone, text-processing and e-mail equipment, and travel expenses.

If you are interested, please e-mail a letter expressing your interest and ideas, along with a resume and supporting materials, to Rudy Joenk (see left column). All applications will be acknowledged. The deadline is 1 May 1996.

The new editor will be appointed soon thereafter, in time for a cross-over period between editors. Mike Markel will complete the December 1996 issue and the new editor will take over the March 1997 issue, which goes to production about 1 December 1996.

TREASURER LOOKING FOR AN UNDERSTUDY

Reply to:
Bill Kehoe
Tel: (301) 953-6000, ext. 7944;
Fax: (301) 953-5937
w.kehoe@ieee.org

The treasurer submits an annual budget of $175,000 and is responsible for payment of the Society's expenses. The treasurer also implements the payment of funds as directed by the Administrative Committee (AdCom) and helps with aspects of meeting and conference planning, such as hotel contracts. An accounting background is not needed, but attention to detail is a must. This is an opportunity for professional growth and to work with a diverse board of communication professionals. For further information, please contact Bill (see left column).

CURMUDGEON'S CORNER

JOAN G. NAGLE

Joan Nagle has been active in PCS since 1985. She has edited the Society's Transactions *and has served on the Editorial Board of the IEEE Press. She is currently working on her second book.*

IF

"If" is the title of a poem that was popular in my childhood (and even before that) by a popular poet of the time, Edgar A. Guest. It begins,

> If you can keep your head when all about you
> Are losing theirs, and blaming it on you,

Sounds like the basis of a DILBERT strip, no? Just goes to show that things haven't changed much. (Except for the poem's non-PC ending, which told the listener that if *he* could fulfill all the foregoing conditions, then "you'll be a man, my son." No comment.)

But at least Guest's *if*-clauses made sense; they led to a logical conclusion. The basis for this column's curmudgeonly ire is the brainless use of the conditional.

Servers, particularly in franchise restaurants where they are taught a standard script of customer-discourse pleasantries, are wont to say, "My name is Greg, if you need anything."

I am always tempted to ask, "And what is your name if I don't need anything?"

Recently I heard a graduate of the same discourse school on my car radio. He concluded his review of a play being presented in the community with this line: "It's a very funny play, if you haven't seen it before." Now that made me wonder (it being a long and especially boring drive). I suppose there is a such a thing as a funny play that's only funny the first time you see it and really tedious after that, in which case he was being accurate. And then there are plays that make you laugh time after time. Like maybe "Born Yesterday." But I don't think he was being that discriminating.

Misusing the conditional statement...

Okay, so none of us waits tables or reviews plays (except in the privacy of our homes, where we can say anything we like, unless we live with teenagers or deeply critical spouses). We are still prone to misuse the conditional statement.

As in those examples, we don't follow up with what happens if the condition is *not* met. For example, "If properly maintained, this heater will provide 30,000 Btu output." Again, I am left to wonder: If not properly maintained (and have I, in fact, been told what constitutes proper maintenance?), will the output gradually decrease over time, drop sharply, or disappear? How long do I have?

My suspicion is that maintenance and output are not closely connected, at least not in a direct relationship. That the writer was really saying two discrete things: (1) proper maintenance is important (that is, I'm not responsible for what happens if you don't do it), and (2) the output of this heater is 30,000 Btu (usually). Although I may be the world's prime (at least loudest) proponent of economical writing, this sentence is trying to do too much in too few words.

As noted in (1), we lean toward conditional statements when we are being overcautious (generally the result of hanging around with lawyers too much). Overcautious writers use words like *could*, *would*, *may*, and *might* to avoid making clear, and possibly actionable, statements. But not everything has to be qualified, does it? In proposals, for instance, the use of *could* and *would* make us sound uncertain of the characteristics of our offering. Instead of,

> The heater would provide 30,000 Btu output.

it is more positive (and usually more accurate) to say,

> The heater provides 30,000 Btu output.

My own [deeply critical] spouse has a rule that mandates "Only one weasel word per sentence." I propose a corollary: "And *no* weasel words when you don't want to sound like a weasel."

What do weasels sound like? How would I know? Iffy, I think.

In conclusion, here's a beauty shop sign, spotted recently by another family member, that qualifies the establishment's services not at all:

> We specialize in all kinds of hair.

Looking Ahead to IPCC 96: Communication on the Fast Track

By Rob Houser with Scott DeLoach

For advance program and registration details, or for general information about IPCC 96, send your name, address, and telephone/fax number to:

Roger Grice
Conference Chair
52 Doris Lane
Lake Katrine, NY 12449
USA

Phone/Fax:
(914) 336-0064
E-mail: r.grice@ieee.org

To experience an Adirondacks fall in Saratoga Springs, New York, isn't the only reason to come to IPCC 96.

Come for the *sharing*. Find out what your peers are doing in their jobs to expand our profession. Ask someone for help with a communication problem you've been having. Help someone by sharing your own hard-learned lessons.

Come for the *questioning*. Let the speakers challenge your assumptions, and you challenge theirs as well. We often learn as much through discussing the questions as we do through hearing the answers.

Come for the *networking*. Meet others who do what you do or what you want to do. Keep in touch with people you met at previous IPCCs. Don't wait for the threat of downsizing to begin looking at the opportunities available to you.

And, of course, come for the beautiful scenery, too. With the Adirondacks around you, you're bound to be inspired and refreshed before you head back to the office.

Taking a break from the daily grind is an important part of your professional preparation. Have the "budget mongers" and the "schedule mongers" beaten down your desire to try new approaches? Many people say that attending conferences such as the IPCCs helps them get refocused on their customers. They return to their jobs with new ideas and renewed enthusiasm.

For whatever reasons, come to IPCC 96 in Saratoga Springs. Invite someone you know who might benefit from the conference. Don't wait. Invest in your professional growth by attending the IPCC.

PCS Speaker at Los Angeles Sections Meeting

On January 17, PCS AdCom member Linda J. Kosmin was the featured speaker at the Los Angeles County IEEE Joint Engineering Management, Education, and Professional Communication Societies dinner meeting held at the Jolly Roger Inn, Anaheim, CA. The meeting was co-sponsored by the Foothill and Metropolitan Los Angeles Sections and the IEEE Entrepreneurs' Network.

Linda's topic was "Internet Routes to R&D Funding Sources." Highlights of her presentation included

(1) proposal writing aids;
(2) favorite grant hubs;
(3) key pathways: Telnet, Gopher, WWW;
(4) cooperative research opportunities;
(5) competitive intelligence leads;
(6) links to foundation resources; and
(7) listserv perspectives.

WORD HISTORIES

BY CRAIG M. CARVER

Deadline—an item on the agenda at last July's [1994] G-7 economic summit was the cost of closing Ukraine's infamous Chernobyl nuclear plant, which still operates despite severe safety problems. Deputy Energy Secretary William White said before the meeting that the group would "set some *deadlines* for Chernobyl." *Deadline* (a limiting line, mark, or time) was coined during the Civil War, in the notorious Confederate POW camp Andersonville. The earliest known written instance of the word occurs in an 1864 report by Colonel D.T. Chandler: "The Federal prisoners of war are confined within a stockade fifteen feet high.... A railing around the inside of the stockade, and about twenty feet from it, constitutes the '*dead line*,' beyond which the prisoners are not allowed to pass" (read into the *Congressional Record*, 1876). If a prisoner crossed the line, he was summarily shot. After the war *deadline* survived in the South as jargon in games of marbles, referring to a line drawn near the ring. If on the first shot a player's shooter fell short of the line, he was "dead" and had to drop out of the game. In the West cattle ranchers used a *dead line* to indicate the point beyond which sheep farmers were not to go on pain of being "dry gulched"—that is, killed. From a physical line not to be crossed, *deadline* evolved into a point in time not to be crossed—most often a given time after which newspaper or magazine copy would not be accepted for inclusion in a particular issue.

ADCOM BEGINS E-MAIL ADDRESS COLLECTION

At the December AdCom meeting, Paul Seesing, chair of the Electronic Information Committee, was asked to begin compiling a database of the e-mail addresses of PCS members. This database is intended to provide a fast and simple means of getting information from the AdCom to the members.

If you would like to be included in the database, please send a message with your IEEE member number and your preferred e-mail address to *p.seesing@ieee.org*.

NEWSLETTER SCHEDULE

Reply to:
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2227 Canyon Blvd., #462
Boulder, CO 80302-5680
r.joenk@ieee.org
(303) 541-0060

Contributions are welcome. Send proposals for columns to the editor.

E-mail files and ASCII IBM-compatible diskettes are preferred.

Newsletter publication deadlines are as follows:

Issue	Deadline
July/Aug. 1996	10 May 1996
Sep./Oct. 1996	5 July 1996
Nov./Dec. 1996	6 Sep. 1996
Jan./Feb. 1997	8 Nov. 1996
Mar./Apr. 1997	10 Jan. 1997
May/June 1997	7 Mar. 1997

Spam.ming *v.* the practice of sending unwanted junk mail, usually product advertisements, to a large number of people via electronic mail or the Internet.

ADCOM PROFILES

MARK HASELKORN

Mark Haselkorn specializes in use and impact of computer technology.

Mark Haselkorn, recently elected president of the Professional Communication Society, is professor and chair of the Department of Technical Communication (TC) in the College of Engineering at the University of Washington (Seattle). He has been at the University for ten years and, under his leadership, TC received departmental status (1989) and was awarded its own undergraduate and graduate degrees (1990).

In addition to maintaining its prestigious degree programs, TC has become the University's lead department on numerous research projects and initiatives in the areas of digital media, usability, international technical communication, and use of new information and communication technologies to deliver user services.

Mark has been called "one of the nation's leading experts on the use and impact of computer technology." His research includes two studies for the Office of Technology Assessment of the Congress of the United States, exploring the impact of electronic media on the dissemination of Federal information. Since 1987, he has led numerous Intelligent Transportation Systems (ITS) projects sponsored by Federal, state, city, transit, and corporate organizations.

This work includes system development of online services known as Advanced Traveler Information and Advanced Public Transportation Systems, analyses of commuter behavior and information needs, development and use of Automatic Vehicle Identification, study of signal priority systems, and impact assessment of traveler information systems.

Since 1991 Mark has teamed with Daniel Dailey (another PCS member) to design and demonstrate a regional ITS network based on the Internet. Together, they have established an ITS research program with a 1995 level of funding over $2,500,000.

Mark's lovely wife, Jodie, is a physician in physical medicine and rehabilitation. They have an equally lovely two-year old daughter, Amelia. Amelia attended her first IPCC in Philadelphia at the age of one month; her participation was far more significant at her second IPCC in Banff.

Mark, Jodie, and Amelia recently moved to a new house on Seattle's Capital Hill, and they look forward to hosting the PCS Administrative Committee when they have their March meeting in Seattle.

RON BLICQ

Ron Blicq loves his experience as a glider pilot.

Ron Blicq has been associated with PCS for longer than he cares to admit! He joined the IEEE and PCS (which then was the IRE Professional Group on Engineering Writing and Speech) in 1958 and presented his first paper to a PGEWS conference in Chicago in 1960.

His background is essentially technical: 13 years with the Canadian and British air forces, initially as an airborne avionics/navigation officer specializing in high altitude radar research, a task that took him to Australia for six months, to North Africa on numerous occasions, and several times along the route through India to Singapore. ("It took seven flying days, each seven-to-eight hours long," he says, "to fly from Britain to Brisbane in Australia!")

On leaving the air force he joined the Electronics Division of CAE Industries Limited in Winnipeg, Canada, where for the next 10 years he was technical editor responsible for generating defense proposals for the Canadian and U.S. military, and for producing technical manuals evolving from the company's maintenance contracts for the Pinetree Early Warning Radar Defense Line.

From CAE Ron "graduated" to Red River Community College, where he taught technical communication to often-reluctant engineering technology students. Now he is supposedly retired, but in effect he is enjoying life immensely developing the curriculum for and helping teachers involved in the Province of Manitoba's thrust to implement technical communication as an elective in the high school curriculum. And, as readers of this *Newsletter* know, he also has been active in promoting two recent PCS conferences: Banff in 1994 and Dortmund, Germany, in 1995; and he will chair the 1998 conference in Quebec City.

His second passion over the past two years has been learning to "soar with the eagles" as a glider pilot. He just wishes that central Canada's climate was suitable for year-round gliding (it's mid-January and -38° in Winnipeg as he writes this—and at that temperature it doesn't matter whether it's Celsius or Fahrenheit!)

Ron admits that he was not a good student in school. That came later, when he joined the air force on his 18th birthday. "I grew up on the delightful island of Guernsey, 20 miles from the Normandy coast of France," he says, "where cycling through narrow, leafy lanes whose banks were filled with clumps of nodding daffodils, celandine, and buttercup, and swimming in the clear but chilly waters of the Gulf Stream that surrounded the island, proved too much of a distraction." It took a wartime evacuation to central Canada to remove the distractions, and the demands of learning radio and navigation techniques for the air force, to gear him up for a better learning mode.

THE SOFTWARE SCHISM

From "La Bustina di Minerva," a column by Umberto Eco, in the September 30, 1994, issue of the Italian journal L'Espresso. *Eco's column was anonymously translated into English and posted on the Internet in October 1994.*

Insufficient consideration has been given to the underground religious war that is transforming the modern world: the division between users of the Macintosh computer and users of MS-DOS-compatible computers. I am firmly of the opinion that the Macintosh is Catholic and that DOS is Protestant. Indeed, the Macintosh is counterreformist and has been influenced by the methodical path of the Jesuits. It tells the faithful how they must proceed step by step to reach—if not the Kingdom of Heaven—the moment in which their document is printed. It is catechistic: the essence of revelation is dealt with via simple formulae and sumptuous icons. Everyone has a right to salvation. DOS is Protestant, or even Calvinistic. It allows free interpretation of scripture, demands difficult personal decisions, imposes a subtle hermeneutics upon the user, and takes for granted the idea that not all can reach salvation. To make the system work you need to interpret it yourself: the user is closed within the loneliness of his own inner torment.

You may object that, with the passage to Windows, the DOS universe has come to resemble more closely the counter-reformist tolerance of the Macintosh. It's true: Windows represents an Anglican-style schism—big ceremonies in the cathedral but with the possibility of returning to DOS to fiddle with things. With Windows, you can still decide to allow women and gays to be priests if you want to.

And what about the machine language that lies beneath both operating systems? Ah, that is the stuff of the Old Testament, Talmudic and cabalistic.

TOOLS OF THE TRADE

CHERYL REIMOLD

PREPARING OUTSTANDING PRESENTATIONS

Part 2 — The Basic Structure

Last time, I showed you that answering three questions will give you the right main message and key points for a strong presentation:

1. *Who* are my listeners?
2. What do I want them to *do* or *believe*?
3. What are their main *needs* and *interests*?

Once you have the message and key points, you need to fit them into a structure that will produce the response you want.

There is one structure that works uniformly well for all presentations — technical or non-technical, informative or persuasive. It consists of three parts, which I will discuss more fully in upcoming columns. Here, I want to show you what the structure is and why it will always work for you.

Using the universal structure makes your message clear.

Rx for Presentations: A Universal Structure

1. **Introduction (1-2 minutes):** Rapport builder, attention getter, main message, and presentation plan (preview of key points)
2. **Body:** Up to three or four key points, each supported by varied forms of evidence, illustrations, or examples
3. **Summary:** Restatement of main message and key points and a statement of their significance to the audience, followed by a call to action or memorable concluding thought if appropriate

Stick to this simple formula and you will reach your audience — any audience. This is because the structure grows out of the *severe limitations* that beset every audience in the world.

Audience Limitation #1: Potential Confusion

Your audience will be easily confused by any structural complexity. This is mainly because the people listening to you can't go back over what you said, as they can when reading a memo. They have to understand everything the first time they hear it. So, your points must be laid out simply and clearly — as they are in the universal structure: preview of only a few key points, followed by discussion in the same order.

Unfortunately, the tendency is always to underestimate the complexity of your presentation — for the simple reason that *you* know exactly what you want to say. Usually, you go over your material several times as you develop and then rehearse it. After a while, everything seems perfectly clear and obvious — because by now you are perfectly familiar with it!

Remember that your presentation began with a fabric of information in your mind, out of which you drew some important threads for your audience. The tapestry, the whole picture, is complete in your mind — but the audience has only the threads. For the audience to follow you, those threads must themselves make a clear, even if schematic, picture of your message and its key substantiating points. The universal structure will do that for you.

Audience Limitation #2: Distraction

Your audience is prone to miss or mis-hear parts of what you say because of the intrinsic noise of the situation. The air conditioning may be loud; someone's view may be blocked; a noisy event may be taking place in the next room. Some people may be distracted by other audience members or by their own thoughts.

In fact, a fundamental rule of presentations is the "Rule of Three." This rule states that you must present your important points three times, because the audience will take in only one-third of what you say. A simple calculation shows that this provides a reasonable chance for most listeners to hear you at least once.

Audience limitations: confusion, distractions, sleepiness.

The universal structure enables you to deal with this audience limitation. In the Introduction, you state your main message and preview your key points. In the Body, you state and buttress your key points, relating them clearly to the main message. And in the Summary, you briefly restate the message and points, tying them together for the audience by underlining their significance to that particular group.

Audience Limitation #3: Sleepiness

The awful fact is that your listeners tend to alternate between napping and daydreaming. Their natural attention curve is like an upside-down bell. They start out quite awake, wondering why you are there and whether you are going to do anything interesting. Then their bodies take over and drag them swiftly down to the bottom of the upturned bell. (Don't be fooled by appearances: Many of them have learned to nap with their eyes open.) Finally, they struggle back into wakefulness as you say the magic words, "in summary," because they think you might fill them in on what they missed during their nap. This is their sometimes painful climb up the other side of the bell curve.

Now, what does this sad fact mean for the structure of a presentation? First, let's take the easy parts: the beginning and the end of your talk, or the Introduction and the Summary. These are the tips of the bell curve, where you have your listeners' attention without much effort. Don't waste these natural high points of attention on trivialities (as so many do). Instead, use the beginning and the end to state firmly the most important parts of your talk. The components of the Introduction and the Summary in our universal structure guide you to do this.

Now comes the hard part. The Body of your talk, the very part in which you get into the substance of your message, is nap time. Here is the moment the audience nosedives to the bottom of the bell. Your biggest challenge in the Body of the talk is to keep your listeners conscious, and your most powerful weapon against sleepiness is *variety*.

As the universal structure shows, you must substantiate your key points with varied examples, illustrations, and evidence. You must also put variety into your voice, your stance, your gestures, and your visual aids. Variety startles and interests people; sameness puts them to sleep.

Next time we'll consider the universal presentation structure in more detail, starting with the Introduction.

AdCom Meeting Minutes

By Laurel Kay Grove

Conferences in Snowbird and Quebec City, new symposium series, constitution being revised, working with Intelligent Transportation Systems

The PCS Administrative Committee (AdCom) met on December 9, 1995, at the airport Marriott Hotel in Newark, New Jersey.

George Martin agreed to serve as Fellows chair and will try to help members move up the IEEE hierarchy; Cheryl Reimold will fill the Awards chair vacated by Elizabeth Keyes.

IPCC 97 is scheduled for October 22-24, 1997, at Snowbird in Utah, which is near Salt Lake City. Conference chair Karl Smart is also chairing the SIGDOC conference, which will immediately precede IPCC 97. The two conferences will overlap by one day, with joint sessions being held on Oct. 22.

The site of IPCC 98 has been chosen: the city of Quebec! Conference chair Ron Blicq is organizing committees; to volunteer, contact Ron at *r.blicq@ieee.org*.

PCS's new symposium series, Conversations, will begin this spring with one on "The Virtual Organization: Impacts of Electronic Collaboration." Joan Nagle is drafting a proposal to the IEEE Press for the resulting book.

The Accreditation Committee that began in September is developing policies and protocols for accrediting academic programs in engineering communication. Mike Goodman would welcome your input; contact him at *m.goodman@ieee.org*.

A major topic at the meeting was the PCS constitution. The requirement that individuals elected to the AdCom hold Member grade or above was controversial. The other major point of discussion was determining what committees are necessary to the business of the Society. As decided at the December meeting, the standing committees are Awards, Chapter/Section Relations, Editorial Advisory, Education, Electronic Information, Meetings, Membership, and Publicity/Marketing. The constitution is still under discussion and a vote is expected at the March meeting.

For 1996, meetings are scheduled for March 9 in Seattle, Washington; June 7-8 in Snowbird, Utah; and September 21 in Saratoga Springs, New York. All PCS members are welcome to attend AdCom meetings.

Opportunities

Bill Kehoe continues to look for someone to understudy him as treasurer. A summary of his duties appears on the PCS World Wide Web home page. Interested members can contact Bill directly at *w.kehoe@ieee.org*.

New editors are being sought for both the newsletter and the *Transactions*. Information is available in those publications, on our Web home page, and from Rudy Joenk (*r.joenk@ieee.org*).

The Education Committee is interested both in developing new PCS courses and in identifying new presenters for our current courses. Contact Janet Rochester (*j.rochester@ieee.org*) to get involved.

PCS needs a new representative to the IEEE-USA Communications and Information Policy committee. Mike Goodman (*m.goodman@ieee.org*) can tell you more about the committee, which generally meets in the Washington, DC, area.

One of the arenas in which PCS is an equal player within IEEE is on the Intelligent Transportation Systems (ITS) committee. PCS is a founding member of this committee, which deals with the application of communication and information technology to improving the efficiency of our transportation system. Since intelligent transportation systems depend on the gathering, design, and delivery of information like current road conditions and destination directions, PCS's input is critical.

The IEEE's first ITS conference is being planned for 1997 and you can be part of the planning. For more information, contact Mark Haselkorn (*m.haselkorn@ieee.org*) or one of our PCS representatives on the committee: Daniel Dailey (*dan@ee.washington.edu*) or Emily Sopensky (*esiris@aol.com*).

Inaugural Technical Communication Institute Scheduled

By Ron Blicq

TCI 96, the first annual Technical Communication Institute, opens in June and will provide an intensive interactive learning environment, during which a prestigious faculty will present state-of-the-art communication technology to practicing technical communicators. The location: Winnipeg, Canada. The dates: June 5-8, 1996.

The Institute is the brainchild of three PCS members: Ron Blicq, Lisa Moretto, and James Conklin, who have been developing the concept since 1992. Their ideas crystallized following a 1994 study sponsored by Western Economic Diversification and the Society for Technical Communication. The study identified that

...instruction, not a conference

- High quality documentation has a significant impact on product quality and manufacturer competitiveness, and
- Training in or exposure to new communication technology is difficult and expensive to obtain in the more remote areas of North America.

The Province of Manitoba immediately recognized the need for specialist training for technical communicators in both Canada and the United States, and drew together an organizing committee from the University of Manitoba, Red River Community College, and The Canadian Manufacturers' Association. The Province also, through WORKFORCE 2000 Manitoba Education and Training, provided funding to help launch the inaugural Institute.

Topics Selected

The coordinators surveyed 2000 technical communicators in May 1995, who clearly identified the topics to be addressed:

- Information design
- Hypertext/Online documentation
- Planning multimedia presentations
- Project management
- Creating ISO 9000 documentation
- Publishing on the Internet

Participants will be able to sign up for the topics of their choice. However, they will be encouraged to register early because there will be only limited space for some topics. Each will be presented over one or two days and will be at an advanced (not introductory) level.

The Faculty

A top-notch faculty has been recruited, including JoAnn Hackos, Ann Rockley, C.J. Bibus, Edmond Weiss, Eric Ray, and Ben Weisner, all well known names in both the Professional Communication Society and the STC.

The Institute will be based at the centrally located Fort Garry Hotel in Winnipeg, adjacent to the historic gathering place known as *The Forks*. Instructional sessions will be held in the nearby facilities of the University of Manitoba and Red River Community College.

An Instructional Event

The Institute coordinators say that the most difficult task they have had in describing TCI 96 is to convince people that it is an *instructional* event, not a conference! A brochure describing the Institute is available to PCS members from Ron, Lisa, or James:

- **Ron Blicq** (Winnipeg, MB)
  Tel: 204 488-7060. Fax: 204 488-7294
  E-mail: *71604.1535@compuserve.com* or *r.blicq@ieee.org*
- **Lisa Moretto** (Myrtle Beach, SC)
  Tel: 803 238-9417. Fax: 803 238-9417
  E-mail: *75557.3326@compuserve.com*
- **James Conklin**, (Winnipeg, MB)
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EXPERIENCE NOT ESSENTIAL

PCS has a number of opportunities for individuals to lend their talents and creativity.

Volunteers are the backbone of the Institute, providing programs, conferences, and publications, as well as leading policy decisions. In return for their time and energy, IEEE volunteers perform important roles while making valuable contacts. PCS has a number of opportunities for individuals to lend their talents and creativity; some of these are:

- Awards
- Chapter leadership and liaison
- Conference planning and organization
- Education activities
- Internet development
- Membership development
- Publications
- Student activities

Volunteers laud the IEEE experiences they gain as contributing to their career development as well as to the satisfaction of accomplishment.

If you are interested in learning more about getting involved, contact Mark Haselkorn (*mark@uwtc.washington.edu*), or, if you have a specific committee you'd like to join, contact the appropriate committee chair:

Awards —
Cheryl Reimold (*c.reimold@ieee.org*)

Chapter/Section Relations —
Dave Kemp (*d.kemp@ieee.org*)

Editorial Advisory —
Rudy Joenk (*r.joenk@ieee.org*)

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Meetings/Conferences —
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Membership —
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Deborah Kizer (*d.kizer@ieee.org*)

Students —
Dave Kemp (*d.kemp@ieee.org*)

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