IEEE
PROFESSIONAL COMMUNICATION SOCIETY
NEWSLETTER

MARCH/APRIL 1999 VOLUME 43 • NUMBER 2

TWO 50TH ANNIVERSARIES

BY RON BLICQ

I had the distinct pleasure to be present at a dual celebration in September 1998: the 50th anniversary of Britain's Institute of Scientific and Technical Communicators (ISTC) and the 50th anniversary of one of the earliest British books on technical communication, *The Presentation of Technical Information* by Reginald Kapp. The celebration occurred during the banquet at ISTC's 1998 conference in Churchill College, Cambridge, England.

The ISTC was formed in 1948 at precisely the same time that Reginald Kapp, professor of electrical engineering at University College, London, was penning his book. He was 62 and, although this was the fourth book he had written, his previous works were on technical subjects.

Kapp wrote: "Teach people to think clearly, and they are likely to express themselves clearly; teach them to think about the person addressed, and they will have learnt the first lesson in the art of conveying information effectively from mind to mind. But teach them only how to turn out well constructed sentences and they may fail badly in the art of exposition."

He explained that two topics are at the heart of successful technical communication. First, communicators need to understand how the human mind handles new information. Second, communicators have to produce well crafted text to deliver the message. This requires mastery of a form of English that Kapp summarizes as "the English that any writer uses who expresses meaning clearly and without ambiguity; who spares readers unnecessary effort; who selects every item and places every sentence and every word so that it will meet the function assigned to it."

That book became my "bible" throughout my early days as a technical writer/editor with the Royal Air Force in Britain (this was 1953-55). As time progressed, however, and I changed continents, and more

ISTC president Gerry Gentle (right) with Mr. and Mrs. Jonathan Kapp at the dual anniversary reception.

and more books on technical communication appeared, his pocket-sized, 147-page volume slowly took a back seat.

But it wasn't forgotten by the ISTC executive committee who decided to re-issue the book as a joint 50th anniversary project. The new edition was launched at the 1998 ISTC banquet in Cambridge with president Gerry Gentle presenting a plaque commemorating the event to Jonathan Kapp, Professor Kapp's son.

Now I have both the original edition and the new edition sitting side-by-side on my desk. Dipping into the pages of the new edition I found it be just as relevant and meaningful as it was when the original

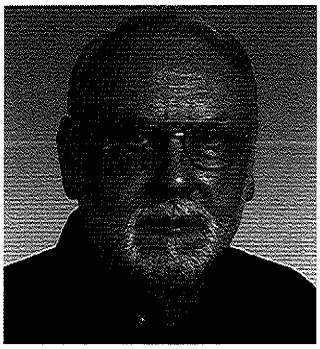
(continued on page 4)

INSIDE

2 From the Editor
3 President's Column
5 Humanware
7 Tools of the Trade
9 Black Tools
11 Flocci...pilification
12 Net Notes
14 Highlights of January AdCom Meeting
16 Point of Explanation
17 Professor Grammar
18 Internet in France
20 Changing Meeting Minutes
24 Twenty Questions

ISSN 0143-433X

FROM THE EDITOR



RUDY JOENK

Member Survey

Before you file this *Newsletter* wherever you file such items please (re)turn to page 24 and take the short survey which starts there. Other than editor Kim Campbell's questions to *Transactions* readers a couple of years ago, PCS hasn't gathered member information like this for quite a while (and it's not likely to become a frequent practice). We now have Beth Moeller as new Publicity & Marketing chair and we think this is the time we are oriented to making good use of member data. Results will be published here as soon as possible.

Déjà Vu

In the preceding issue (January/February 1999, vol. 43, no. 1, p. 21) we reported on the Engineering Management Society's survey that emphasized the importance of communication skills in technical jobs. Soon thereafter I read in *The Denver Post* that the "Ability to communicate ranked first among personal qualities of college graduates sought by employers, in a survey of 480 companies and public organizations by the National Association of Colleges and Employers."

Perhaps you remember Professor Grammar's effort to explain why *and/or* shouldn't be used in writing instructions (September/October 1998 issue, vol. 42, no. 5, p. 13)? A discussion of the meaning of *and/or* took place recently in the LAWSIG forum on CompuServe®. The participants' consensus was the obvious "either one or the other or both." They neither condoned nor discouraged its use and suggested that the construction had been first used in legal documents, specifically maritime contracts of the mid-19th century.

Lake Superior University's annual list of words that should not be protected by the First Amendment (i.e., should be banished) includes "Y2K" and "dialogue" used as a verb. To the latter I would add "transition."

AdCom Meetings

The next meeting is June 26-27 in the Boston area. The place—probably on the route 128 periphery—will be announced. After that the final AdCom meeting of the year will be September 7 in New Orleans preceding IPCC 99. Members are welcome at AdCom meetings.

Info for Authors

One thousand words makes a nice page-and-a-half article, although longer and shorter articles may be appropriate. Proposals for periodic columns are also welcome.

If you use a wp program, keep the format simple; multiple fonts and sizes, customized paragraphing and line spacing, personalized styles, etc. have to be filtered out before being recoded in *Newsletter* style for the publishing software. Some wp codes can be converted from one program to another but headers, footers, and tables lead the casualty list. Embed only enough highlighting—boldface, italics, bullets—to show me your formatting preferences.

Use e-mail for transmitting an article or postal mail for sending a diskette. My addresses are in the boilerplate at the bottom of this page.

(continued on page 4)

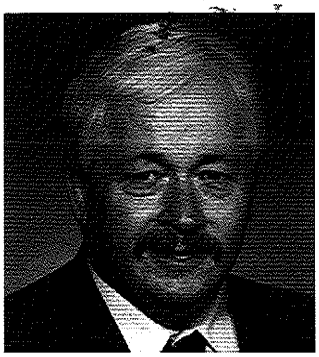
IEEE PROFESSIONAL COMMUNICATION SOCIETY

OFFICERS
ROGER GRICE, PRESIDENT
GEORGE HAYHOE, VICE-PRESIDENT
MURIEL ZIMMERMAN, SECRETARY
WILLIAM KEHOE, TREASURER

STAFF
RUDY JOENK, EDITOR

- *IEEE Professional Communication Society Newsletter* is published bimonthly by the Professional Communication Society of the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers, Inc., 3 Park Avenue, New York, NY 10016.
One dollar per member per year is included in the Society fee for each member of the Professional Communication Society. Printed in U.S.A. Periodicals postage paid at New York, NY, and at additional mailing offices.
- *Postmaster:* Send address changes to IEEE Professional Communication Society Newsletter, IEEE, 445 Hoes Lane, Piscataway, NJ 08855.
- *Editorial correspondence:* Rudy Joenk, 2227 Canyon Blvd. #462, Boulder, CO 80302-5680, 303-541-0060, *r.joenk@ieee.org*. Articles, letters, and reviews from readers are welcome. E-mail and ASCII IBM-compatible diskettes are preferred.

PRESIDENT'S COLUMN



ROGER GRICE

TECHNOLOGY AND TECHNICAL COMMUNICATION

It's early January as I write this column and I'm getting ready for a new semester at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute. I'll be teaching a course called Task-Oriented Communication, a rather interesting course that includes information on how to analyze users and their tasks and ways to measure how effective that communication is. The technological "wrinkle" on the course is that it's being offered through Rensselaer's distance-education facilities, an organization called Professional and Distance Education. In addition to on-campus students, the class will include a number of working professionals scattered across the United States and Europe.

As I worked to bring the elements of the course together, I stopped to think of the amount of technology that was going to be involved in preparing, delivering, and receiving the class. It's impressive.

Preparing the visual aids may take more time than the lesson does.

Delivering and Receiving the Course

The course is delivered in a variety of ways:

- Some students will be in classrooms connected to Rensselaer with telephone-wire connections. They will be able to see and hear what is going on in the classroom and they can press a button to connect to the classroom so that those of us on campus can see them and hear them. They have, in effect, a full presence in the classroom, although that presence is electronic rather than physical.
- Other students will be in classrooms connected to Rensselaer via satellite. They will be able to see and hear what is going on in the classroom but if they want to talk with us, they need to call in by telephone. (And classroom facilities being what they are, it is not always easy for them to find a working telephone.) Although we can hear from those students we never get to see them, so an element of imagination is needed.
- Still other students do not have a connection to the classroom; they receive a videotaped version of the class as it was broadcast and they view it several days after the class has been held.

Communication with Each Other

Communication with students-at-a-distance is not as easy as communicating with students in the on-campus classroom, but it can be done effectively—with creativity, patience, and a sense of humor all around.

While many of the students *can* communicate directly with the classroom during class, many do not—for a variety of reasons:

- Some students are shy. And the added layer of technology can be rather intimidating. Even if they need do little more than press a button, they do have to do something to get my attention and hope that their connection stays in place until they are finished talking and listening.
- Students who must make a phone call to communicate with the on-campus classroom are doubly burdened. In addition to the reluctance to use technology, they have to put up with a time delay—the time to get from their seats to the telephone, to place the call, and for the signal to come from the control room to me that I have a phone call. Students often feel intimidated: By the time they join the conversation it has moved on from the point at which they wanted to comment.

There are, of course, ways around these barriers, and a high percentage of communication from students comes in the form of e-mail, after-class phone calls, and comments submitted to a Listserv for the class.

Using Technology in the Classroom

Because the distance-education classes are broadcast, extra care and attention are

needed to bring the presentation quality up to a point where it can survive the strain put on it by transmission. So, in getting ready for each class, I need to prepare visual aids to help carry the message in case voice transmission is less than perfect; for this I use the slide-making program in my office-suite software package.

I need to ensure that any pieces of paper I show in class have large, easy-to-read text so I rely heavily on the word-processing program from my office-suite software. And I need to worry (actually, my production crew worries) about sound quality and audibility and the way that objects (including clothing) appear as a broadcast signal. Often, preparing the visual presentation of a classroom session takes more time and technology than developing the class lessons does.

So, Will Technology Really Save Us?

With all this technology at my disposal, you'd think that I'd truly be in control, wouldn't you? But the world always has a way of reminding me how small my place in it really is. As I worked to get ready for my second class of the semester and then leave for the PCS AdCom meeting in Houston, the northeastern portion of the United States was hit with a storm of snow and ice. And despite all the technology at my disposal, I sat at home, ice-bound, missing both my class and the AdCom meeting. It was a humbling experience for me; I guess I don't have as much control over things as I sometimes think I do.

TWO 50TH ANNIVERSARIES

(continued from page 1)

Communicators need to understand how the human mind handles new information.

version was published 50 years ago. (The ISTC did some very minor editing—principally to make the book gender-neutral.) A full review will appear in a forthcoming issue of the *IEEE Transactions on Professional Communication.*

So, where can you obtain this little gem? From the ISTC at Blackhorse Road, Letchworth, Hertfordshire, SG6 1YY, Great Britain; fax +44 1462 483 480; *istc@istc.org.uk*. The cost is £12.50 (~$20) plus postage and packing of £3 (~$5).

Ron Blicq (RGI_Ron@compuserve.com) *is a long-time member of PCS and has served on the AdCom for many years. He recently was elected president of INTECOM. He teaches courses and presents workshops on written and oral communication.*

FROM THE EDITOR

(continued from 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 May 15 for the July/August issue, July 15 for the September/October issue, etc.

"I sometimes give myself admirable advice, but I am incapable of taking it."

— Mary Wortley Montagu

HUMANWARE—THE THIRD "-WARE"

BY ULF-L ANDERSSON

It is said that something doesn't exist until it has a name—a word. Of course, this is not entirely true. But it is true that something unnamed will easily be forgotten. It might not even be noticed at all.

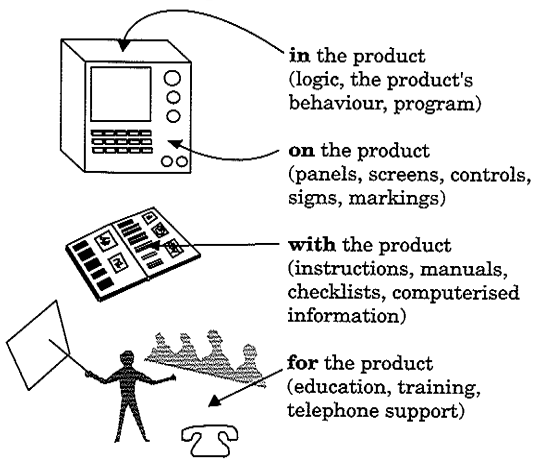
When we have words for software and hardware, it is so easy to forget the unnamed parts of a product that the user needs to be able to handle them. There is a growing use of the word "humanware" as a collective word for everything the user needs to be able to handle the product—not only check lists, manuals, and training but also, even more important, knobs, panels, indicators, screens, program ergonomy, etc.

Technical writers should show technologists how to build things that do not require manuals.

Less Risk of Suboptimizing

The holistic approach helps us avoid suboptimizing the various parts of the humanware—most often resulting in trying to save the product by patching it up with the manual.

When producing and testing manuals we often find that the problems arise from faulty design of hardware or software. And often we, as technical communicators, are involved too late to be able to influence the design of the product.



The further we put the humanware from the product, the less cost-effective it tends to be.

For many years we technical communicators here in Scandinavia have tried to get into the projects at earlier stages. In more and more cases we are now able to do so—and in some cases even influence the design.

We have at least one example in Sweden of a design process where first the manual was written and tested and then the product was designed according to the manual (a way to handle the design process that Don Norman recommends in his latest book *The Invisible Computer*).

Still though, most products are designed in the traditional way, leaving the manuals to try to make up for the difficulty in handling. Or as a quality officer at a household equipment company, attending one of my courses in designing easily handleable products, voiced it: "The manual is a crutch."

One Competition Factor Left

Luckily there is a growing understanding of the need for good humanware among product designers. Some of my course participants have told me, "We use the same technology as our competitors and can't compete with the price—but we can compete with more easily handleable products."

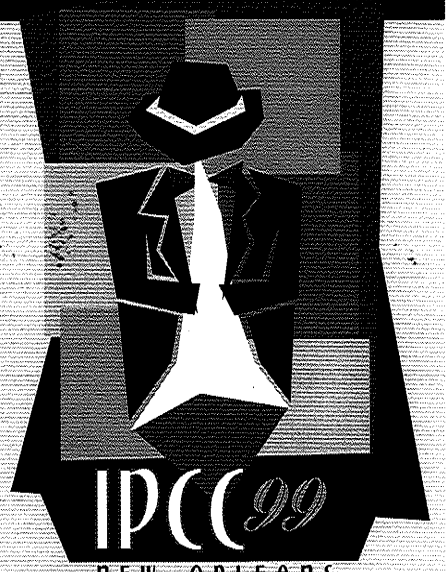
Experienced technical communicators can make important contributions to the design process. Don Norman (in *The Invisible Computer*) states: "Technical writers. People whose goal should be to show the technologists how to build things that do not require manuals.... To a user-experience architect, the technical writers should be the key to the entire operation."

But to be able to do that, we technical communicators can't sit quietly in a corner and produce manuals (or online information). We must be—as an international group at Forum 80 in Norway formulated it—the users' defense lawyers in the design process.

Ulf-L Andersson has worked for 42 years as a technical communicator, most of the time as a consultant to Scandinavian industries and research organizations. He has conducted many courses in technical communication and in humanware, the first ones in 1960 when employed by the Swedish Air Force. He has written books (in Swedish) on The Art of Communication *and* Humanware *and belongs to the founders of the Swedish Society on Technical Communications (in 1964) and* INTECOM *(in 1969).*

IPCC 99 COMMUNICATION JAZZ!

OMNI ROYAL ORLEANS
FRENCH QUARTER
NEW ORLEANS
LOUISIANA, USA
SEPTEMBER 8-10, 1999



Improvising The New International Communication Culture

Keynote speaker will be Tony Temple of IBM's Human-Computer Interaction team. Mr. Temple comes to IPCC 99 fresh from his work as executive producer of IBM's RealThings project.

Complete registration information and forms are available at our web site: www.ewh.ieee.org/soc/pcs/ipcc99

Join us in New Orleans at the Omni Royal Orleans, Mobil Four-Star, AAA Four-Diamond luxury hotel located in the heart of the French quarter. It features Spanish wrought-iron balconies and French facade. The interior showcases 19th Century English, French, Spanish and American artifacts.

New Orleans

"New Orleans is one of the most popular tourist destinations in the universe. Visit and you will see why. It's easy to fall in love with New Orleans and be romanced by the world famous French Quarter. This 10 block square is a mosaic of colors, sounds, tastes, smells and feelings like no other place in the world. Nestled in the Mississippi River's crescent, the quarter is a blend of old and new traditions, cultures and customs."

TOOLS OF THE TRADE

CHERYL REIMOLD

HANDLING TOUGH SITUATIONS

Part 6: Follow Through for Results

All too often people finally go through with a confrontation and even manage to have a good discussion—yet in the long term they get no results. Their mistake is usually very simple: they underestimate the importance of proper follow-through. In this final part of our series on dealing with tough situations, let's see how you can avoid that costly error.

Two Simple Lessons from Life

Do you keep repeating the same stressful discussions with certain people—say, your kids or spouse, or a problem subordinate, or your boss? If you do, you're certainly not alone. At home as in business, repetitive "problem-solving discussions" are the norm rather than the exception. There are two interesting facts one can learn from that:

Clear away the obstacles while respecting other people's dignity.

Fact 1: The first try usually doesn't work in tough situations. Since this is true almost by definition, follow-through must be an essential part of your approach if you want to succeed.

Fact 2: Proper follow-through has to be smarter than simple repetition. Most of the unsuccessful approaches we have seen involve people saying the same thing again and again only at a greater volume or with more vindictive vocabulary. The fact that this usually goes on forever shows that it doesn't work.

Understanding Fact 1 avoids naive disappointment and ineffective emotional reactions. *Expect* that people will not honor agreements fully and have a plan for dealing with that—and then don't hesitate to carry it out. Remembering Fact 2 saves you from wasting a lot of time and emotional energy on strategies (such as repetitive pep talks) that don't work and may even make things worse.

Dealing with the Well Intentioned...

Even well intentioned people can forget promises or run into personal limitations they did not appreciate when they made an agreement with you. In fact, before thinking about other people consider your own humanity because it may give you a better perspective on the shortcomings of others.

Let's say you are trying to improve your relationship with an area supervisor (not your boss) who continually creates obstacles to your projects by complaining about your performance, often in meetings. Suppose further you get him to agree to ease up on his criticism—with the stipulation that you will inform him sooner and more completely about your projects. Now, four weeks after the discussion in which you reached the agreement, he starts on his public lamentation before you can even present half the facts.

Before you do anything else, consider your part. Have you kept your side of the bargain? Or did you perhaps give him only selected bits of information? And if so, why? Is it because you were afraid he'd demoralize you privately, even sooner than in the old scenario?

Or did you find yourself resenting the "approval power" implied by the agreement—so much so that you developed a knack for "forgetting"? If you did not honor your part of the bargain, tell him so privately and try for a new start. If you are blameless, do the same. Go over your agreement with him privately and seek an agreement to put keep to the bargain.

There are two important points here. One, agreements are two-way; make sure you do your part. Two, when people "forget" or are "too busy," realize that there may be complex personal dynamics or problems in the way. If you think that intentions are basically good, try to clear away the obstacles while respecting other people's dignity.

For instance, suppose a subordinate worked out a plan with you for completing projects more quickly. In reality the work drags on just as before even though he swears he is trying. What are you going to do? Basically, you need to pin down the

main problems and get a revised agreement that seems more realistic. It's a difficult conversation in its own right for which you have to anticipate responses such as excuses, denial, outbursts, or despondency.

Here is how you might start: "Look, we've had two projects on which to test your plan, and it's clearly not working. Both projects are two weeks past deadline even though we had good cooperation from everybody involved. Let's figure out exactly what's still going wrong and come up with a better plan." (Note how that introduction relies on straightforward statements rather than questions and how it forestalls excuses by mentioning cooperation.)

Communication and good will may not solve all problems.

Don't expect full honesty about the problems, though. The employee will hardly admit that he is totally disorganized and often spends hours looking for scraps of paper containing vital information. However, he might admit in a more general fashion that organization and documentation were not good and that he wasted time pursuing details that did not support the project goals. That might be enough to figure out a better plan, yet it leaves him with his dignity intact.

The key is to move forward rather than rehash the original discussion. If the second or third attempt leads nowhere, move to your worst-case option (say, shift him to less important projects and encourage him to transfer or look for work elsewhere).

...And the Not So Well Intentioned

It's no use pretending that communication and goodwill can solve all problems. In many cases others are not interested in meeting you even one-quarter of the way and you have no power over them. Still, you may have influence if you can find some leverage point. This is the worst-case option you should have worked out as part of your backup plan.

For instance, suppose you can't get cooperation from somebody who dislikes you or your group. You need her to do a job for you but she merely says, "I'll get to it when I get to it"—and follow-up requests, including written ones, are fruitless. Where could you find a leverage point?

One possibility is to consider having outsiders do the work. Get quotes and send a memo to your uncooperative colleague outlining your next step if the schedule is not met. This may well produce cooperation in a hurry—especially if other people in the company are copied on the distribution list! If it doesn't, you will at least have found a way around the problem.

If your problem person comes to complain about your decision, have all your memos available to show her that you are one of those rare souls who do follow through. You may avoid future troubles with her as a result.

Cheryl Reimold has been teaching communication skills to engineers, scientists, and businesspeople for 15 years. Her firm, PERC Communications (6A Dickel Road, Scarsdale, New York 10583, 914-725-1024, perccom@aol.com*), offers customized in-house courses on writing, presentation skills, and interpersonal communication.*

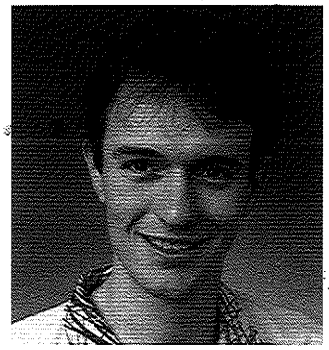
"The discipline of the writer is to learn to be still and listen to what his subject has to tell him."

— Rachel Carlson

"Why doesn't the fellow who says 'I'm no speechmaker' let it go at that instead of giving a demonstration?"

— Kim Hubbard

BLACK TOOLS



HANSPETER SCHMID

THE ART OF MISINTERPRETATION

"In my opinion, family is very important."

"So what do you think about a man who leaves his wife and newborn for another woman?"

"This is of course completely unacceptable."

"Surprising to hear that from you! Just ten minutes ago you told us that you greatly admire Hemingway, but he did precisely what I just described."

"I admire Hemingway for his writing, not for the life he led."

Do I have your attention now? Not only did I show you an example of Trick 3, I also used Trick 30 to convince you that I'm an educated man. However, that's not where the story should begin. It's not where the story ends, either.

The best countermeasure to misinterpretation is not to use absolute principles and values in your arguments.

The story begins with Cheryl Reimold's column about handling tough situations, in which she is teaching us tools to find solutions when a discussion gets difficult. I find her tips very useful but they do not prepare me for some of the toughest situations — disputes where the only aim is to win, to wipe the opponent off the court.

Unfortunately, it is sufficient if only one person wants to play the game like this. Most public political discussions are fought to win, and a considerable number of disputes in front of colleagues or bosses are led along the same lines. Since there are no disputes where one person is completely right and the other completely wrong, dirty tricks often decide who wins in the end.

Using such tricks is not only unethical, it may also backfire if the opponent sees the trick and uses appropriate countermeasures. For this reason you should know the dirty tricks and how to avert them — but avoid using them yourself. Trick 3, which I demonstrated, is one of the 38 tricks that the German philosopher Schopenhauer collected in unpublished work around 1830. I think his list is fairly complete and still valid, and I will show you all his tricks and countermeasures in this column. You may think that it is very easy to see if any of these tricks is applied, but this is true only for the examples. In real discussions the tricks are not so obvious and all you can do is listen and learn.

The first three tricks are about changing the meaning of what your opponent actually said. I call Trick 3 "Generalization": I had said earlier that I admire Hemingway and although my opponent knew that I meant only Hemingway's writing, he generalized my admiration to everything Hemingway ever did. Saying specifically what I meant in the first place would normally have been sufficient to avoid this kind of attack.

Related to this is Trick 1, the "Extension-Contraction Game":

"The first computer was built in Germany by Zuse."

"Babbage built his computer several decades earlier!"

"True, but it was not an electronic computer."

"That's all the same. A computer is defined by what it does, not by how it does it."

One person tries to extend the term "computer" such that Babbage's machine ends up as the first computer, whereas the other person contracts the term such that the winner is Zuse. This trick is often used unwittingly, and the second-best thing you can do is to admit that who actually built the first computer depends on one's definition of computer, which may not settle the conflict and can lead to a discussion about definitions.

The best countermeasure, however, is to not use absolute principles and values *at all* in your arguments; although they would indeed make your argument impeccable, they unfortunately do not exist.

Trick 2, "Homonymy," is seldom applied, for lack of opportunity. It involves transferring properties from one thing to another, where the two things have not much more in common than their name. The history of philosophy is full of examples but there are also modern ones. For example, your boss might say "I will not allow you to use cellular neural networks in our equipment. Our customers expect well determined behavior, not randomness!" You should answer: "CNNs are not well named. They do share a few properties with ordinary neural networks, but they are fully deterministic. Let's use them, call them analog cellular automatons, and our customers will be happy."

Well, that is enough for the first installment. Next time you will hear about the "Stealth Salami" and other ways of hiding one's intentions. I will cover Tricks 4 to 37 in five more articles, and since you had to listen to how the story began, you also have a right to know how it ends.

It ends with the Last Trick, which should perhaps be listed as the first one because anyone can apply it: If you realize that you will lose or that you are not right, then get personal and insulting. Attack the opponent, make cynical remarks, and laugh at him. If someone does that to you, you cannot reply in kind or the dispute becomes a verbal brawl. If you can, stay cool, tell him to not get personal, and try to return the dispute to its objective.

Unfortunately, few people can meet personal attacks with real coolness, and even if you do stay cool, it may make your opponent even more angry. As Hobbes once said, all joy and merriness comes from having someone in relation to whom you can think highly of yourself.

The only really effective countermeasure to dirty communication tricks can unfortunately not be applied in every case, although it is rather simple: Do not have discussions with just anybody, but only with people who you know will not say things so absurd that they embarrass themselves, people who like to discuss for the sake of learning or solving problems and not for obtaining power, who like to hear good arguments even from someone else, and who generally can bear not to be right.

Hanspeter Schmid (h.p.schmid@ieee.org) *is an analog-IC designer and Ph.D.-degree student at the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology (Zurich) who has an untamable interest in modern philosophy of science and society. His need to know and avert dirty communication tricks follows naturally from his belief that a philosopher who never disputes with people is like a boxer who never goes into the ring.*

IEEE POTENTIALS CALL FOR PAPERS

The bimonthly *IEEE Potentials* magazine is addressed to student members in the U.S. and Canada, now numbering about 45 000.

Articles are sought on all aspects of electrical, electronic, and computer engineering and computer science. They should be written for the undergraduate level, explain technological advances in an area, and attempt to interest students in the topic. Articles are refereed before publication.

For more information communicate with Dr. George W. Zobrist, associate editor, *zobrist@umr.edu*, or (573) 341-4492.

"Words are vehicles that can transport us from the drab sands to the dazzling stars."
— *M. Robert Syme*

FLOCCINAUCHINIHILIPILIFICATION

JABBERWOCKY REVISITED

BY MICHAEL BRADY

Crusading American playwright Lillian Hellman (1905-1984) once remarked that "If I had to give young writers advice, I'd say don't listen to writers talking about writing." Were those who read this *Newsletter*, as well as those who write for it, to heed Hellman's advice, there would be no *Newsletter*.

That's hardly news. But this *Newsletter* does exist. It adheres to tradition. Comments on writing are legion, some of the most durable from the poignant pens of the nineteenth century. Two that should be dear to the professional hearts of PCS members come from two poets who wrote on opposite sides of the Atlantic, though both were born in Great Britain.

"...forgive my 'literary' sins—the other kind don't matter."

Robert William Service (1874-1958) was born in Lancashire and emigrated to Canada in 1894. He took a job with the Canadian Bank of Commerce, which stationed him in the Yukon for eight years. While there he put Yukon life to verse and his first poems were published in 1907. He knew the constraints of his art; the preface to his collected poems reads:

I have no doubt at all the Devil grins,
As seas of ink I splatter.
Ye gods, forgive my "literary" sins—
The other kind don't matter.

By that measure, the Devil certainly must be grinning today, as the modern computer-aided writer's use of ink undoubtedly outstrips that of penmen tenfold. Indeed, literary sins remain.

Also aware of that was Charles Lutwidge Dodgson (1832-1898), the mathematician and scholar who also was an ordained deacon of the Church of England. He is best remembered for his enduring works written under the pseudonym of Lewis Carroll. Mathematicians recognize him as one of the progenitors of symbolic logic, and indeed his text by that name is still in print (Hassocks Harvester Press, 1977, ISBN 0-85527982). But to the world at large he is known as the author of *Alice in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking-Glass*, arguably the most famed of all children's stories in English.

Yet not only children enjoy those books; they can be read at several levels from preschool bedtime to graduate school logic. Few fields of his time escaped Carroll's witty pen. In the first chapter of *Through the Looking-Glass* he dismissed the gobbledygook of his day by having Alice discover a poem that was written backwards, so it could only be read in a mirror. The title and first two stanzas comprise a caveat for all writers:

Jabberwocky

Twas brillig, and the slithy toves
Did gyre and gimble in the wabe;
All mimsy were the borogoves,
And the mome raths outgrabe.

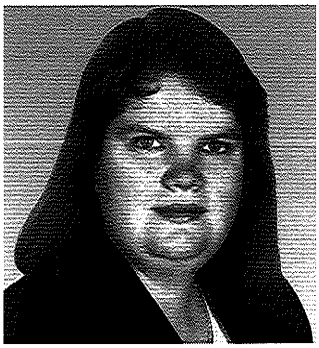
Beware the Jabberwock, my son!
The jaws that bite, the claws that catch!
Beware the Jubjub bird, and shun
The frumious Bandersnatch!

By coincidence—or perhaps not, we'll never know—the *Jabberwocky* can be sung to the tune of *Greensleeves*, the ditty twice mentioned by Shakespeare in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, once in spotlighting the disparity between the words and deeds of Falstaff: "They do no more adhere and keep pace together, than the Hundredth Psalm to the tune of Green Sleeves."

The remark comprises double entendre: The Hundredth Psalm is a psalm of praise. Doubtlessly the Reverend Dodgson knew that well. Praise does not jibe with *Greensleeves*; though beautiful, the words of it lament love spurned. Ergo, that which jibes with *Greensleeves* is criticism. And *that* the *Jabberwocky* is. Beware, writers, *the fruminous Bandersnatch!*

NET NOTES

So You Want a Web Site



Elizabeth Moeller

It is okay not to be on the Web.

Remember when you were a child and you desperately wanted a pet? Remember how your parents told you that pets were a lot of work? Well, a Web site isn't quite as much work as a new puppy but it does require some effort on your part, both initially and long-term. Before deciding on creating your Web site, there are a few questions you need to ask yourself.

Why?

This is the first question that you must be able to answer: Why do you want a Web site? Do you have a product to sell? Do you want to provide technical support for your products? Do you want to educate someone? Do you want to market your services? Do you want to keep up with the competition? All of these are valid reasons.

It is the last one, however, that I hear most frequently from my clients. Because their competition is online, they feel they need to be there too. Today not every business will benefit from being on the Internet. I qualify that statement with "today" because down the road every community may have its own local network, making it important for the corner delicatessen to be on the Internet. Today the corner delicatessen does not need to be on the Internet to compete.

What Do You Want to Accomplish?

Now that you know why, the next step is to determine your goals. This is an extremely important question to answer because it determines how you will organize and market your Web site. Keep in mind that very few businesses make a million dollars simply by having a Web site. Although you often hear of success stories like Amazon.com (*http://www.amazon.com*) and CDnow (*http://www.cdnow.com*), there are a much greater number of failures.

You need to decide how your Web site will complement your existing business structure. Forrester Research, Inc. (*http://www.forrester.com*) reported on InternetNews.com (*http://www.internetnews.com*) that many businesses get bogged down in the "how to get on the Internet" phase and forget what has worked well for them in the past. The best method is to integrate your Internet strategy with your existing business strategies and technology.

Whom Do You Want to Reach?

This goes way back to technical communication basics: Who is your audience? This question also works in conjunction with your goals. Are you looking for new customers? Do you want to keep current customers happy? Do you want to provide information to a specific group of people? Do you have more than one audience? Since a Web site's structure is tied to its purpose, it lends itself well to more than one audience. People interested in purchasing your product travel one path, while people who need support travel another.

What Image Would You Like to Portray?

Many businesses spend a small fortune on graphic designers to create the right image for them and then throw it out the window when it comes to designing their Web site. Are you looking for a new image or do you want visitors to see the business they know and rely on? Either option is fine. Maybe it's time to update your business' image and a new Web site is a good reason. The key, however, is consistency. Your Web site, print advertising, and even your letterhead and business cards should all be coordinated and consistent and reflect your business' personality and strategy.

Who Will Maintain the Web Site?

Web sites should be dynamic—which means they should change on a regular basis. The frequency of change is up to you but it should be at least quarterly. Some sites update minute-by-minute providing

time and temperature information. This is a neat feature on some sites but think about whether your visitors really need to know the temperature outside your office window.

Other Web sites update daily or weekly with news briefs important to people in their industry. For example, some accounting firms offer a "Tax Tip of the Week." Other sites update when a new product hits the market or they need to add something to their technical support areas. Often someone inside your business is capable of making these updates. Web designers also offer maintenance agreements to keep your site timely. Either way, it is important to change the site periodically so visitors will want to come back.

Your Web site should reflect your business' personality and strategy.

Who Will Check Electronic Mail on a Daily Basis?

This is the most often overlooked question. The Web is an interactive medium. Visitors to your site want instant gratification. You must give them the ability to send you electronic mail or to fill out a form to request more information or some other task. Therefore, a Web site comes with electronic mail—and the need to respond to that mail in a timely manner. As a rule of thumb, electronic mail should be responded to within 48 hours. After that, people often forget that they have sent mail to one business or another. Within your business you need to choose a person who will respond to any electronic mail requests or questions. That person can answer the questions himself or herself, or forward them electronically internally, or print and put them in the appropriate person's in-box, or a host of other options. No matter what option is chosen, everyone in the business needs to understand the importance of responding to electronic mail in a timely fashion, just like to a phone call or a fax inquiry.

Do I Need a Web Site?

If your answers to these questions indicate that you need a Web site, you are well on your way. If you're not sure how to answer some of these questions, then you need to rethink your business strategy and decide whether a Web site is really for you. Most businesses today find that a Web site will benefit them in some manner or another. However, it is okay not to be on the Web if your business will not reap any benefit. Just reevaluate your situation from time to time so that you are ready when the time comes.

Elizabeth Weise Moeller is a PCS AdCom member and chair of the Publicity & Marketing Committee. She owns Interactive Media Consulting (518-366-8765, 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.*

FORUM 2000

Forum 2000, the next occurrence of an outstanding quinquennial technical communication conference, will take place June 12-14, 2000, at the Commonwealth Center in London, England. General topic areas will include trends, professional development, and tools and technology; and other topics will be welcome.

Presentation formats will include Idea Markets, which may lead to brainstorming sessions, sort-and-build sessions, information sessions (new at the Forum), and debate sessions (also new). For more information about Forum 2000 send e-mail to Peter Greenfield, Institute of Scientific and Technical Communicators, *istc@istc.org.uk.*

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE JANUARY ADCOM MEETING

BY MURIEL ZIMMERMAN

Visit the IEEE's— and our— redesigned Web sites.

The Professional Communication Society's Administrative Committee (AdCom) held a two-day meeting in Houston, Texas, on January 15-16, 1999. Vice-president George Hayhoe chaired the meeting in place of president Roger Grice who was unable to fly to Houston because of bad weather. We welcomed four new members to their first AdCom meeting: Ed Clark, Luke Maki, Terrance Malkinson, and Tom van Loon.

Major discussion items were conferences, publications, the PCS Web site, globalization, and plans for a new series of AdCom symposiums. Future AdCom meetings will be in Boston on June 26-27 and in New Orleans in conjunction with IPCC 99 on September 7.

Conferences

IPCC 98 chair Ron Blicq presented a wrap-up report on the successful Québec meeting. Michael Goodman (also unable to attend because of the weather), chair of IPCC 99, reported that plans for the New Orleans meeting are proceeding on schedule and that a large number of excellent paper proposals have been received. Beth Moeller assumed the role of chair for IPCC 2000, scheduled for September 25-27, 2000, in Cambridge, Massachusetts; it will be a joint venture with SIGDOC. For IPCC 2001 the AdCom is considering another joint venture with SIGDOC in Santa Fe, New Mexico.

Publications

The March issue of the *Transactions* is a topical issue on the Engineering Genre. A call for papers for another topical issue, Communication in Virtual Organizations, appears in the December 1998 issue of *Transactions*. A proposal for a joint publication by PCS and the Society for Technical Communication has been submitted by *Transactions* editor Kim Campbell and *Technical Communication* editor George Hayhoe to the IEEE Technical Activities Board (TAB). The proposal provides for producing a single, joint issue on the topic of Communication in Cross-functional Teams early in 2000. Two guest editors have been chosen and the call for papers will appear in the spring issues of both publications.

The IEEE Press has co-published two books in the field of technical communication with Battelle Press: *Technically Speaking: A Guide for Communicating Complex Information* by J. D'Arcy and *Procedure Writing: Principles and Practices* (2nd ed.) by D. Wieringa, C. Moore, and V. Barnes.

PCS Web Site

AdCom Publicity & Marketing chair Beth Moeller has redesigned the PCS Web site and created an attractive and usable site with links to a wide variety of content areas related to the interests of PCS members

Maxims for the Internet Age

- Pentium wise; pen and paper foolish.
- Too many clicks spoil the browse.
- The modem is the message.
- Don't put all your hypes in one home page.

— Modem Times

(*http://www.ieee.org/society/pcs/adcom.html*). The site includes a space for PCS members to express interest in volunteer opportunities, and Beth reported that several site visitors have indicated their willingness to serve.

Globalization

AdCom member Mark Haselkorn, our representative on the TAB Strategic Planning and Review Committee, reports that globalization is a major goal of TAB for all IEEE societies and activities. Globalization is not a new concern for PCS. We are proud to report that AdCom member Ron Blicq has been elected president of INTECOM, the International Council for Technical Communication, an umbrella organization for 15 societies worldwide. INTECOM publishes *TC-Forum*, and it will hold the Forum 2000 conference in London, England, on June 12-14, 2000. Also on the globalization theme, one of our new members, Eduardo Clark, volunteered to translate material into Spanish for us.

AdCom Symposiums

One of the mandates of PCS is to help IEEE members increase their communication skills. The AdCom is planning a series of educational sessions for the local IEEE section at sites where we hold our meetings. The sessions will be planned to take a variety of forms, from one hour to one day, depending on the needs and interests of the section. Ron Blicq is coordinating the planning stage, soliciting information about who can teach what subjects, and Lisa Moretto will implement the project.

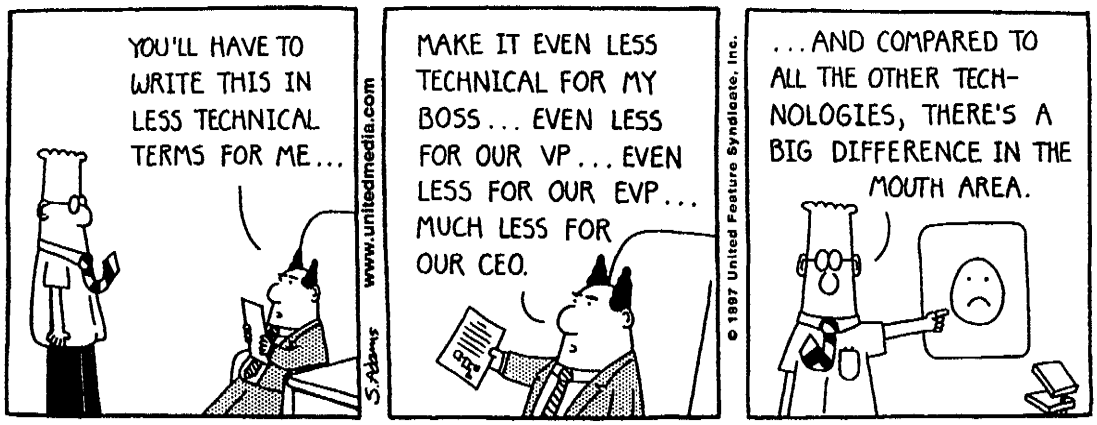
IEL ONLINE

The IEEE/IEE Electronics Library (IEL) is available to institutional customers via the Internet. With a subscription to IEL Online, customers worldwide can access full-page PDF images of IEEE journals, conference proceedings, and standards. Users can search a bibliographic database, based on the INSPEC database, and link to corresponding PDF images of the selected records.

IEL Online is updated monthly and is available as an annual subscription covering the range of IEEE and IEE publications from 1988 forward. A recent NASA subscription serves 13 organizations with 3000 engineers. For more information communicate with Scott MacFarland, *s.macfarland@ieee.org* or (732) 562-5383.

DILBERT by Scott Adams

Dilbert © United Features Syndicate. Reprinted by permission.



POINT OF EXPLANATION

BY WEN SMITH

I'd like to offer a prize to the reader who can come up with a new mark of punctuation that I need. It's an *explanation point.*

No, I didn't say exclamation. I already have more exclamation points stored in my word processor than I'll ever use. What I need is an explanation point, a mark to put at the end of a sentence to explain what the sentence means.

The explanation point would save words, time, and money.

My new mark would save millions of words and be worth a thousand pictures. The first problem in creating an explanation point is that of design. What will the new mark look like? I've considered a little hollow square or triangle but I can't find any rationale for either. An explanation should be solid, not hollow. And a solid square or triangle could be mistaken as a period.

That's why a circle won't do, either. The period, centuries ago, was a circle, but it was nonexplanatory. Caesar couldn't have explained anything by saying, "I came, I saw, I conquered, period!" A period just puts an end to the chatter; it doesn't explain.

There's a hint of possibility in the asterisk, or little star. But an asterisk promises more than it delivers. It usually forces the eye to the bottom of the page to find a footnote. The note is usually more confusing than what it tries to explain. Anyway, if I asked readers to drop to the bottom of the page, they'd never come back.

Nothing will serve the purpose if it looks anything like a colon or semicolon. Those marks suggest something more to come but this explanation mark has to be clear enough to be final.

And it can't have any curl to it like a question mark. This mark must not be questionable in any way. It will have to explain, really explain. Hyphens and dashes won't do although they can be helpful now and then for clarifying an off-beat or low-key idea.

The mathematician's "equals" symbol (=) is an interesting possibility. But I reject it on philosophical grounds. A really good sentence means much more than it says, so the sentence and its meaning are not equal. Scratch the "equals" symbol.

A friend suggests that the nearest thing to an explanation point is the international symbol of forbidding, the red circle with diagonal line. When you see a burning cigarette canceled out by a red slash, you know what's meant. But again I find a limitation. The symbol is limited to negative commands and doesn't really explain. It says don't, but it doesn't say why not. It's a kind of "Shut up!" he explained.

Carets and arrows are out. They arouse curiosity but don't explain anything. Nothing on the typewriter keyboard seems to have just the right look.

My new explanation mark's advantages would spread far beyond the English-writing world. In Spanish it could be used, as the question mark is, inverted at the beginning of a sentence, where it would eliminate the need for the sentence itself. Think of the value if applied to every language.

Unlike any other mark the explanation point would be useful to speakers as well as writers. It would adapt easily to oral usage in the way invented by comedian Victor Borge, who created a series of pops and squeaks and spits, each representing a comma or period or question mark. The new explanation noise, of course, should be very distinctive. An additional prize will go to the reader who suggests just the right sound.

We'll need a name for the new mark, too, something we can snap emphatically at the end of a spoken sentence as we do now with the period: "I won't take it any more, period!"

Once I've found a suitable mark for the explanation point, I'll offer it for public

(continued on page 22)

PROFESSOR GRAMMAR

THE NAKED *THIS*

My dear students:

The Professor edits alfresco in the warm California sun.

In the privacy of the Professor's enclosed courtyard, she tans all over while she edits. Pausing briefly from her editing to apply tanning lotion in all of the appropriate places, she is reminded of her lesson for this edition: pronoun reference with a naked *this*.

If clarity is a virtue in the information that you develop, dear students, then virtue is at risk when your *this* is naked. Permit the Professor to show you a naked *this*:

As managers, they solve their personnel problems. This helps them solve their personal problems.

"What's 'This'?" you ask, as you read backward to interpret the naked *this*. (And as you read backward, you note that readers prefer to read forward.)

Something unstated is...more likely to be misunderstood than something stated.

"This," you see, is a pronoun without an antecedent. Instead of referring clearly to a preceding noun, "This" refers vaguely to something unstated. Something unstated is less likely to be understood and more likely to be misunderstood than something stated.

Consider this revision in which the embarrassing naked *this* is covered by a noun after it:

As managers, they solve their personnel problems. This practice, which makes perfect, helps them solve their personal problems.

Or consider this revision in which the embarrassing naked *this* is covered completely by a gerund phrase that functions as a noun:

As managers, they solve their personnel problems. Solving personnel problems helps them solve their personal problems.

You know how to protect the virtue of clarity, dear students:

- Cover a naked *this* with a word or phrase after it.
- Cover a naked *this* completely — by replacing it.

Now permit the Professor to perfect her tan (and continue her editing) while you apply your knowledge by working on this quiz:

Quiz

Instructions: Cover each naked *this* as you revise these excerpts from students' writing.

1. One of the foci of the strategy presentation was the discussion of the goal of eliminating books, both printed and, eventually, soft copy. This is difficult to achieve....
2. To locate the working directory for HotProduct for Windows® check the HPWPATH environment variable. (Under Windows NT, you can find this on the Control Panel under Environment Variables. Under Windows 95, you can find this in your AUTOEXEC.BAT file.)
3. If you run programs in a HugeProduct-dependent region that requires Language Environment, you can improve performance if you use library routine retention and the existing PREINIT feature of HugeProduct. For more information on this, see the Language Environment Programming Guide.

After you complete the quiz, you may submit your work to the perfectly tanned Professor.

Copyright © 1997 by IBM Corporation. Reprinted 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.

How the Internet Is Changing the Way We Do Business in France

By Patricia McClelland

Internet use in the United States and Canada is common. But in France it is another story. For the most part, only technically aware consumers such as the members of IEEE and STC are online. But that may soon change, given some interesting marketing forces at play.

How STC Members Communicate

I thought that the members of PCS might be curious about how we manage in France. You might be wondering how we communicate among STC members. Do we use e-mail, snail mail, or the fax machine? In research I conducted recently I found out that we use all of those means but that we usually save snail mail for Christmas cards and the fax for sending colleagues newspaper articles. We use e-mail for almost everything else.

86 Percent Had E-mail in 1997

When Minitel users decide to shift to the Internet there will be an explosion of use.

When I was president of the STC France chapter in 1997, every month I received a list of chapter members (the France chapter covers 15 European countries). One evening I counted the members who had e-mail addresses. Fully 86 percent of us had an Internet connection.

We realized that we could save money by sending many types of information to our members by e-mail and that we could post important things on our Web site that we created in 1996. Because there were still some who didn't have e-mail, we decided to use e-mail only for reminders and duplicates of meeting invitations.

Last September the France chapter had the pleasure of hosting STC's first board meeting of the year in Paris. Absolutely all of the planning with the head office and the members in Europe and Israel was conducted by e-mail.

99 Percent Had E-mail in 1998

During that successful meeting, attended by 107 members from Europe and Israel, I took a quick poll. I asked how many members did *not* have access to an e-mail account either at home or at work. Only one person raised her hand, equaling less than one percent.

Now everything we publish goes out by e-mail. That includes surveys, newsletters, training application forms, meeting reminders, and soon our directory called *Who's Who in STC Europe*. The first time we sent something out by e-mail, it was prompted by the need to save money. Now we do it out of convenience and to reach our members quickly.

Internet Technology in France

In France we have modem access as well as ISDN lines. Some of us (I do) even have cybercable which is a hookup to the Internet through cable modems. Through cybercable you can download a one-minute video of 2MB in 10 seconds instead of 10 minutes using a 28 800 bits/second modem (Source: Lyonnaise de Cable, the service provider).

Impact of Minitel

Many people are under the impression that in France residents are not interested in the Internet because they have Minitel, an interactive terminal connected to videotext. There are currently 10 million such terminals in France, each used on average by more than three people, which means more than 30 million users (Source: France Telecom, the French phone company). The good part is that those users are already accustomed to using a terminal to obtain information. They are technically literate. And they are not leery about online security.

The day they decide to shift to the Internet there is going to be an explosion. One of the reasons they haven't changed over is simply that they are used to Minitel. Right

The French are getting wired!

now Minitel users have to pay for every service they access, often at more than 40 cents a minute.

Using the Internet Is Expensive

Every time we get on the Internet in France we have to pay 12 cents for 3 minutes for a local call. The result is hefty phone bills. To change that, ADIM (Association des Internautes Mécontents/Association of Discontent Internet Users) called on all Internet users to stage a boycott of the Internet on December 13, 1998, and on January 31, 1999. They want to put pressure on France Telecom, the national telephone company, to grant Internet users a flat fee for accessing the Web. That news even made the pages of the U.S. Industry Standard on January 13, 1999 (*http://www.thestandard.net/articles/display/0,1449,3129,00.html?home.bf*). Most users believe that France Telecom will give in soon. So it shouldn't be long before Minitel users make the transition to the Web.

Three Million Computers Sold in France in 1998

Three million computers were sold in France in 1998 alone! (Source: *Le Monde de l'Informatique*, a reputed computer magazine). For a population of 56 million, that is an impressive number. According to Mediangles, a French Internet research company, there were already more than 2.7 million Internet users at work or at home in France in May 1998, representing 5.2 percent of the population (Source: *www.Mediangles.fr*). Information from Reuters on January 11, 1999, suggested that there are now 4 million. It seems that individuals are better equipped than companies! They have more CD-ROM readers and better sound equipment than the companies they work for. Because they acquired computers only during the last two years, the French now own up-to-date equipment.

Infonie, an Internet access provider (IAP) in France, launched a bundled package for would-be Internauts on January 27, 1999. They are offering a cheap PC at $355 in exchange for a commitment for buyers to use them as IAP at $26.50 a month for two years. Although the offer concerns only 20 000 computers, chances are it will spark similar offers from competitors. Anyone who had previously been sitting on the fence will probably go for this alluring offer. At $355 for a computer, it looks like a good deal.

These recent statistics show that the French are, indeed, getting wired. And we're likely to see a major shift in the next year if the telephone company agrees to a new Internet rate. The Internet opportunities in France seem poised to take off. We will all be watching with great interest.

Patricia McClelland co-founded the Society for Technical Communication France Chapter in 1991 (PatriciaMcClelland@compuserve.com). *She is a telecommuter and partner in e-Storm International Consulting based in San Francisco. e-Storm is a Web Marketing firm that develops marketing and public relations programs to promote their clients' sites to different audiences targeted by them in Europe, Asia, and North America* (http://www.e-Storm.com).

CALLING ALL NEW ENGLANDERS

IPCC is coming to Cambridge, Massachusetts, in September 2000. We already have some exciting people and events lined up but we need your help. Committees looking for volunteers include Local Arrangements, Program, and Publicity. We especially need people in the Boston area with contacts to help with publicity to New England area technical communicators. If you can spend some time with us, please contact Beth Weise Moeller, conference chair, by e-mail (*b.w.moeller@ieee.org*) or fax (518 584-5218).

NEW TECHNOLOGY WILL CHANGE MEETING MINUTES FOREVER

BY JAMIE HUTCHINSON

Imagine a meeting with no ritual of finding a volunteer to take minutes, with no arguments about what decisions were made at the last meeting, and with the knowledge that everything that is said will be recorded, processed, and stored as an audio book with table of contents, detailed outline, annotations, and searchable index.

Imagine *supercharged* minutes!

In the labs where it is being developed the technology that will make this possible is called *indexing and summarization* for multimedia material. When applied to spoken discourse, indexing and summarization can integrate established speech-recognition technology with novel techniques for extracting structure from the wash of speech that constitutes meetings, lectures, seminars, interviews, and other spoken interactions. The technology has the potential, within a few years, to radically change how we are able to use all of our spoken professional communication.

MAET is potentially capable of outlining, indexing, and summarizing a meeting.

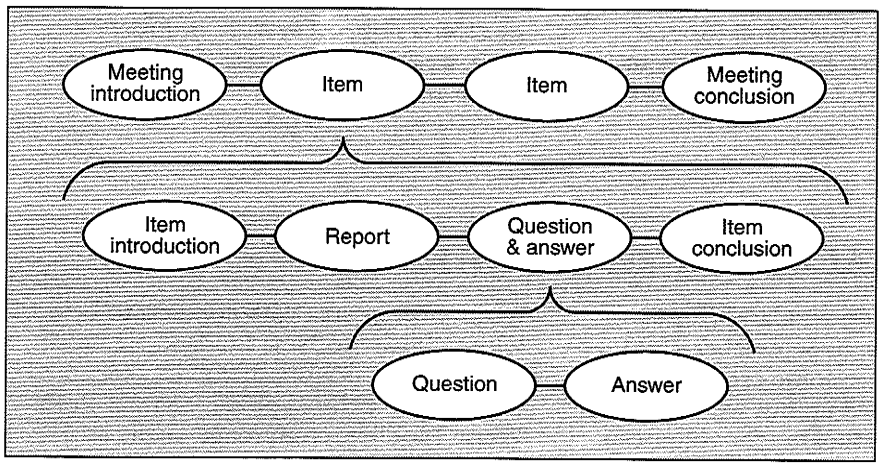
Trausti Kristjansson, a researcher in the Image Formation and Processing Laboratory of the Beckman Institute for Advanced Science and Technology (University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign), decided to apply indexing and summarization specifically to meetings. "A large part of corporate knowledge is contained in meetings," Kristjansson said, "and the ability to track a project's history or to review performance and decision making may allow organizations to optimize teamwork, as well as shorten the orientation period of new team members."

The result is Kristjansson's Meeting Analysis and Editing Tool (MAET), developed toward fulfillment of his master's degree in electrical engineering at Illinois. Part of the work was done during an internship at Lucent Technologies, and Kristjansson plans to apply the finishing touches as part of his upcoming doctoral work at the University of Waterloo, Ontario.

MAET is potentially capable of outlining, indexing, and summarizing a meeting as tightly structured as a parliamentary session or as loosely structured as a brainstorming session. It also provides a graphical user interface for manual correction and annotation of the automated minutes. Researchers at Waterloo are developing a content-based approach that, if combined with the structural emphasis of MAET, could yield a marketable product that organizations could use to great advantage. Kristjansson estimates this process of integration will take about two years.

For his data set Kristjansson recorded meetings of the Integrated Synchronous and Asynchronous Collaboration (ISAAC) group at the National Center for Supercomputing Applications based at Illinois. The meetings tended to be loosely structured. Kristjansson determined that the major structural components of ISAAC meetings were *meeting introduction, item introduction, monolog, dialog, question, answer, item conclusion, and meeting conclusion* (see Figure 1). Acquiring more data from more varied types of meetings is a goal for further development of MAET.

Figure 1

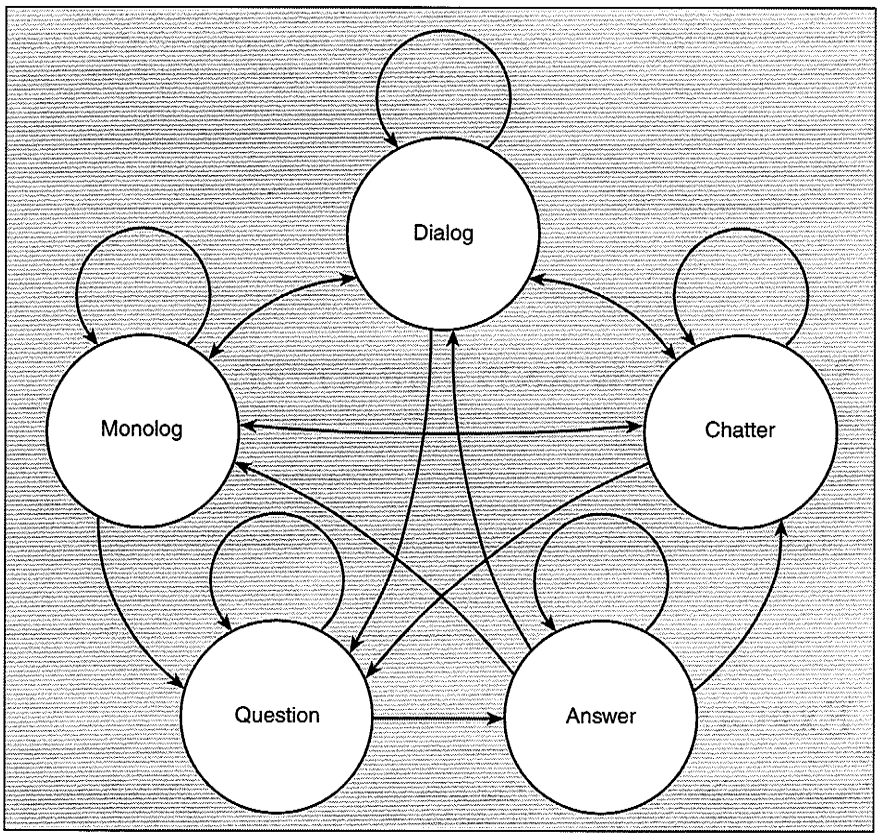


Four main components enable MAET to not merely record but actually *process* a meeting, identifying the structural elements as well as providing outline, index, and summary. These components are *speaker identification, prosody analysis, word spotting, and structure analysis.*

Speaker identification is achieved by training MAET on voice samples of meeting participants. Factors such as who is speaking, for how long, and in what sequence provide important evidence for determining whether, for example, a report is being given or questions are being asked and answered. Speaker identification also makes a set of minutes indexable by speaker.

Prosody analysis, because it reveals clues about emphasis, is useful for extracting audio summaries as well as for determining structure.

Figure 2



Word spotting is simply a method of finding salient points, such as deadlines and amounts of money, and structural keywords and phrases, such as "start meeting" and "next agenda item." Thus, word spotting supports indexing and also helps to determine structure.

Structure analysis combines the results of the previous components to create an outline and it supports the indexing and summarizing functions of MAET. Kristjansson wrote code for MAET that relies on a statistical method — the hidden Markov model — to determine structure based on probabilities provided by the first three components. (Figure 2 models the structural possibilities for a particular item within a meeting.)

Kristjansson says that organizations may also use the new technology to monitor external communications. For example, indexing and summarization could provide an automated clipping service to monitor electronic media for public relations uses. Universities could also be fertile ground for the technology — students would be able to review lectures and seminars with tremendous efficiency.

"With the efficient compression techniques currently available and the inexpensiveness of digital data storage space, it is now economical for organizations to store audio and video from meetings and other spoken interactions," said Kristjansson, "and indexing and summarization make it easy to find your way around in all that data."

Jamie Hutchinson (hutch@ece.uiuc.edu) *manages the publications office of the Department of Electrical and Computer Engineering of the University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign. He is a member of the PCS Editorial Advisory Committee.*

"Don't knock the weather; nine tenths of the people couldn't start a conversation if it didn't change once in a while."

— *Frank McKinney Hubbard*

PCS Participates in ITS Council

PCS is a founding member.

For some engineers New Year's Day 1999 included celebrating the birth of a new entity dedicated to studying intelligent transportation systems (ITS). The IEEE Technical Activities Board (TAB) transformed its Ad Hoc Committee on ITS into a permanent entity—the Intelligent Transportation Systems Council, which began activities January 1.

The purpose of the Council is to advance and coordinate scientific, *literary*, and educational work in the field of ITS throughout IEEE and the larger ITS community. The Council's field of interest includes the theoretical, experimental, and operational aspects of electrical and electronics engineering and *information technologies* as applied to all intelligent transportation efforts.

Membership

Eighteen societies with interests in the field of ITS are members of the Council and PCS is a founding member. Each member society appoints two representatives to the Council; our representatives this year are Mark Haselkorn and Luke Maki. Emily Sopensky, previously one of our representatives, is now secretary of the Council.

Publication

The first issue of the ITS Council's quarterly journal, the *IEEE Transactions on Intelligent Transportation Systems*, is scheduled for March 2000. Dr. Chelsea C. White III, Director of the ITS Research Center of Excellence at the University of Michigan, is editor. White was the first chair of the predecessor committee when it was organized in 1993.

The new *Transactions* will focus on the design, analysis, and control of information technology as it is applied to transportation systems. For further information visit the Council's Web site, *www.ewh.ieee.org/tc/its*, or communicate with the editor, *ccwiii@umich.edu* or (734) 764-5723.

PCS Web Site—New and Improved

Annouincing the new and improved PCS web site! Visit *http://www.ieee.org/pcs* for up-to-date information on conferences, meeting minutes, a calendar of events, and much more. Have you wanted to volunteer but didn't know how? Fill out the online Volunteer Information form. To list an item on our calendar, please contact Beth Weise Moeller (*b.w.moeller@ieee.org*).

Point of Explanation

(continued from page 16)

use at no charge. Imagine the enormous benefits to tax payers if the IRS could add an explanation point to its Form 1040 or W-4. In our busy lives the explanation point would save words, save time, save money.

It would make it possible, when all is said and done, to have done as much as we've said.

Consider the contest open. I'm still trying to decide what the prizes will be. It would be nice to have Ed McMahon hand the winner ten million dollars on television but Ed is booked up and about two dollars is all I can afford right now.

I should have explained that.

Wen Smith is a humorist who lives in Ashland, Oregon.

TWENTY QUESTIONS

(continued from page 24)

6. **Do you read the *Transactions*?**
   - ☐ Yes, cover to cover
   - ☐ Yes, but only articles or features that interest me
   - ☐ Yes, but just a cursory look
   - ☐ No

7. **If your answer to Q6 is *Yes*, what is your favorite *Transactions* feature?**
   - ☐ Book reviews
   - ☐ Editorials
   - ☐ Interface feature
   - ☐ Profiles
   - ☐ Research articles
   - ☐ Other (please explain)

8. **Do you read the *Newsletter*?**
   - ☐ Yes, cover to cover
   - ☐ Yes, but only articles or features that interest me
   - ☐ Yes, but just a cursory look
   - ☐ No

9. **If your answer to Q8 is *Yes*, what is your favorite *Newsletter* feature?**
   - ☐ One-time articles
   - ☐ Black Tools column
   - ☐ Floccinauchinihilipilification column
   - ☐ Masters of Style column
   - ☐ Net Notes column
   - ☐ President's column
   - ☐ Professor Grammar column
   - ☐ Tools of the Trade column
   - ☐ Other (please explain)

10. **Do you attend IPCCs, PCS's annual conferences?**
    - ☐ Yes, at least every other year
    - ☐ Yes, depending on location
    - ☐ Only once every 5 years or so
    - ☐ No

11. **Do you belong to any other IEEE societies?**
    - ☐ Yes
    - ☐ No

12. **If your answer to Q11 is *Yes*, which ones?**

13. **Is PCS your primary society?**
    - ☐ Yes
    - ☐ No

14. **Which other technical communication professional organizations do you belong to? (check all appropriate)**
    - ☐ Association of Teachers of Technical Writing
    - ☐ Council on Programs in Technical and Scientific Communication
    - ☐ SIGDOC (ACM Special Interest Group on Documentation)
    - ☐ Society for Technical Communication
    - ☐ None
    - ☐ Other (please list)

15. **Would you like to volunteer for one of PCS's committees?**
    - ☐ Yes
    - ☐ No

16. **If your answer to Q15 is *Yes*, which ones? (check all appropriate)**
    - ☐ Awards
    - ☐ Chapter/Section relations
    - ☐ Editorial Advisory
    - ☐ Education
    - ☐ Membership
    - ☐ Nominations
    - ☐ Publicity & Marketing

The next three questions are for demographic purposes only.

17. **What is your age? (optional)**
    - ☐ Under 25 years
    - ☐ 26-30 years
    - ☐ 31-40 years
    - ☐ 41-50 years
    - ☐ 51-60 years
    - ☐ Over 60 years

18. **What is your gender? (optional)**
    - ☐ Male
    - ☐ Female

19. **Where do you reside?**
    - ☐ Africa
    - ☐ Asia
    - ☐ Australia
    - ☐ Canada
    - ☐ Central America
    - ☐ Europe
    - ☐ North America (not Canada or the U.S.)
    - ☐ South America
    - ☐ United States

20. **Comments or questions?**

Optional (for the drawing)

Name:

E-mail:

Phone:

The Transactions *and the* Newsletter *are always interested in hearing from readers.*

TWENTY QUESTIONS

To better serve PCS members, the Administrative Committee is asking everyone to answer the following questions. Results of this survey will be used in the society's strategic planning. Please fax your survey to (518) 584-5218 or mail it to:

Dr. Beth Weise Moeller • 15½ Jumel Place • Saratoga Springs, NY 12866 USA

You can also complete this survey online at *http://www.ieee.org/pcs/survey.html.*

You might win free registration at IPCC 99!

Your input will be compiled anonymously but if you also provide your name and e-mail address, you will be entered in a drawing for free registration at IPCC 99 in New Orleans, September 7-10, 1999 (worth up to $500). For the drawing, your survey must be completed online or postmarked no later than June 1, 1999.

Unless otherwise indicated, check only one option per question.

1. What is your membership status?
- □ Full IEEE PCS member
- □ PCS Affiliate member
- □ Student member
- □ Not a member

2. What is your primary job function?
- □ Editor
- □ Educator
- □ Engineer
- □ Engineering manager
- □ Graphics
- □ Project manager
- □ Student
- □ Technical writer
- □ Other (please explain)

3. How long have you worked in the technical communication field?
- □ Less than 2 years
- □ 2 to 5 years
- □ 5 to 10 years
- □ 10 to 20 years
- □ More than 20 years
- □ Not applicable

4. Why did you join PCS? (check all appropriate)
- □ General interest in improving engineering communication
- □ General interest in technical communication
- □ IEEE benefits
- □ Networking opportunities
- □ *Newsletter*
- □ PCS's technical focus
- □ Reduced rate on conference registration fees
- □ *Transactions*
- □ Other (please explain)

5. How did you find out about PCS?
- □ Colleague
- □ Conference announcement
- □ IEEE society listing
- □ Saw the *Newsletter*
- □ Saw the *Transactions*
- □ Other (please explain)

(continued on page 23)

IEEE
PROFESSIONAL COMMUNICATION SOCIETY
NEWSLETTER

Send Form 3579 to: IEEE, 3 Park Avenue, New York, NY 10016