IEEE
PROFESSIONAL COMMUNICATION SOCIETY
N E W S L E T T E R

PCS's FIRST-ISSUED IEEE THIRD MILLENNIUM MEDAL

BY MURIEL ZIMMERMAN

An IEEE Third Millennium Medal was presented to Dr. Emily Schlesinger by PCS president George Hayhoe at her home on 23 January 2000 as a token of gratitude for her many contributions to the Institute and to the Professional Communication Society, and as an indication of the important part she has played in the history of PCS.

Dr. Schlesinger has been a member of PCS since 1964. Now retired, she was president of PCS in 1976 and 1977. During that time, she regularized publication of the *Transactions* and edited the *Newsletter* herself, producing some 80 pages annually. On a personal trip to Europe and Great Britain, she met with professional communicators in London and Paris, helping to widen the sphere of PCS to include those who communicate in English as a second language.

George Hayhoe and Emily Schlesinger at medal presentation

She helped the PCS education committee launch home study, conference, and workshop writing courses, and was an effective liaison with the Society for Technical Communication and other communication organizations. The Schlesinger Award for outstanding service to PCS was created in her honor in 1995.

The Third Millennium Medals will honor 3000 IEEE members who have made outstanding contributions. The number of awards allotted to societies and sections is based on size, allowing each entity to award a proportionate number. The medals are designed by Gladys Gunzer, whose work includes the 1984 IEEE Centennial Medals and the 1980 Winter Olympics Medallions. The design includes a world map symbolizing the global nature of the IEEE and the words "In celebration of the Third Millennium." Each award is customized with the recipient's name.

Ten additional Millennium Medals will be awarded to the following PCS members who will be acknowledged for the significant contributions they have made to the Institute and to the Society: Ron Blicq, Roger Grice, Rudy Joenk, Bill Kehoe, James Lufkin, Herb Michaelson, Joan Nagle, Richie Robinson, Stephanie Rosenbaum, and Scott Sanders.

IEEE President Bruce Eisenstein said, "I would like to see hundreds of celebrations next year [2000], each one honoring a special member while marking a special year." The presentation to Emily Schlesinger is indeed the first of our celebrations, and we will present additional Millennium Medals throughout the year, culminating in a special event at IPCC 2000.

F R O M   T H E   E D I T O R

RUDY JOENK

Letter to the Editor

*Lucky editors get this type of apprecia-
tion about once in a decade; honestly,
it didn't cost me a cent! Ed.*

Thank you very much for your continued
excellent publications. I joined IEEE PCS
after reading a publication you edited ca.
1984. Since then I am no longer working
as a technical writer, although I have main-
tained my professional memberships. I
have seriously been considering dropping
them as I am not impressed with many
trends in technical communication.

However, today I have been reviewing my
PCS *Newsletters.* They are great. The arti-
cles are interesting and varied—and short
enough to be enjoyed immediately rather
than put aside for the never arriving free
time (when all I want to do is read profes-
sional articles).

As usual I meander. The publications you
edit for PCS are wonderful. Thank you.

— *Denise Phair*
  Denver, Colorado

Columnists

In this issue we welcome a new columnist
even as we say auf Wiedersehen and thanks
to another. Vicki Hill joins us to plumb
the depths of getting it right for your audi-
ence in AUDIENCE QUEST, and Hanspeter
Schmid (BLACK TOOLS) leaves after a year
of showing us how to recognize and side-
step numerous pitfalls of debating (along
with a generous dose of philosophy). We
wish him well and look forward to further
contributions.

AdCom

I trust you're familiar with "AdCom" as
shorthand for Administrative Committee,
which is the governing body of PCS, simi-
lar to a board of directors. I am not going
to force the expansion of this term in all
articles, just as we often use PCS in place
of our full name, but I will ensure that the
diligent are able to find it at least once in
each issue.

Secretary Ed Clark summarizes the very
productive January meeting in Washington,
DC, on page 12, and there you can match
some faces to names.

The next meeting is a two-day session in
Minneapolis, Minnesota, on 5-6 May at
the Holiday Inn Metrodome. After that,
the final meeting of the year, which is
the annual election meeting, is on 24
September preceding IPCC/SIGDOC 2000
at the Marriott Hotel in Cambridge,
Massachusetts. Members are welcome
at AdCom meetings.

Potpourri

Translating English into English: "Ontog-
eny recapitulates phylogeny" comes pretty
close to "Like father/mother, like son/
daughter."

From *The Washington Post: Sarchasm* is
"the gulf between the author of sarcastic
wit and the recipient who doesn't get it";
and *inoculatte* means "to take coffee intra-
venously when you are running late."

1911 definition belied by the preceding
item: *"Dictionary, n.* A malevolent liter-
ary device for cramping the growth of a

PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

COLLABORATION: THE NAME OF THE GAME

GEORGE HAYHOE

STC joint publication, FORUM 2000, SIGDOC joint conference, Popov Society joint meeting

Whether you are an engineer or a full-time professional communicator, you probably spend a significant part of your workday collaborating with other people. Although what the *Dilbert* comic strip calls a "cubical farm" has many disadvantages, there is no doubt that such an environment can foster the kind of cooperative work that is the rule in today's workplace.

Collaboration is a fact of life for professional organizations such as PCS as well as for individuals. In recent years our society has worked closely with many other groups to advance the professions of electrical and electronics engineering, technical communication, and related fields. We've undertaken this collaboration in a variety of ways and have seen some significant results from our efforts.

Collaborating with Other Engineering Organizations

As a technical society within IEEE, the Professional Communication Society works routinely with other IEEE entities.

- We have a vote on IEEE's Technical Activities Board (TAB), the body that governs the activities of IEEE's 40 technical societies and councils and that speaks on behalf of those societies and councils to the IEEE Board of Directors. TAB sets policy for society publications and conferences, provides financial advice to the board of directors on behalf of the societies and councils, and conducts periodic reviews of the societies and councils to ensure that their operations conform to Institute regulations.

- We recently sponsored a book titled *The Essence of Technical Communication for Engineers* by Herbert L. Hirsch for publication by the IEEE Press in May. This book promises to be a helpful addition to the professional engineer's bookshelf.

- We cooperate with IEEE-USA's PACE program to offer workshops and presen-

tations on professional communication topics at the annual Professional Development Conference. This conference helps industry and engineering professionals stay current in areas ranging from career planning and professional skills management to mentoring, financial planning, organizational ethics, diversity, and public policy.

- We joined with other IEEE Division VI societies to sponsor a reception for IEEE GOLD (Graduates of the Last Decade) members at the October 1999 Sections Congress and a luncheon for chapter coordinators at their retreat in February. Those events promoted Division VI societies as a means for IEEE members to keep their professional skills up to date in areas such as professional communication, management, and education.

We also collaborate with engineering organizations outside of IEEE. For example, we have had a cooperative agreement with the A. S. Popov Society (Russia's society for electrical and electronics engineers) for the past 10 years. We are currently working with the Popov Society to cosponsor a meeting in Moscow in April or May 2001 (more details on that event in upcoming issues of the *Newsletter*).

Collaboration with Other Communication Organizations

For several years, we have also been working closely with other organizations interested in professional and technical communication.

- We recently published a special joint issue of our *IEEE Transactions on Professional Communication* and *Technical Communication*, the journal of the Society for Technical Communication (STC). This joint venture was intended to familiarize the members of STC, the world's largest professional organization for technical communicators, with IEEE and the Professional Communication Society, and likewise to familiarize PCS

members with STC. The special issue's topic, communication in cross-functional teams, is emblematic of much that characterizes communication on the job as we enter this new millennium.

• We and the Association for Computing Machinery's Special Interest Group on Computer Documentation (SIGDOC) have held our annual conferences at the same venue just before or just after each other four times since 1994, and in Québec City in 1998 the two conferences were held concurrently. In September 2000 we and SIGDOC will offer a single conference in Cambridge, Massachusetts. This collaboration offers our societies some cost savings and, more important, it allows us to offer attendees more technical sessions for a single conference registration, as well as features such as keynote speaker Nicholas Negroponte, director of MIT's famed Media Lab. See *http://www.ieeepcs. org/2000/* for details about IPCC/ SIGDOC 2000.

We multiply our effectiveness by joining forces.

• We have been a member of INTECOM, the International Council for Technical Communication, since 1995. INTECOM is composed of 17 national and international technical communication societies. One of its main objectives is the professional development of technical communication professionals, including advice on professional standards, education, and training. PCS AdCom member Ron Blicq recently started the second year of his two-year term as INTECOM president. PCS is one of four partner societies managing INTECOM's Forum 2000 conference, which will be held in London 12-14 June. See *http://www.istc.org. uk/forum.htm* for information about Forum 2000.

• We have participated in five summit meetings attended by leaders of several technical communication organizations during recent years. These summits,

initiated by PCS past-president Mark Haselkorn in 1997, are intended to help the organizations see past their rivalries to the many goals they have in common. Several projects proposed at these summits are now under way, and the results should prove helpful to professional communicators when they are complete.

Collaborating to Ensure Future Success

PCS is a small society within IEEE, accounting for less than one percent of the Institute's members. Similarly, PCS represents an even smaller fraction of the people who work in technical and professional communication. But we multiply our effectiveness in both the engineering and technical communication communities by joining forces with other organizations both inside and outside the Institute that have interests allied to our own. In doing this, the Professional Communication Society can achieve influence far greater than that commanded as a result of our actual size.

We should play a leading role in projects related to our field of interest as defined in the new PCS constitution:

• Electronic information such as Web sites, CD-ROMs,
• interactive TV, online help
• Technical proposals, reports, and documentation
• Printed publications and oral presentations
• Electronic publishing
• User interfaces
• Usability evaluations

Electronic delivery of information will be a major part of the Institute's agenda in the coming years and PCS must position itself to play a leading role in that effort. If we are successful in collaborating with other IEEE entities and with other organizations outside the Institute, we can achieve great success.

"If it takes a lot of words to say what you have in mind, give it more thought."
— *Dennis Roch*

P R O F E S S O R   G R A M M A R

EVERYTHING'S IN ORDER

Dear students,
The Professor loves order.
In her spice cabinet the spices are ordered alphabetically.

In her wine cellar the wines are ordered alphabetically by vintner, and the wines from each vintner are ordered chronologically by vintage.

And in her humidor the cigars are ordered by classification: common and Cuban. The Cuban cigars, which make all other cigars common, are a gift from one of the Professor's admirers….

But the Professor departs from the order of her lesson.

Living amidst order the Professor finds anything and everything easily:

- A pinch of a special spice for a delicious dish
- A nice sherry for guests
- A Cuban cigar for herself

Your users, dear students, also will love order when you provide it in your writing. To make information easy to find, order the chapters within a manual, the divisions within a chapter, the paragraphs within a division or help window, the sentences within a paragraph, and even the items within a list.

So many orders are useful to users. Consider a few of these orders, including an order or two that might not be familiar to you:

- Sequential order
- Spatial order
- Order of importance
- Order of familiarity

Sequential Order

Sequential order is the familiar order for developing software information. For example, to access your secret e-mail, take these steps:

1. Enter your power-on password.
2. Enter your operating-system password.

3. Break for coffee.
4. Enter your screen-saver password.

You know sequential order well. It is the order of the instructions that you write. It is also the order for explaining a process and describing a mechanism in operation.

A strength of sequential order is its predictability. Weaknesses include its monotony and, because each step is ostensibly equal to every other step, its lack of emphasis.

Spatial Order

Spatial order is the familiar order for developing hardware information. Put these randomly listed parts of your workstation in order:

- Monitor
- Keyboard
- CPU
- Mouse

What is a useful order? Top to bottom? Or bottom to top? Left to right? Or right to left? A functional order in combination with spatial order? (The Professor never said that order is easy for a writer.)

You also know spatial order well. It is the order for describing a mechanism. And, in combination with sequential order, it is the order for many types of instructions.

As with sequential order, a strength of spatial order is its predictability, and a weakness is its monotony.

Order of Importance

Order of importance might be less familiar to you. Decreasing order of importance begins with whatever is most important, continues with the next most important, and ends with the least important:

1. Quality improvements
2. Line items
3. Maintenance
4. Meetings

Increasing order of importance, which begins with whatever is least important, continues with the next least important,

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What is a useful order?

and ends with the most important, is less common in technical information.

A strength of order of importance, as you see in the sample list, is its emphasis on whatever is identified as most important. What are the weaknesses, if any?

Order of Familiarity

Order of familiarity, which leads users from the more familiar to the less familiar, is the order that the Professor used in this lesson. She led her students from sequential order and spatial order, which they know well as writers of software information and hardware information, to order of importance and order of familiarity, which they might not know as well.

Consider an order that might not be familiar to you.

You judge the strengths and weaknesses of order of familiarity, dear students.

Class is dismissed. It's time for the Professor to find a Cuban cigar — an easy task because everything's in order.

Copyright 1999 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. The Council recently authored the Prentice-Hall book Developing Quality Technical Information: A Handbook for Writers and Editors. *Many of the Professor's lessons are based on tenets described in this* Handbook.

FROM THE EDITOR

language and making it hard and inelastic." From *The Devil's Dictionary* by Ambrose Bierce.

Sign on a church near Flagstaff, Arizona: "Don't let worry kill you — let the church help."

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 your formatting simple;** multiple fonts and sizes, customized paragraphing and line spacing, personalized styles, etc. have to be filtered out before being recoded in *Newsletter* style. Headers, footers, and tables lead the casualty list. **Embed only enough specialized formatting and highlighting —**

boldface, italics, bullets — to show me your preferences.

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

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

Deadlines

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

"The trouble with using experience as a guide is that the final exam often comes first and then the lesson."

— Unknown

T O O L S   O F   T H E   T R A D E

COMMUNICATION IN THE NEW MILLENNIUM

PETER REIMOLD AND
CHERYL REIMOLD

*Communication is
needed to lessen
the threats inherent in
some developments.*

Part 1: The Challenges

Now that everybody (we hope!) has made it safely into the new millennium, it seems appropriate to reflect on the communication challenges ahead not because there is magic in the number 2000 but because the past few years have revealed changes that seem both deep and permanent. In this series we'll look at some of these shifts and the adjustments they call for.

Hallmarks of the New Age

There is no question that we are on the verge of scientific and technological breakthroughs with tremendous societal implications. Most notably, the **new biology** and **information technology** will greatly change our lives, and both are already producing battles over values ranging from ethics to economics. With business **globalization**, which now extends to former East-bloc countries, these issues involve the whole world, not just a few rich nations.

Information technology in particular is feeding the public's **impatience**. We no longer accept limitations of time and space. When we want to shop, we want to shop, no matter what the time of night; when we want help, or an ear to complain to, we must do it *now*. This general attitude of instant gratification and entitlement is going to affect all facets of our life.

Impatience takes a special form in the increased **intolerance for differences** that is evident in the emergence of mini-nations and civil wars across the globe as well as hate groups, road rage, and general violence.

This is also the age of universal participation in everything, from talk and game shows (which are now eclipsing sitcoms on television) to online investing to cyberspace auctions—and government by instant nationwide poll may not be so far away. Unfortunately, widespread investing is only pumping up the pressure for immediate business results and that, in turn, is

fueling continued job insecurity through downsizing, rushed mergers and divestitures, and other dramatic management gestures. In a sense, as we succeed in our greedy investment strategies, we end up firing, demoting, and dislocating ourselves.

Finally, this is surely going to be the age of environmental reckoning. Global warming is moving out of the realm of theoretical discussion as the world experiences disastrous storms and weather shifts. Every business and household in every nation will be affected by this and, as with recycling, communication will be an essential part of the cycle of creating awareness, finding solutions, and keeping implementation on track.

Implications for Communication

Communication may not be the biggest issue in all these changes ringing in the new millennium, but it has a role to play. There are many exciting things happening, and communication can help us benefit fully from them. At the same time, communication is needed, more urgently than ever, to lessen the threats inherent in some developments. For instance, information technology is indeed beginning to connect us all, offering the promise of worldwide communication and even democratization if we do this well; yet the more we connect to the world in this way, the more we isolate ourselves as we lose face-to-face contact. No matter how sophisticated the technology, it will never match the power of a handshake!

What's more, we will need **new communication skills** to cope with what lies ahead, especially in information technology and globalization. Do you know how to hold a videoconference over the Internet, add digital video to a document to illustrate a process, or construct your own interactive Web site? Most of us are pretty shaky in these areas, partly because the technology is still somewhat clumsy and sometimes not available widely enough to justify the effort. But as the hardware reaches the necessary

power and the speed of connections improves, we will have to do these things just as casually as we now produce visuals for a presentation or figures for a report.

Or suppose globalization becomes a fact even for many smaller businesses. Is it enough for employees to leave school with a scant command of English, let alone Spanish, French, German, or Japanese? And does our educational system help students understand cultural differences that can thwart communication if ignored?

In succeeding columns we'll consider these and other issues. For now, we hope to have sparked some thought on these critical concerns. Please, send us your thoughts on communication in the new millennium. We'll answer you personally, and we'll take up your ideas in the next column. Happy Third Millennium!

Cheryl and Peter Reimold have taught communication skills to engineers, scientists, and businesspeople over two millennia! Their firm, PERC Communications (telephone +1 914 725 1024, e-mail perccom@aol.com), *offers businesses customized in-house courses on writing, presentation skills, and on-the-job communication skills.*

AWARD NOMINATIONS SOUGHT

One of the important functions of the Professional Communication Society is to recognize outstanding achievements and contributions to our profession and to our society. PCS presents three awards each year: the **Alfred N. Goldsmith Award** for outstanding achievement in technical communication, the **Emily K. Schlesinger Award** for outstanding service to PCS, and the **Best Paper Award** for the outstanding paper published in the last volume of the *IEEE Transactions on Professional Communication*.

How Awards Are Chosen

Nominations for the Goldsmith and Schlesinger Awards are submitted by PCS members. The final selection is made by a vote of the Administrative Committee (AdCom).

All members of PCS are encouraged to submit nominations for the Goldsmith and Schlesinger awards. For more information about the awards and a list of past recipients, visit the PCS Web site at *http://www.ieeepcs.org/about.html*.

If you would like to nominate someone for an award, please send e-mail to *m.zimmerman@ieee.org*. Include the nominee's name, specify the award you think he or she should receive, and submit a 100-200 word explanation of why this person should receive the award. Nominations must be received by **1 May**.

The best *Transactions* paper is selected by the PCS Editorial Advisory Committee.

PCS MEMBERS ELEVATED TO SENIOR STATUS

Congratulations to these Professional Communication Society members who achieved IEEE Senior Member status in 1999:

REGIONS 1-6 (U.S.)		REGION 7 (Canada)	REGION 10
Michael B. Jones	Wayne F. Owen	R. L. Vaughan	Katsuhiko Hirai (Japan)
Frank R. McElvain	Annette D. Reilly	REGION 8	Subramanian K.
David P. Shattuck		Moshe Ran (Israel)	Krishnamurthy (India)

If you have 10 years or more of professional communication experience you can apply for IEEE Senior Member status. The forms are available via e-mail. Send a blank message to *senior-member-forms@ieee.org*. You will automatically receive the application-nomination and reference forms by return e-mail. For more information or help in completing the forms contact (PCS) *marj.davis@ieee.org*.

END OF THE DEBATE

HANSPETER SCHMID

Distort the matter at hand, alter the context of the debate,…

Black Tools is the name I gave to the art of winning a debate irrespective of who is in the right. Many debates are fought to win, mostly debates in front of an audience. The art of winning such a debate is often applied in an unethical way, thus the name Black Tools.

Unfortunately, debating is like fencing. It scarcely matters who is right or wrong, who fights for a good cause or for a bad one. If one debater knows how to hit and parry and the other doesn't, it is decided from the start who wins. If you don't want to lose debates solely for technical reasons, you should know at least the basic tricks of intellectual fencing.

The German philosopher Schopenhauer compiled the list of 38 tricks I have shown you in the six preceding issues of this *Newsletter*. Schopenhauer never published his list of tricks, although he possibly presented it in lectures at the University of Berlin in 1830. His way of explaining the tricks is rather outdated now so I took his list, combined it with some of my own philosophy, and recorded it in six Black Tools columns; I'll call them [1; March/April 1999] to [6; January/February 2000].

Apart from containing lots of cynical common sense (for example, my remarks about political correctness in [3]), the six articles were also about my personal attempt to reconcile realism and relativism. Realism is the assumption that there is a real world that exists independently of what we perceive and think. Many realists also believe that there are so-called facts, things that are true independent of who perceives and thinks about them. This extreme form of realism is called logical positivism.

Relativism is the opposite idea, namely, that something can be true or wrong only in relation to a certain context, world view, culture, or theory. Some relativists believe that nothing at all is independent of the beholder. This extreme form is called radical relativism.

I think that both realism and relativism are good concepts: Everything we know and say about the world is true only relative to a certain theoretical, cultural, or social context, but such contexts do not develop arbitrarily, so that reality is reflected somehow in the theories, cultures, and societies.

I started the philosophical part of the Black Tools column with an attack against yes-no logic [2], went on to discuss different world views and how to use them in debates [3], and then explained how facts (even scientific ones) are made rather than discovered [4].

Then I pointed out the difference between expert knowledge, which is accessible only to a small group of people (esoteric knowledge), and common sense, which is accessible to a large number of people (exoteric knowledge) [5]. Finally, I explained the difference between theory and practice by portraying theory as a matter of thinking and practice as a matter of caring [6].

Although truth is relative, there is still truth within a certain context. For example, two electrical engineers have a lot of principles in common and, within the context of electrical engineering, they can argue in an objective way, using true-false logic. Eight tricks deal with the matter at hand alone, mainly by distorting it slightly to the advantage of one of the debaters: Generalization [1, Trick 3], the Extension-Contraction Game [1, T1], Homonymy [1, T2], Proof by Induction [2, T11], the Extreme Contrary [3, T13], the Proof of a Paradox [3, T15], the Do-It-Yourself Conclusion [4, T20], and the Concrete Counterexample [4, T25].

A debater can also use his opponent's world view against him, or what the opponent said earlier, or even what the opponent's friends or allies said. Then truth becomes relative again. Seven tricks work with setting truth by altering the context of the debate: the Gambit [2, T5], Asking Questions [2, T7], To Mock a Mockingbird [3, T16], Make Undesired Conclusions [4, T24], Turn the Tables [4, T26], Answer Bad Arguments with Bad Arguments [4, T21], and As You Don't Like It [6, T35].

If the debate is observed by an audience, one truth is always truth according to the audience's views. Using the audience's views for your own ends is the subject of eight more tricks: Good Labels [3, T12], You Just State What You Should Actually Prove [4, T22], Convince the Jury [5, T28], Declare Yourself Incompetent [5, T31], Authority and Common Sense [5, T30], Pejorative Classification [5, T32], Toasting Bad Proofs [6, T37], and perhaps the most dangerous trick of all—This May Work in Theory But It Is Wrong in Practice [6, T33].

Looking at this arsenal of discussion tricks, it's no surprise that the art of evading attacks is also well developed. Five of the tricks are purely evasive: Fine Distinctions [3, T17], Change the Topic [3, T18], Life, the Universe, and Everything [3, T19], Diversion [5, T29], and If You Can't Convince Them, Confuse Them [6, T36].

Seven tricks deal with tricking your opponent, either by hiding from him what you're getting at until it is too late for him, or by using his stubbornness against him: the Stealth Salami [2, T4], Hidden Postulation [2, T6], Stealth Questions [2, T9], Dig Their Heels Out [2, T10], the Hollywood Proof [3, T14], and Provoking Exaggerations [4, T23].

The last four tricks are about hitting the opponent himself: the Last Trick (Insult Your Opponent) [1, T38], Evoking Anger [2, T8], Pressing on Weak Spots [4, T27], and Breaking a Noisy Silence [6, T34].

Although there are many more tricks, it is already difficult enough to remember these 38 basic ones during a debate. Fortunately, you can do something in debating that you cannot do in fencing: You can take your time. It is well known that the present is not just the infinitesimally short moment when the future becomes the past. In a human mind the present lasts three to four seconds.

Since a problem and its solution cannot happen simultaneously, one of them must be in the past. Thus, if you're in trouble, just take a deep breath, and the three seconds you win will make a huge difference.

By the way, those three to four seconds turn up in places as diverse as music (most musical motifs last three to four seconds) and didactics (a teacher who asks a question should wait three seconds before calling on someone to give an answer, and also before commenting on that answer).

With these words, I say goodbye to the Black Tools, but hopefully not to you. I'll go on writing about implications of different philosophies on the art of professional communication every now and again.

Hanspeter Schmid (h.p.schmid@ieee.org) *is an analog-IC designer and lecturer at the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology (Zurich) who has an untamable interest in modern philosophy of science and society. Since he believes that there are always several sides to any problem, and there's truth in all of them, he can always go into opposition in any debate and even take it almost seriously. These articles are now posted on his Web page,* http://www.schmid-werren.ch/blacktools/.

INTERESTED IN SEEING MOSCOW?

PCS and the Professional Communication Section of the Russian A. S. Popov Society (similar to the IEEE) are considering cosponsoring a workshop or colloquium on technical and business communication in Moscow in April or May 2001. (The dates would not conflict with the STC annual conference, 12-16 May).

This meeting would mark the 10th anniversary of our first such collaboration.

Topics might include (but are not limited to) technology and services of electronic libraries; how to write proposals, especially for financial grants; writing for publication; electronic collaboration; etc.

If you are interested—no commitment yet—send an e-mail message to *r.joenk@ieee.org* and we'll include you on a distribution list for further information as it develops. Please identify your interests and feel free to suggest topics.

CARMINA BURANA

BY MICHAEL BRADY

A freelance writer, observed Robert Benchley, is "one who gets paid per word, per piece, or perhaps." The wit of the remark was original and it was much quoted, including by fellow humorist James Thurber. But the truth of it is as old as the craft of freelancing. Some seven centuries earlier, a wandering scholar had lamented his lot in the idiom of his time by writing in dog-Latin verse: "O slippery inconstancy of Fortune! You hold unstable court, and you reward those whom you favor immoderately!"

The wandering scholars were the *goliards,* a class of jesters and writers of satirical Latin verse, who flowered in the 12th and 13th centuries in England, France, and Germany. Most were in the service of the Church, which then was the employer of choice for young intellectuals lacking independent means. Just as Robert Benchley took humor to the people in one of the first all-talking motion pictures, the goliards were the first to take poetry to the public.

In so doing, they enjoyed a freedom of expression that many a modern writer might envy. Once in an order, a goliard was beyond the reach of civil law and could be tried only by an ecclesiastical court. They exercised that freedom liberally. Though devout, they tempered their belief with a relish for the joys of life, and many of their poems and songs lauded Bacchus, the god of wine of classical mythology, or Venus, the goddess of love and beauty. Indeed, the songs of the wandering scholars are among the best reflections of the mores of medieval Europe and arguably the best documentation of the work of the first freelancers, who wrote for bed and board.

Regrettably, few of the writings of the goliards remain. But, fortunately, there is one large manuscript of some 200 goliard songs penned ca. 1230 and kept at the Benedictine monastery of Beuren, just south of Munich, Germany. The monastery was dissolved in 1803 and the manuscript found its way to Munich, where Johann Andreas Schmeller published it in its entirety in 1847 under the title *Carmina Burana* (Latin for "Songs of the Beuren"). The publication was sensational, as the texts of the songs were hardly as devotional as one might expect in a manuscript kept in a monastery for nearly six centuries.

Most of the songs of the *Carmina Burana* are in Latin. Some are in medieval German, and one, *Doleo quod nimium*, is in a mix of Latin, French, and Provençal. *Carmina Burana* quickly became a source work for scholars, writers, and musicians, who resurrected the melodies of the songs from concordances held in the St. Martial and Notre Dame repertories.

In 1927 English medievalist and writer Helen Waddell published *Songs of the Wandering Scholars*, which included the *Carmina Burana* and remains one of the most thorough studies ever of the everyday language of Europe in medieval times.

The straightforward simplicity of the *Carmina Burana* has inspired composers, most notably Carl Orff, a native of Munich, who for 11 years taught music to children and lay adults at a workingman's college. That teaching stint reinforced his belief in rudiments of plain rhythm and, for voice, plain texts. He was the right man at the right time and place to give *Carmina Burana* a modern setting. That he did, in a cantata first performed in 1937 in Frankfurt.

Orff's *Carmina Burana* uses a big orchestra percussively and balances it against solo and choral singers. This is physical music, stunning in its impact. I recommend it to all freelancers (as well as to others). Follow the lyrics as you listen; they illuminate the practice of our craft as it was eight centuries ago.

The lyrics illuminate the practice of our craft as it was eight centuries ago.

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE JANUARY ADCOM MEETING

BY ED CLARK

T he Professional Communication Society's Administrative Committee (AdCom) held a two-day meeting in Washington, DC, on 21 and 22 January 2000. The first-day session, for strategic planning, was held at the IEEE-USA office. Guests were Peter Weisner, director of IEEE continuing education, and Fran Zappulla, staff director of IEEE publications operations.

The second-day session, to conduct regular AdCom business, was held at the Wyndham City Center Hotel. The next AdCom meeting will be in Minneapolis, Minnesota, on 5 and 6 May. PCS members are always welcome at these meetings.

The first session identified PCS strengths and weaknesses to set the stage for strategic planning to realign PCS activities and direction to better meet the expectations of its current and potential new members. Major goals are to increase membership and participation in PCS activities and to improve the financial situation.

A committee of president George Hayhoe, vice-president Beth Moeller, *Transactions* editor Kim Campbell, and IPCC 2004 chair Bernadette Longo will draft a plan based on the input from this session.

Major items on the second day were the president's appointments, the venue for IPCC 2003, and the activities of the officers and committee chairs.

President's Report

The five-year IEEE review of PCS is scheduled for June. An ad-hoc committee of George Hayhoe, Rudy Joenk, Beth Moeller, and Bill Kehoe is preparing PCS data for the review.

The AdCom confirmed the president's appointments of treasurer Bill Kehoe, secretary Ed Clark, and *Newsletter* editor Rudy Joenk. Additionally, Larry Strianese was introduced to the AdCom as our new Webmaster. The AdCom voted to retain *Transactions* editor Kim Campbell for an additional year, through the end of 2001.

A productive meeting with guests and new members; great conference venues in the works.

Ho hum?
George Hayhoe leading
the brainstorming

Conferences

Activities are on schedule and within budget for **IPCC 2000** in Cambridge, Massachusetts, this September. Nicholas Negroponte was confirmed as keynote speaker at no cost to PCS. Potential sponsors for the banquet, reception, and breakfasts have been contacted. A registration of 400 participants is planned.

The theme for **IPCC 2001** in Santa Fe, New Mexico, is Communication Dimensions. Chair Joe Chew and the organizing committee are seeking sponsors for publication of the proceedings and for the luncheons and banquet. Only a partial overlap with SIGDOC is planned, including a joint keynote speaker and luncheon.

Chair Laurel Grove and the committee for **IPCC 2002** are looking at possible venues on the central Oregon coast and in downtown Portland. There is a possibility of cooperation with an STC regional conference.

The AdCom approved the proposed venue for **IPCC 2003** at Coronado Springs Resort, a Walt Disney World property in Orlando, Florida.

Publications

A *Transactions* cover redesign was discussed in terms of cost and IEEE requirements. The editor and the Editorial Advisory Committee will explore options and report on the process and cost at the AdCom meeting in May.

Publicity and Marketing

PCS brochures, membership applications, and *Transactions* copies will be available at our booth during the STC annual conference in Orlando, Florida, 21-23 May. Several AdCom members attending the conference volunteered to staff the booth.

Bids will be solicited from graphic designers for the design of a PCS logo. Leann Kostek and Beth Moeller are leading this effort.

Leann Kostek, former membership chair, will have an article in an upcoming

Dinner was great!
Kim Campbell, Nancy Coppola

issue of IEEE's *The Institute* that will mention PCS.

The PCS Web site has been averaging 600 hits a month and Larry Strianese will take over the Webmaster duties from Beth Moeller. The bulletin board is getting good discussion threads and PCS will continue periodic sponsorship of the *techwr-l* e-mail list.

New AdCom members:
Marj Davis,
Bernadette Longo,
Larry Strianese
(Webmaster),
Paul Dombrowski,
Nancy Coppola

Above, The pinning: George Hayhoe presents past president pin to Roger Grice

Below, "All work and no play…"
Beth Moeller, Ed Clark, Cheryl Reimold, Laurel Grove, Luke Maki

Above, Educational activities:
Peter Weisner (IEEE staff),
Ron Blicq, Muriel Zimmerman,
Cheryl Reimold

Right, "Couldn't eat another bite!"
Tom van Loon,
Luke Maki,
Terrance Malkinson

"Should auld acquaintance…"
Rudy Joenk, Emily Schlesinger, Ron Blicq

"After the ball…"
Beth Moeller, George Hayhoe

Education

The Education Committee has successfully arranged one course with income to PCS and has two additional sessions planned. A course may evolve from PCS participation in the September PACE conference. A participant in Ron Blicq's writing workshop is arranging a similar workshop for the IEEE Section in Kansas City. Chair Lisa Moretto is collaborating with the North Carolina Symposium and Exposition, an annual educational event for engineers, with the goal of having PCS as an active and contributing organization.

Above, Eyes right:
Fran Zappulla (IEEE staff), David Dobson, Gene Hoffnagle

Below, Editorial Activities:
Gene Hoffnagle, Laurel Grove, Fran Zappulla (IEEE staff),
Kim Campbell, Terrance Malkinson, Muriel Zimmerman

Finances are improving!
George Hayhoe,
Bill Kehoe, Joe Chew

IPCC/SIGDOC committee: Bill Kehoe, Beth Moeller, Roger Grice, Mary Jane Northrop (SIGDOC), Joe Chew (IPCC 2001)

THOREAU'S WILD FRUITS

RONALD J. NELSON

A little known manuscript by Henry David Thoreau has recently been published for the first time: *Wild Fruits: Thoreau's Rediscovered Last Manuscript* (edited and introduced by Bradley P. Dean; New York: Norton, 2000). He began writing it in autumn 1859, although it was part of a larger project that he had begun earlier in the decade. It remained unfinished at the time of his death on 6 May 1862. Its contents bear fruits of many varieties for lay reader and professional communicator alike: It is a cornucopia of stylistic gems.

Thoreau himself defined "fruit" as derived from the Latin *fructus* ("that which is used or enjoyed") and as "a fine effluence, which only the most ingenuous worshiper perceives at a reverent distance from its surface even. The cause and effect are equally evanescent and intangible, and the former must be investigated in the same spirit and with the same reverence with which the latter is perceived." Whatever our capacities, we perhaps can concentrate more of our energies on the true fruits of our endeavors, which involve an awareness of a spiritual dimension to what we do.

The fine effluences that flow from this book are potentially valuable to us all. The entries in Thoreau's journal would be worthwhile models, for example, to those who appreciate careful, palpable description in any form here in the many descriptions of common and rare plants that Thoreau encountered in his wanderings, primarily in Concord, Massachusetts, and surrounding towns.

These descriptions, which were the result of years of observation, are presented in the order in which the various plants and fruits are first observed during a typical year, synthesized into a single archetypal year. They range from "the most purely objective and scientific to the aesthetic and highly subjective." Thoreau's descriptions are stylistically engaging because they encapsulate the habits of a mind capable of scientific detachment conjoined with a deep involvement in and love for nature.

In addition, *Wild Fruits* is a scholarly work in which Thoreau completes and embell-

…a reminder of the need to refresh ourselves on what we think we know…

ishes his journal entries by quoting from an impressive array of ancient and modern (in his day) authorities. In the process, he intersperses Latin names with common names of the plants and fruits he describes in a comfortably readable style. Part of his first entry for willows, for example, attests to the appeal of his style:

By the thirteenth of May the earliest willows *(Salix discolor)* about warm edges of woods show great green wands a foot or two long, consisting of curved worm-like catkins three inches long. Like the fruit of the elm, they form conspicuous masses of green before the leaves are noticeable, and some have now begun to burst and show their down— and thus it is the next of our trees and shrubs to shed its seeds after the elm.

And his description of the late whortleberry celebrates the appearance of that fruit in clean, refreshing language:

This is a tall and handsome bush about twice as high as a huckleberry bush, with altogether a glaucous aspect, growing in shady copses where it is rather moist, and to produce much fruit it seems to require wet weather. The fruit is one of the handsomest of berries: smooth, round, and blue, larger than most huckleberries and more transparent, on long stems dangling two or three inches, and more or less tangled. By the inexperienced it is suspected to be poisonous and so avoided, and perhaps is the more fair and memorable to them on that account. Though quite good to eat, it has a peculiar, slightly astringent, and compared with most huckleberries, not altogether pleasant flavor, and a tough skin. At the end of the first week of September, they are commonly the only edible whortleberries which are quite fresh. They are rare hereabouts, however, and it is only in certain years that you can find enough for a pudding.

Wild Fruits is an educational experience for readers of all kinds, who will find the familiar (potatoes, pumpkins, chestnuts) and the unfamiliar (cohosh, tupelo, zozania, checkerberry, hound's tongue) delightfully covered. Readers will have their vocabularies expanded as they make the unfamiliar familiar. In that sense, the book is a reminder of the need to refresh ourselves on

…concentrate more of our energies on the true fruits of our endeavors…

what we think we know and to realize that there is much we don't know.

The book encourages a commitment to observing the world carefully and appreciatively. It could even be regarded as fostering a philosophy of life in which the reader may become conscious of the fact that "the mystery of the life of plants is kindred with that of our own lives.…" In his remarks at the start of the manuscript Thoreau notes, "The value of these wild fruits is not in the mere possession or eating of them, but in the sight and enjoyment of them" and "The value of any experience is measured…not by the amount of money, but the amount of development we get out of it." As he says,

Commonly, the less you get, the happier and the richer you are. The rich man's son gets cocoa-nuts and the poor man's pignuts, but the worst of it is that the former never goes a-cocoa-nutting and so never gets the cream of the cocoa-nut, as the latter does the cream of the pignut. That on which commerce seizes is always the very coarsest part of a fruit.… You cannot buy that pleasure which it yields to him who truly plucks it.

Thoreau certainly would be regarded today as an advocate of "hands on" as essential to grasping the fullness of an experience. We might well profit from his stance as participant-observer in a world that seems more and more prone to the surrogate pleasures of virtual reality. Paradoxically, Thoreau suggests that there is permanence in the ephemeral if we know how to perceive it.

The zenith of *Wild Fruits* may well be Thoreau's entry for the European cranberry. In it he speaks of "the advantage of having some purpose, however small, to be accomplished—of letting your deliberate

wisdom and foresight in the house to some extent direct and control your steps" and of having reaped "unexpected and incalculable advantages from carrying out at last, however tardily, any little enterprise which my genius suggested to me long ago as a thing to be done, some step to be taken, however slight, out of the usual course."

For Thoreau and for us it is important to carry out "deliberately and faithfully the hundred little purposes which every man's genius must have suggested to him. Let not your life be wholly without an object, though it be only to ascertain the flavor of a cranberry, for it will not be only the quality of an insignificant berry that you will have tasted, but the flavor of your life to that extent, and it will be such a sauce as no wealth can buy." In keeping with such meaningful activities, we will be likely to locate the "little oases of wildness in the desert of our civilization."

Anyone interested in viewing facsimile transcripts of Thoreau's manuscript pages for *Wild Fruits* can do so at *http://www.walden.org/Thoreau/writings/fruits*. Those interested in Thoreau's life, works, and philosophy might consider joining the Thoreau Society, the oldest and largest organization devoted to an American author. It can be reached by phone at +1 800 554 3569, on the Web at *http://www.walden.org*, or by mail at 44 Baker Farm, Lincoln, MA 01773.

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STC ANNUAL CONFERENCE

The Society for Technical Communication will hold its 47th annual conference in Orlando, Florida, 21-24 May. The conference will feature more than 250 technical sessions covering technical writing, editing, management, Web design, multimedia, and other subjects of interest to technical communicators.

Information on the conference is available on the STC office Web site at *http://www.stc-va.org*. A copy of the preliminary program, including a registration form, can be obtained by phoning +1 703 522 4114 ext. 200.

CHAPTER NEWS

MADRAS, INDIA

From left: S. S. Narayanan, V. Appa Kutty, and S. A. Soundaran Rajan, chair of the IEEE Madras Section.

Dr. S. S. Narayanan, chair, reported these 1999 activities:

1. 3 November 1999, presentation on Personality Development and Employment Interviews by Prof. J. Ganesan, director of the Clarion Human Resources Development Training Centre, in two seminars at the Madras Computer Academy.

2. 29 December 1999, two workshops on Web and Corporate Communication by Prof. S. S. Narayanan at the Institution of Electronics and Telecommunication Engineers Chennai (Madras) Centre.

3. 31 December 1999, certificate presentation to the workshop participants and exhibition of Web literature by V. Appa Kutty, senior engineer of Madras TV Centre.

PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA

Janet Rochester, chair and recent PCS AdCom member, is now also secretary of the IEEE Philadelphia Section.

RUSSIA

Dr. H. S. Lantsberg, chair, reported these 1999 activities:

- Participation in the 4th International Conference on Integration, Information Technologies, and Telecommunication in March in Moscow.

- Meeting with the Russian Popov Society PC Section and the Association of Information Workers of Russia during the Popov Society's annual meeting in May in Moscow with presentations on professional communication problems; for example, state information policy and modern information-communication technologies, state information system method of infotelecommunication forecasting, international analytical center, information technology in a library, and electronic information center.

- Workshop on Modern Technology Information Library Services for Research Institutes in September in Tarusa.

- Round-table meeting on Methods of Improvement of Publication Activity of Professional Communication Services in November in Moscow.

Chapter news is always welcome.

This May marks the 55th anniversary of the Russian Popov Society. At the annual meeting IEEE president Bruce Eisenstein will present to Prof. Vladimir Kotelnikov —dean of Russian communication scientists and engineers—the Alexander Graham Bell Gold Medal for his fundamental contributions to signal theory.

This August marks the third anniversary of the IEEE Russia Section, which now has 24 chapters (including PCS) located in cities from the west to the east of Russia with more than 700 members and three student branches.

A representative of the Russian Popov Society PC Section was elected a member of the Permanent Chamber on State Information Policy of the Consultative Counsel under the President of Russia, which we consider as a recognition of our influence on the development of professional communication in Russia.

Participation in other technical conferences is being planned for 2000, and for 2001 a workshop on Technical and Business Communication **with PCS** is proposed for April or May in Moscow.

A U D I E N C E   Q U E S T

THE FORCE WAS WITH US

BY VICKI HILL

*T*he audience for this new column includes:
  • *Experienced writers who want to reach audiences more effectively*
• *Experienced writers who want to expand their audiences*
• *Novice writers perceiving audiences through a glass darkly.*

General guidance for writers on how to reach audiences is easy to find. First, that old chestnut: "Know your audience." Dig a little deeper and you find that much more than general knowledge is needed. Unless a writer has properly analyzed his or her audience and uses arguments and styles appropriate to that audience, a piece of writing cannot accomplish its goals.

But few useful guidelines for reaching audiences exist. In fact, the audience quest is sometimes compared to overcoming writer's block: Just write it; write it to yourself or write it to your favorite aunt. Just do it. There must be a better way, and that is what this series is about.

In this first column I explain and illustrate how I propose to shed some light on the audience quest. The columns will build up a collection of tales describing successful audience engagements. How the audience was found, how the writer stayed the course, and how it all turned out will be examined. I believe that addressing real-life audience quests directly and concretely will increase awareness of audiences and offer workable techniques.

In exploring sources of guidance I found a particular approach useful—in fact, I recommend it as a fundamental consideration. Peter Elbow, in *Writing With Power* (New York: Oxford, 1981), likens audiences to magnetic fields that can focus our words. One type of audience exerts a strong force on a writer's words; it is called a *get the results* audience. To address this type of audience, the writer must quickly establish a connection and stay close to achieve the desired result. With the explosion of publishing outlets and frazzled, distracted audiences, this dimension is becoming ever more important.

Make sure the customer's unique view of the world is understood.

A weaker force is exerted by a *get it right* audience. This audience requires initial distance to allow innovation and creativity to flower unimpeded. My first tale concerns a *get the results* audience with a flavoring of *get it right* added.

Illustrative Tale 1

I started a telecommunications policy study full of enthusiasm and general knowledge about national communications infrastructures. Of course, the amount of time left was far too short. The project manager achieved a delicate balance: He let me do the research and form my conclusions, but he made sure that the customer's unique view of the world was understood.

Study findings that were not framed properly would not be accepted. The study was delivered in time. Almost all avenues of research, issues, and recommendations were proposed by me, and almost all were filtered and shaped by the project manager based on his long tenure with the customer.

In this quest the organizing force could not have been much stronger; the project manager was an audience expert. You will in many cases not have an expert on hand. This is where rapid research and other intelligence-gathering techniques must be razor sharp. Astonishingly, many authors attempt to address audiences without investigating obvious sources of information: related businesses, biographies of players, news stories, and publications authored by members of the target audience.

Distance from the audience also had its role to play. My very naiveté with this particular audience meant that I added innovative aspects that the project needed. After all, the study was supposed to bring new information to the audience, even though they didn't want their world rocked.

I briefly mention here the types of creative offering that could fall under the *get it right* category. White papers and long, thoughtful *Wall Street Journal* and *New Yorker* articles come to mind. Those are the pieces with which writers can delight audiences, giving them things they never knew they wanted. The behavior of movie

CLICK HERE

JEAN-LUC DOUMONT

There must now be about a billion Web pages out there, not even counting all the pages generated dynamically in response to a query. If you have ever surfed the Web, you no doubt have noticed the uneven quality of those pages. Nowadays, virtually anyone can publish on the Web, but not everyone has the skills it takes to do so effectively.

Besides poor content or dubious aesthetics, Web sites frequently fall short on what is often considered the very fabric of the Web: *hyperlinks.* Despite good intent—either helping or visually entertaining visitors—hyperlinks may hinder effective navigation. Among their typical shortcomings are the *click here* syndrome, the every-other-word hyperlinking, and the mystery box.

A few years ago I predicted that the *click here* syndrome would soon disappear, given how obviously distracting it can be. I was wrong: Numerous sites still happily boast hyperlinks such as "To download our terms and conditions, click here." Given that hyperlinks normally stand out visually (lest they be little useful), a quick glance at the page merely reveals meaningless click here's all over the place (just like in this paragraph).

Typical of novice designers' getting carried away, the every-other-word hyperlinks tend to disappear spontaneously on more mature Web sites. In intent, they are close to Tim Berners-Lee's original idea of moving freely from one subject to the other. Just like footnotes, however, they hardly allow informed decisions about which links to follow. (Can you guess where any of the above links would take you?)

These days, the fashionable hyperlink—no mistake possible—is the *mystery box:* a series of usually small evocative icons or pictures that reveal what they link to when the mouse passes over them. Such JavaScript tricks may be most entertaining to those visitors with nothing better to do ("Hey, cool! Now how did they do that?"), but they hardly make the site more accessible.

Web hype has misled many into thinking that hypertext is an Internet invention.

Web hype has misled many into thinking that hypertext is an Internet invention. Regardless of when the term was coined, the idea of linking one piece of writing to another is no recent one. Although new media may open up new possibilities, traditional printed documents still offer a robust model of hyperlinks, in the form of tables of contents, references, and notes.

- *Table of contents:* a set of links visualizing the structure of the Web page or site and allowing access to a specific part. The table of contents may be verbal or graphical (icons, image map, etc.) as long as it provides a useful overview.

- *Reference:* a link to another part of the page or site (often taken up as such in the table of contents) or to another site. The reference often benefits from being an expandable part of the sentence, as in "…(see our Terms and conditions)."

- *Note:* a link to additional information, such as a definition or short explanation. To avoid drawing undue attention to a single word, notes benefit from being grouped *after* the paragraph, for example, under "Learn more about.…"

If the Web did not invent the hyperlinks, it does ease their navigation: Instead of turning pages (or turning to the library), we can now just click the links. Yet seeing at a glance whether a link is worth following is still faster than clicking it first and figuring out its relevance afterwards.

More explicit links allow better decisions, yet (like all communication items) benefit from conciseness. Imagine for a second a phone on which every key said something like, "To dial the digit 3, press here"!

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

WEB USABILITY

ELIZABETH MOELLER

Users will wait a maximum of 15 seconds for a Web page to load.

In the September/October 1999 issue of the *Newsletter* I touched on some Web usability issues and I think some of those issues are important enough to warrant another discussion. In fact, *splash screens, user login,* and *out-dated content* are the three biggest problems I see on a daily basis.

Splash Screens

It bothers me that the latest trend in Web site design includes lavish splash screens, often with some form of Flash or Shockwave animation. Disney World *(http://www.disneyworld.com)* and Ford Motor Company *(http://www.ford.com)* are prime examples. While Disney and Ford allow users to skip the Flash introduction, many sites do not allow users to get past the splash screen until they view the entire animation. Also, Flash and Shockwave require the users to get plugins (additional software) for their Web browsers before they can even view the animation.

Usability issues abound with animated splash screens. The biggest problem is download time. Nielsen/Net Ratings, the Internet arm of the company known for its television rating system, reports that less than half of the Internet users connect with modems capable of speeds of 56Kbps or faster. More than 40 percent of those users are using 56Kbps modems, which rarely connect at full speed. On top of that, Jakob Nielsen reports that users will wait a maximum of 15 seconds for a Web page to load *(http://www.useit.com/alertbox/9605.html)*.

This basically means that the total size of all page files, including graphics, should be no more than 50KB. The combination of some form of animation, plus any text you may want to include, will more than likely run over this limit.

Splash screens are often the product of a Web site designed and created by a marketing department, usually without the benefit of a Web usability expert. These screens are designed to be consistent with the rest of the marketing image for the organization. Unfortunately, this is sometimes not reasonable. As everyone knows, different advertising media require different styles. Once users are at your Web site, you have up to 30 seconds to engage them and this includes the download time. Give them the content they desire without asking them to watch your animated sequences or jump through special hoops.

User Login

Another annoyance for many users is the required login before the site will give any information. For example, Travelocity *(http://www.travelocity.com)* advertises their Best Fare Finder to help you find the best available airfare for an upcoming trip. The only way to see those fares, however, is to tell Travelocity who you are—including name, street address, e-mail address, and phone number.

Amazon.com *(http://www.amazon.com)* requires user login at the ordering stage. Users are free to browse the site until it is time to order something. However, once you log in, Amazon tracks your purchases and those of others purchasing items similar to yours. Each time you visit Amazon.com the home page includes book recommendations for you based on your previous purchases and other information stored about your viewing habits.

Some sites do not require user login but they give the appearance that you will not get the best information unless you do log in. Time Warner Cable, providing Road Runner Cable Modem service to businesses and homes in our area, uses this tactic on their Road Runner Pro (business use) Web site *(http://www.rr.com)*. It appears that you cannot get to the pricing structure for Road Runner Pro unless you provide your name, company name, and associated information. However, if you simply click on the "Next" button, you will see the complete pricing list.

Again, this is a case where the marketing department probably had final say over the Web site development. Many organizations require user login as a way to collect marketing data about who is visiting their site and where they go. Once logged in, a user's movement through a site can be

tracked. That user can then be targeted for specific advertising.

There is a cartoon that surfaces a lot on the Internet; the caption reads, "On the Internet, no one knows you're a dog." That is the appeal of the Internet for many. They choose to browse the offerings of different vendors, knowing that they will not be subjected to a high-pressure sales pitch. They are able to find vendors who meet their needs and then contact the vendors when time allows. This is a conundrum for many Web site developers. They want to know who their users are without scaring them away. A bigger issue for them, however, should be their information content.

Avoid letting marketing departments have the final say on Web site development.

Out-dated Content

This is the biggest problem facing users today. Many organizations feel that once the Web site is online, it can be ignored. *Wrong!* The Web site becomes an integral part of your marketing plan. All information needs to remain current. Out-dated content, in the best circumstances, requires users to make a phone call to verify information. In the worst circumstances, your organization has lost credibility and customers.

CyberResearch *(http://www.cyberresearch. com)*, the self-proclaimed leading supplier of industrial PC-based data-acquisition systems, has been advertising "online catalog coming soon" for quite some time. While their print catalog is very much alive and current, there appears to be no sign of the online catalog. This, coupled with the infrequent updates to the Web site, will

cause huge credibility problems for them. A leading supplier should not be offering an out-dated, obsolete computer system as a featured item on its Web site—something CyberResearch has done in the past.

This is frustrating for users, not only on a business level but on a personal level as well. The season for our local performing arts center is long over but its Web site *(http://www.spac.org)* was still advertising 1999 events at the time this column was written. SPAC has not formally announced its 2000 season yet. However, it would be nice for them to acknowledge that the 1999 season is over, perhaps thank people who attended, and provide the date we can expect to see information on the 2000 season.

Organizations need to view their Web site as a customer-service vehicle. Many would never dare to offend a customer during a phone call or face-to-face encounter. But, by ignoring the needs of their Web site visitors, they are doing just that. Stop and think about which organizations you have chosen not to patronize simply because their Web site was difficult or out of date. The list might surprise you.

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AUDIENCE QUEST

audiences is instructive. Hollywood never knows which pictures will succeed; they green-light a certain number of *sui generis* pictures *(Speed, The Blair Witch Project)* that turn out to hit the spot. The writers of these movies are normally mavericks who dare to ignore audience market research numbers.

For writers, innovation and creativity may best be served by ignoring, at least initially, the demands of audiences. Achieving some degree of balance between extremes, for

most cases, seems to be a fruitful way to start an audience quest.

Future tales will delve into additional experience-based audience quests.

Vicki Hill (vgh1@erols.com) *is a consultant in the areas of business process improvement, software life-cycle processes, and telecommunications applications. Special interests include the presentation of complex technical information, the magazine scene, biographies, films, and Web surfing.*

A Standard for International English Spelling?

By Ron Blicq

In a 22 October 1999 article in Canada's newspaper *The National Post*, Canadian author Peter C. Newman describes how, in today's increasingly global marketplace, English has become the predominant language of commerce:

"Although English is the mother tongue of 380 million people, 1.6 billion have learned to speak it—that's almost one-third of the world's population."

He demonstrates how ministers of state who speak different languages often choose English as the most convenient language of communication, and cites the 11-nation European Central Bank in Frankfurt as a typical organization that works only in English. He also notes that many of the journals published by respected international organizations such as the Pasteur Institute are published in English. INTECOM's journal *TC-Forum* is another example.

A driving force behind this quiet revolution, Newman claims, is the Internet: "Recent surveys show that 80% of the wired world's Web entries—and there will be a billion sites on stream by the end of this year— are in English. That's profoundly significant, because the Internet is the favored medium of the young and the upwardly mobile. They thus require a working knowledge of English, wherever they live."

Impact on Technical Writers

There are significant implications for technical writers of English-language documents destined for international use. In English-speaking countries it has not so far been of concern: We spell either American or British style. But for technical writers in Germany, the Netherlands, Norway, and Finland, for example, who have to write documentation destined for international markets, the question becomes significant.

Should they rely on a British dictionary that declares *favour, theatre,* and *manoeuvre* as the correct spellings, or should they rely on an American dictionary that recommends *favor, theater,* and *maneuver*?

INTECOM, the International Council for Technical Communication, which comprises 17 technical communication organizations, one of which is the Professional Communication Society, has launched a project to identify whether practicing technical communicators think a standard should be established and, if so, which dictionary should be selected to provide guidelines (or, possibly, whether INTECOM should set guidelines based on a combination of dictionaries).

To establish a standard for spelling in English-language technical documentation will be difficult. Table 1 lists some spelling variants between Great Britain and the U.S., most of which you will recognize.

But the choices go far beyond spelling; we also will have to decide whether to use certain words that are entrenched differently in the language on either side of the Atlantic. In the world of the automobile, for example, *windscreen* and *petrol* are British whereas *windshield* and *gasoline* are American. (For years, Americans have considered Britain's use of *bonnet* and *boot* for what Americans refer to as the *hood* and *trunk* as decidedly quaint.) And the quest will go much farther, for there are also variations in spelling and local expressions in countries such as Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa. Table 2 lists words used differently in the U.S. and Great Britain.

What Is Done in Canada?

At first glance, the Canadian experience parallels the situation I have just been describing and so should provide us with a model to follow. Unfortunately, that is not the case.

Historically, up to about 1950 most Canadian immigrants came from Europe, with a strong British component. So in Canada's early years the British spelling style was much more predominant.

However, because most Canadians live within 100 kilometers of the Canada-U.S. border, there has been a strong influence to adopt the American spelling style.

TABLE 1. TYPICAL VARIATIONS IN SPELLING BETWEEN BRITAIN AND THE U.S.

Britain	U.S.
ageing	aging
analyse,	analyze,
equalise,	equalize,
recognise	recognize
appendices	appendixes
behaviour,	behavior,
colour,	color,
harbour	harbor
calibre	caliber
cancelled	canceled
catalogue	catalog
centre,	center,
centred,	centered,
centring	centering
defence,	defense,
offence	offense
diagrammed,	diagramed
disc	disk
distil, fulfil,	distill, fulfill *
foci	focuses
formulae	formulas
grey	gray
instalment	installment
judgement	judgment
lit	lighted
litre, metre,	liter, meter,
louvre	louver
manoeuvre	maneuver
memoranda	memorandums
mould,	mold,
smoulder	smolder
practise	practice
plateaux	plateaus
programme	program
sceptical	skeptical
skilful	skillful *
spelt,	spelled,
spilt,	spilled,
spoilt	spoiled
sulphur	sulfur

These contradict other U.S. -l- and -ll- constructions.

…the young and upwardly mobile… require a working knowledge of English.

This has been accentuated by American television and the incursion into Canada of U.S. products and learning materials.

Consequently there is a wide disparity among Canadians, some favoring the "modern" American spelling style and others favouring the historically well established British style. Even Canadian dictionaries have different points of view, depending on whether the dictionary has been developed by a principally U.S. publisher or a British publisher. (There are marked differences, for example, between the *Funk & Wagnalls Canadian College Dictionary* and the new *Canadian Oxford Dictionary.*)

The INTECOM Survey

At Forum 2000 in London in June I will invite technical communicators to discuss whether there is a need to establish a standard.

Each participant will be asked to complete the questionnaire in the figure. I will then assemble the answers into a database that I can use to write a report to the INTECOM executive recommending that we either embark on a more intensive research project or shelve the idea (that is, continue as we are currently doing).

To obtain as broad a range of responses as possible, I am asking you, as a reader of the *PCS Newsletter*, also to complete the questionnaire and submit it to me electronically or by regular mail (the questionnaire can be answered very quickly, as shown at the foot of the figure). As a start I have already received responses from the members of the New Zealand Technical Writers Association, the Australian Society for Technical Communication, and *tekom* in Germany. Because PCS has members in many countries, I am looking for a broad spectrum of opinions in your responses.

In addition to being a member of the PCS AdCom, Ron Blicq is president of INTECOM and thus involved in organizing Forum 2000.

TABLE 2. WORDS USED DIFFERENTLY IN BRITAIN AND THE U.S.	
Britain	**U.S.**
autumn	fall
car park	parking lot
Mr/Ms/Mrs	Mr./Ms./Mrs.
pavement	sidewalk
petrol	gasoline (gas)
round	around
windscreen	windshield

SPELLING STANDARDS QUESTIONNAIRE

Your answers to these questions will help INTECOM decide whether it should research and possibly establish standards for international English-language technical documentation.

1. Should INTECOM be researching spelling and word choice, and then establishing standards?

2. If so, should the standards be based on British or U.S. practices?

3. In which of the following geographical regions do you work and write?
   - ☐ Asia
   - ☐ Australia/New Zealand
   - ☐ Canada
   - ☐ Central and Western Europe
   - ☐ Great Britain
   - ☐ India/Pakistan
   - ☐ Mediterranean (North Africa, Egypt, Israel, etc.)
   - ☐ Russia/Ukraine
   - ☐ Scandinavia
   - ☐ South America
   - ☐ U.S.
   - ☐ Other: _____

4. Which way do you think the following words should be spelled?
   - caulk *or* calk?
   - grey *or* gray?
   - recognise *or* recognize?
   - spelled *or* spelt?
   - sulphur *or* sulfur?

Please send your answers to me in one of the following ways:
   - By e-mail to *r.blicq@ieee.org*
   - By fax to +1 204 488 7294
   - By mail to 569 Oxford St., Winnipeg MB, R3M 3J2 Canada

Your answers can be quite short, like this:
   1. Yes (or No)
   2. British (or U.S.)
   3. France

   4. a. grey
      b. sulfur
      etc.

IPCC/SIGDOC 2000 PREVIEW

Communicators work between machines and people.

2000

ipcc Sigdoc

Technology & Teamwork

The Professional Communication Society of the IEEE and the Special Interest Group on Documentation (SIGDOC) of the Association for Computing Machinery will hold their first joint conference 24-27 September in Cambridge, Massachusetts. The conference, hosted by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, carries the theme **Technology and Teamwork**, which expresses the need for us as professional communicators to balance technological and humanistic aspects in document production and knowledge dissemination, since we truly work between machines and people, mediating communication experiences.

The topics that will be addressed explore many of the ideas inherent in the theme. Specifically, the conference will investigate the ways that electronic technology can be used to encourage teamwork in five broadly defined categories:

In *The Writer as Team Member* speakers will address the writer's role:
• In cross-functional teams
• In information and product development
• As user advocate.

The topic *Teamwork to Develop Technological Products* will explore:
• Best practices
• Design processes
• Standards in document development that emphasize the relation between technology and humans.

In *Technology and How We Work* contributors will consider the:
• Relation between writing as a technology and the writer
• Impact on the workplace of distributed work groups and telecommuting
• Differences between face-to-face and computer-mediated communication.

The topic *Accommodating Users and Audiences* will discuss:
• Human-computer interface design
• Product development with cross- and intercultural audiences or teams.

Finally, *Educating Team Members* will investigate two topics:
• Preparing graduates for teamwork in professional communication and documentation

• Continuing education for professional communicators.

MIT captures the spirit of **Technology and Teamwork** in its programs, especially the Media Laboratory, which was co-founded by our keynote speaker and author of *Being Digital*, Nicholas Negroponte. The Media Laboratory opened in 1985 with its research mission focused on "abstracting electronic content from its traditional physical representations, helping create now-familiar areas such as digital video and multimedia."

The Laboratory's current research comprises three consortia, each exploring the relations between technology and humanity. It pioneered collaboration between academia and industry, and provides a research environment unencumbered by traditional divisions among disciplines. For more information on the Laboratory visit its Web site *http://www.media.mit.edu/*, and look for more information on Nicholas Negroponte in an upcoming edition of this *Newsletter*.

In addition to Negroponte's keynote address we look forward to hearing Dr. Barbara Mirel, who was awarded the SIGDOC Rigo Award in honor of her lifetime contribution to the field of information design, technical communication, and online information design.

Dr. Mirel is a leader in the fields of usability, human factors, and instructional writing. Currently, she serves as senior manager of human factors at Lucent Technologies, where she guides, directs, and coordinates all usability and user interface activities for Visual Insights, a Lucent venture, and works closely with systems engineers in interaction design and user interface design.

With all the teamwork that this conference demonstrates, between IPCC and SIGDOC, and among engineers, managers, academics, and researchers, this conference is truly shaping up to be one of a kind for professional communicators. If you would like more information on IPCC/SIGDOC 2000, point your browser to the conference Web site at *http://ieeepcs.org/2000/index.html*.

A NEW OPENNESS

BY BRAD STENGER

A mechanism to protect online material while allowing it to be modified.

It's a problem many Internet users share: How do you allow successive modifications of online materials without losing the credibility of the original?

A Brigham Young University graduate student thinks he has a solution. David Wiley modeled his open publication license (OPL) on the agreements that allow open-source programmers to constantly and collectively improve free software. (In fact, open-source software gurus Richard Stailman and Eric Raymond helped him draft the license.)

The OPL grants anybody permission to modify and redistribute the materials, provided changes are marked and the resultant work is also put out under the license. Wiley set up a repository for all OPL works at the OpenContent Web site (*http://www. opencontent.org*; *david@wiley.byu.edu*).

As of July 1999 the repository contained about 90 registered works [about 120 in February 2000], ranging from experimental art to university course materials. Wiley is working on a new OPL with an optional clause prohibiting commercial paper publication without the author's consent. This way, a work could benefit from online peer review and peer improvement while the publisher of a hard-copy version would be protected from its competitors.

Mark Stone, an editor at O'Reilly & Associates, a California firm that is one of the leading publishers of material on programming and open-source software, says such crossover from the free-content community to the for-profit realm would be most valuable when the ideas are new and changing fast. Or, as Stone puts it: "where mindshare is more important than marketshare."

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