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THE CAT WHO WALKS BY HIMSELF

BY JULIA LAND

One of my favorite children's stories is Kipling's *The Cat Who Walked by Himself*. It takes place at the beginning of time when the first woman is domesticating the wild animals. One by one she makes deals with the animals. In exchange for a roasted mutton bone and the promise of more, the dog agrees to be the first friend, to guard the cave each night, and to help the man hunt each day. The horse and the cow also assume ongoing responsibilities in exchange for regular meals.

As each animal visits the woman in the cave, the cat is invited along, but he always refuses, saying "I am the cat who walks by himself and all places are alike to me." Finally, the people have all the animal friends they want and the cat is not one of them. But from time to time the man and the woman have additional needs—a mouse to be removed from the cave or a baby to be amused—and the woman makes deals with the cat to take care of these situations. The relationship is tenuous and the cat is free to leave whenever he wishes.

According to my dictionary (*Merriam Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, Tenth Edition*), a freelance, or freelancer, is a person who pursues a profession without a long-term commitment to any one employer. I've often thought that a freelancer is much like that cat. Like the cat, the freelancer contracts to do certain jobs for certain pay. The freelancer has no guarantee that there will be a job to do on any given day and no guarantee of the employee benefits and security that regular employment offers.

Several terms are used to describe freelancers: contractors, independent contractors, consultants, temporary employees. Freelancers in our profession may be writers, training designers, translators, editors, or graphic designers.

But whatever name they go by, and whatever services they perform for their clients, freelance technical communicators face certain common issues and the purpose of this column is to explore those issues. The topics may range from business issues such as marketing, contracts, finding and keeping clients, building a portfolio, and dealing with isolation to more philosophical issues such as why we do what we do and what personality characteristics are necessary for success.

I've been a freelancer for several years now, and other freelancers are helping by telling me how they deal with the issues in their city or country. The names of the consultants are listed at the end of this column. Any errors, of course, are mine.

Although freelancers move from one employer, or client, to another, they must still accomplish the same result as regular employees: They must earn a living. In the process they must also appease the taxing authorities. Key factors in accomplishing this are the relationship between the freelancer and the client, and the type of business entity the freelancer adopts.

Freelancers can choose whether to be incorporated. We will talk about incorporation in the next column. This time we limit our discussion to freelancers who have chosen a sole proprietorship or partnership as their business entity, or who accept temporary employment.

Employment Status in the U.S.

In the U.S., if the freelancer is not incorporated, he or she can either work directly for

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I N S I D E

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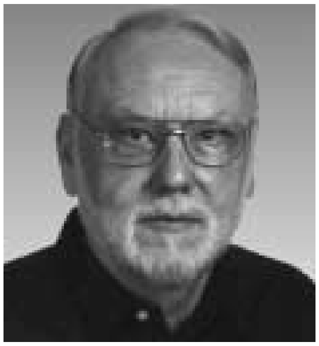
FROM THE EDITOR



RUDY JOENK

New Columnist

In this issue we welcome a new columnist: Julia Land joins us to explore the worldwide business of being a freelance technical communicator in WORKING FREELANCE.

On the Web

At this writing, the January/February issue of the *Newsletter* is available at *http://www.ieeepcs.org/jan_feb00.pdf*. By the time you read this, the March/April issue will be there, too. The Web posting will follow the print distribution by a few weeks.

Instant Fame

If you're going to attend IPCC/SIGDOC 2000 in Cambridge, Massachusetts, at the end of September, I'd like to offer you temporary appointment as a reporter (or photographer) for the *Newsletter*. A paragraph or two about each presentation in a session—what was said, not what's in the proceedings—should be enough unless you're really "hooked" by something. E-mail me at *r.joenk@ieee.org*.

Celebrity

Former PCS president Mark Haselkorn is a candidate for director of IEEE Division VI (the division PCS is in). More later.

AdCom

The IEEE received no adverse comment on our proposed constitution so it went into effect on 15 March. Both the constitution and the bylaws can be accessed on our Web site: *http://www.ieeepcs.org/*.

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

Recipients of your e-mail can't judge you by your civil rights attributes (race, sex, etc.) but they can judge you by your misspellings, grammatical goofs, and the general quality of your writing, however succinct it may be.

The @ sign was chosen as the separator for e-mail addresses in 1972.

The University of Colorado library in Boulder is cutting $500 000 worth of scholarly journal subscriptions because it can't keep up with the price.

I wasn't aware of "antecedent basis" until I started writing patent applications for IBM in 1978. Basically, it means that you shouldn't write about *the* widget until you've introduced *a* widget. This sequence helps to ensure that terms used in patent claims are clearly identifiable. Keep it in mind for other forms of technical writing.

More words in English begin with *s* than with any other letter; then come *c, p, a,* and *t*.

The most common two-syllable words in American English writing are *about, many,* and *other.*

Deadlines are wonderful, especially the whooshing sound they make as they go flying past.

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PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

PCS PLANS FOR SUCCESS

GEORGE HAYHOE

In my first president's column (January/February issue) I promised to update you on the strategic planning workshop held as part of the January Administrative Committee (AdCom) meeting in Washington, DC. In this column, I tell you about what happened at that workshop, what we've done since the meeting to draft a strategic plan, and what our plans are for the future.

The Workshop

We arrived in Washington amid one of the capital's first snowstorms of the season, and the blanket of white covering the city seemed emblematic of the opportunity for a fresh start that the strategic planning exercise provided our society.

The AdCom, with the assistance of Fran Zappulla (staff director of IEEE publications operations), Peter Weisner (director of IEEE continuing education), and Dave Dobson (longtime PCS member), spent a full day 21 January analyzing the strengths and weaknesses within PCS, as well as external opportunities and threats. It was an exhausting session but we were all really pleased with the results of our brainstorming. By the day's end we had filled dozens of flip-chart pages with ideas, which we summed up in the following list of goals for the society:

A strategic plan is being formalized.

1. Identify what we have to offer, align our activities with trends in the field, and increase our visibility worldwide.
2. Ensure that our products and services meet the expectations of current and potential members and customers.
3. Lead in facilitating and disseminating knowledge of communication practice and research.
4. Create and implement a business model to increase revenue and decrease costs, and make the organization flourish.
5. Transform PCS into a community of active members.
6. Leverage our connection with the IEEE.

Because we needed to spend the second day of the meeting on other society business, we weren't able to write the plan itself at this meeting. Instead, a subcommittee was charged with taking the ideas generated during the workshop and producing a draft plan for the AdCom to discuss, amend, and approve before its next meeting in May.

The Draft Strategic Plan

During the nearly two months since the workshop the subcommittee has worked to produce a draft plan that has been sent to the AdCom for discussion. Space doesn't permit reproducing the entire document but here are the top levels of our working draft to give you an idea of the direction in which we're moving.

Strategy I
Establish the PCS brand.

- Identify what we have to offer.
- Align our activities with trends in the field.
- Increase our visibility worldwide.

Strategy II
Align PCS products and services with the expectations of current and potential members and customers.

- Research expectations for PCS products and services within the IEEE.
- Identify products and services that PCS is able and willing to offer to meet those expectations.
- Research competition and a possible PCS niche.
- Determine goals.
- Measure results.

Strategy III
Promote positive relations with other IEEE Division VI societies.

- Propose a joint issue of our *Transactions* with the *Transactions on Engineering Management*.
- Provide an advertising filler page about PCS and its publications to editors of other Division VI publications.
- Provide articles to newsletters and magazines of other Division VI societies.

Strategy IV
Promote visibility of our publications within organizations representing various specialties in information technology.

- Recruit guest editors from within the IEEE and from other international information technology organizations.
- Cosponsor a conference or other professional development event with one or more information technology organizations.

Strategy V
Promote our *Transactions* among international information technology researchers.

- Get the *Transactions* (and other research journals in our field) included in the Institute for Scientific Information citation reports publications.

Strategy VI
Create and implement a business model to increase revenue and decrease costs, and make the organization flourish.

- Create a business model to increase revenue and decrease costs.
- Implement the business model.
- Create an on-going membership development model.

You can help with implementation —volunteer!

Strategy VII
Facilitate contact and cooperation among PCS members.

- Develop a PCS membership directory.
- Develop methods of encouraging member participation in society activities.
- Encourage wider participation on the AdCom and attendance at its meetings.

This draft plan has been sent to all members of the AdCom for comment. Discussion will continue until late March, when a revised draft will be prepared and sent for review. We hope to approve the strategic plan in early April.

The Path Forward

At our next AdCom meeting, to be held at the Holiday Inn Metrodome in Minneapolis, Minnesota, on 5-6 May, we will devote about half a day to the final step in our strategic planning function. We will assign each activity (the lowest level of the plan, not shown in the preceding summary) to one of our standing committees and then determine an implementation date for the activity. Once that step is complete—once responsibility for each activity is determined and milestone dates are set—the real work begins.

Implementing this strategic plan will require much more effort than the AdCom or a few additional volunteers can provide. We need to involve as many of our members as possible. So I'm calling on you to help shoulder some of the burden of transforming PCS into a society that will better meet your needs.

If you would like to help, I encourage you to do several things:

1. Go to the home page of the PCS Web site (*http://www.ieeepcs.org*), find the strategic plan link, and read the final version of the strategic plan, including responsibilities and target dates, which will be posted by the time you receive this issue of the *Newsletter*.
2. Identify one or more activities that interest you and that you can make a contribution toward accomplishing.
3. Go to the Volunteer page of our Web site (*http://www.ieeepcs.org/vol.html*) and fill out the online form, indicating the strategic plan activities you would like to help with.

PCS is your society. It needs your efforts and those of the other members if it is to survive and thrive.

"I think there is a world market for maybe five computers."

— *Thomas Watson, chairman of IBM, 1943*

"There is no reason anyone would want a computer in their home."

— *Ken Olson, president, chairman, and founder of DEC*

TOOLS OF THE TRADE

Communication in the New Millennium

PETER REIMOLD AND
CHERYL REIMOLD

Part 2: The Power of Direct Communication

The power of direct communication is awesome. This is something we need to remember well in the era of electronic information exchange. Here is just one story to illustrate that power.

Two Leaders Meet Face to Face

On 22 December 1999 Israel's newly elected prime minister Ehud Barak met with the Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat in the Palestinian West Bank. The next day's front page of *The New York Times* noted:

It was the first time an Israeli prime minister had ventured into a Palestinian-controlled city for a peace meeting, which in itself broke a barrier in the relationship. And the setting was very casual: Mr. Barak and Mr. Arafat met in the elegant home of the Palestinian leader's second-in-command…the leaders talked for three hours,…gathered with associates around a banquet of Arabic salads and meat dishes.

After the meeting, both sides said two deadlocked issues that had bedeviled progress were essentially resolved.…

What lessons are there for us in this anecdote from international politics? We believe there are two.

First, it highlights some essential elements of successful direct communication:

Courage: By risking his safety, the Israeli leader proved that he was personally committed to the peace process.

Trust: To make this gesture, Barak had to trust Arafat not to exploit it as a weakness. This contrasts sharply with people's common fear of losing face.

Being human: Instead of setting up a formal negotiating environment, both sides wisely opted for a relaxed, gracious atmosphere, in an official's home rather than a government building or hotel.

The most sophisticated technology cannot match the power of face-to-face talk.

Second, the story illustrates how much you can achieve by **going there** rather than staying in your office and sending messages by various means. Increasingly today, these means are electronic. For instance, many people tell us that in their organization, employees often send e-mail even to someone next door rather than talk to that person directly.

Obviously, there must be some reasons for the increased use of e-mail and voice mail. One may be just laziness. Another is that e-mail in particular provides convenient documentation. But we are also picking up a more disturbing explanation: People are starting to lose the knack for personal communication; they're getting used to virtual rather than real life.

That's where the real challenge lies. With everyone busy on many fronts and perhaps hard to reach, how can we preserve real human communication? Is it even worth it?

Scenario: Leaders Meet in Virtual Space

To answer that question, let's look at an alternative scenario. Imagine this news report:

At 11 p.m. yesterday, Israel's prime minister Ehud Barak and Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat held a three-hour computer-based video conference. The leaders communicated by voice as well as electronic whiteboard and PowerPoint charts. To promote a relaxed atmosphere, both showed several video clips of desert and city landscapes, fresh fruit, and delicious meat dishes, as well as flowers.

Is it imaginable that this high-tech meeting resolved deadlocked issues? Where are the acts of courage here that break relationship barriers? Where is the handshake that establishes trust? Where is the friendly sharing of a relaxed environment and good food that helps develop basic human ties?

Obviously, we can't abandon the new communication tools but the more powerful and convenient they become, the more you must **spot the need for direct**

communication. Are you trying to reach someone with whom you have a poor relationship? Are the other person's interests naturally opposed to yours? These and other situations call for old-fashioned communication—forget half-hearted gestures if you want results!

Cheryl and Peter Reimold (telephone +1 914 725 1024, e-mail perccom@aol.com*) have taught communication skills to engineers, scientists, and business people for 18 years. Their new educational Web site is* http://www.allaboutcommunication.com.

The Cat Who Walks By Himself

(continued from page 1)

and be paid by the client, or work through a temporary-employment agency. In the latter case the freelancer does the work for the client but is paid by the agency. The agency is then paid by the client. Whether the freelancer works directly for the client or through an agency, the freelancer can be a temporary employee or a contractor.

From the freelancer's perspective the important difference between temporary employment and contractor status is how taxes are handled. A temporary employee is paid wages and the employer (whether the client or the agency) withholds federal income tax from the wages. Further, the employer must pay one half of the freelancer's FICA (Social Security) tax. The employer reports the wages paid and the taxes withheld on a W-2 form. Thus, temporary employment is often called W-2 status.

Key factors are the relationship between the freelancer and the client, and the type of business entity the freelancer adopts.

In contractor status, the freelancer has a contract with the client or the agency and is paid either by the hour or by the project. Neither the client nor the agency withholds taxes from the freelancer's payments. The freelancer is responsible for making estimated income tax payments to the U.S. government and must pay 100 percent of the FICA tax. The client reports the fees paid on a 1099 form. Thus, this relationship is often called 1099 status.

In the U.S. there can be severe penalties for companies that create artificial contracting relationships with workers who are employees in all but name. Consequently, many large corporations will not consider a 1099 relationship with an individual. A common working arrangement for a freelancer is W-2 status through an agency.

Employment Status Elsewhere

The situation is very similar in Europe, except that temporary employment often is through temporary-employment agencies. Clients are often reluctant to perform the extra bookkeeping required to keep up with temporary employees. Freelancers who are not working as agency employees are expected to issue official invoices for their work, and thus they must have a VAT (value-added tax) number, which can be issued either to an individual or to a corporation.

In Canada it is possible for individuals to operate as sole proprietors. However, more and more clients are hiring freelancers only through temporary-employment agencies, called recruitment agencies. At the same time, the Canada Customs and Revenue Agency (CCRA), the Canadian equivalent of the U.S. Internal Revenue Service (IRS), requires the recruitment agencies to deduct the employee portion of Canada pension and unemployment insurance premiums from the income of anyone they send on assignment. Thus, for CCRA, freelancers working through recruitment agencies are considered employees of the agencies.

Working Through an Agency

Whatever country the freelancer works in, there are advantages and disadvantages to working through an agency. On the plus side, the agency generally does most of the marketing. This can be a real benefit for the freelancer who is shy, who is not comfortable performing those functions, or who is simply too busy for this time-consuming task. The agency may also provide typical employee benefits, such as health insurance (in the U.S.), vacation pay, and sick pay.

An agency will pay the freelancer on a set schedule, frequently every two weeks, independent of whether the client has yet paid the agency. A freelancer working directly for the client must wait for the client's normal accounts-payable process. The client's process usually takes at least 30 days and can easily stretch to 45 days, 60 days, or sometimes longer.

...contractor
...consultant
...temp...agency
...no agency...?

The main disadvantage, of course, is that the agency expects to earn the money to pay for the benefits, and it expects to earn a profit. The agency earns money by charging more to the client than it pays to the freelancer. Agency rates vary, depending on the part of the world it operates in and the types of benefits it offers. In the U.S. the rates may range from 125 to 200 percent of what the agency is actually paying the freelancer. Many freelancers would rather earn that extra 25 to 100 percent and buy the benefits directly themselves.

Another disadvantage is that agency contracts frequently have a very restrictive non-compete clause. A non-compete clause prohibits the freelancer from working for the same client again during a specified period, usually six months to a year. Sometimes the clause prohibits the freelancer from working for any of the agency's clients for the specified period. Relying on an agency for marketing can be a disadvantage as well as an advantage. The freelancer may feel better qualified to present his or her skills to prospective clients, and better qualified to determine which companies would make good clients.

One of the biggest advantages of working through an agency is that it can open the doors to a corporation that will not contract directly with an individual. Next time, we'll look at another way of opening those doors: incorporation. We'll talk about the various types of corporation that a freelancer can adopt and some of the advantages and disadvantages of each.

Many thanks to Jane Aronovitch, Ian Blythe, Michael Brady, J. L. Doumont, Carrie Estill, Nigel Greenwood, Mick Harney, Kathy King, Ruben Oren, and Tom van Loon.. Among us we have worked in Austria, Belgium, Canada, France, Germany, Israel, Malaysia, The Netherlands, Norway, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

The author has been a freelance technical writer for seven years and a member of PCS for five. She lives and works in Houston, Texas. She would especially like to hear from freelancers working in Asia or along the Pacific Rim. E-mail: julia_land@ieee.org.

EVER HEAR OF SUZDAL?

Our Russian colleague Henrich Lantsberg has proposed the town of Suzdal, Russia, as the site of our technical communication colloquium with the Professional Communication Section of the Russian A. S. Popov Society. Suzdal is about 200 km northeast of Moscow. Though it dates from the 12th century, Suzdal has modern conference and tourist facilities.

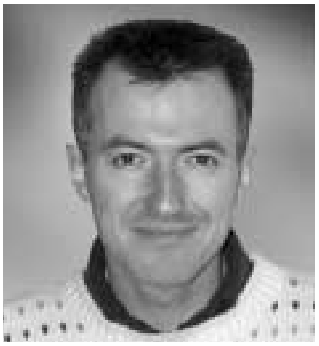
Dr. Lantsberg further proposes that we plan to arrive in Moscow on or before 4 June 2001. We would bus to Suzdal the next day and the colloquium would take place 6-7 June, with a return to Moscow on the 8th.

This meeting would mark the 10th anniversary of our first such collaboration. Topics would include (but are not limited to) problems, services, and technology of professional communication.

If you are interested—that is, if there's a 50-50 chance you'd go, 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. Early indication of interest will help drive the planning forward.

Good Intent, Poor Outcome

I See It…But I Can't Read It



Jean-luc Doumont

"But how could you miss it?" she shouted at John. "I had underlined the whole passage. How could you not see it?" When skimming through the document, John had seen the underlined paragraph, of course—it most certainly stood out. Yet he had not read it, and for a simple reason: Underlined text is hard to read.

The conflict between visibility and legibility is a complex issue, one that often divides people collaborating on a given document: Authors and typographers typically insist that the text is sovereign and that its legibility must be preserved at all costs; graphic artists and page-layout designers, by contrast, often take a holistic approach and simply try to produce beautiful pages.

Interestingly, making a passage stand out by contrast with surrounding text may easily ruin legibility through inflation: We typically make the passage heavier by underlining, bolding, or framing it, that is, by adding ink to an often already busy page. I even remember a colleague who set a whole report in bold because "everything in it was important." Alas, boldface thus lost all contrasting value.

> *The contrast between something and nothing works so much better than that between heavy and heavier still.*

A legible text can be read fast and without error. "Read," here, means that the words it contains (and, to some extent, the syntactical relations among those words) can be recognized; it does not require that the text make sense. Legibility is affected by many visual factors, some of which may, on occasion, conflict with page aesthetics or sheer contrast.

To read fast, we must be able to recognize words with as little information as possible. Often, we decode a word by using its lowest-frequency components only, namely, its silhouette. This process works only for words (or possibly syllables) that we know, and it benefits from contextual information: When proofreading one of our own texts, for example, we need so few visual clues to recognize words that we may overlook blatant spelling mistakes.

A first key towards legibility, then, is to make the silhouette of the words as familiar to the reader as possible or, conversely, to avoid graphical devices that affect them. Here are five ways to do that.

- *Avoid underlining*, which cuts through the descenders. A line drawn further away interferes less, but such a *rule* is usually associated with the overall page layout, not with a few specific words.
- *Avoid all-uppercase*, which gives all words (almost) the same rectangular silhouette. Uppercase has accepted uses, of course, such as for acronyms, although many designers prefer *small caps* for better harmony with lowercase text.
- *Avoid display fonts* for setting body text. Outline, shadow, and other fancy fonts may help create a specific atmosphere, as for a poster or a wedding invitation, but they are not designed for legibility.
- *Avoid tightly spaced lines*, which tend to interfere with each other visually. Tightly spaced uppercase text, so typical of legal disclaimers, is particularly illegible (not on purpose, we hope).
- *Beware of background images*, which may enhance the page but always affect the legibility of the overprinted text.

How, then, do we make important text stand out without ruining its legibility? Simple: by surrounding it with space. The contrast between something and nothing works so much better than that between heavy and heavier still.

Let's not shout over the noise. Rather, let's speak quietly in the silence we have commanded.

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

FLOCCINAUCHINIHILIPILIFICATION

Script Story

By Michael Brady

"Ye Olde English Tea Shoppe"—a common name for an upmarket patisserie, be it in a suburban mall or a city center—the sort of gathering place where you discuss writing, because historically that's what you're supposed to do there, aside from having tea and scones. But how do you pronounce the name?

If you start by sounding the Y, you are orthoepically off course. The "Ye" is not what it seems, because the Y is an artificial modern survivor of the runic thorn Þ, borrowed to write one of the four sounds in Anglo Saxon that had no counterpart in Latin and thereby no spelling in the alphabet introduced in England after the Norman conquest. The thorn was pronounced "th," as in "this," as was its sibling rune, the eth, ð, also used to represent the "th" sound. Both runes were replaced by "th" in Middle English. So "Ye" is pronounced "The."

Despite the efficiency of symbols, writing remains prime.

Though English has forsaken the thorn, it and the eth survive in Icelandic and other languages and therefore are available in the extended ASCII character set, in lowercase and capital, accessible in Microsoft Word as Alt 0240 (ð lc eth), 0208 (Ð cap eth), 0254 (þ lc thorn), and 0222 (Þ cap thorn).

The history of writing is full of such surprises, as well as intriguing tales. In 1900 at Knossos, Sir Arthur Evans excavated what he believed might be the palace of King Minos, mentioned in book 19 of *The Odyssey* by Homer. There he found clay tablets bearing a script unlike Egyptian hieroglyphs, Sumerian cuneiform, or the later Greek alphabet. He called it "Linear Script of Class B," and spent the last 40 years of his life trying to decipher it. He failed. In 1936, at age 85, he arranged an exhibition on the Minoan world and politely admitted that failure to Michael Ventris, a visiting 14-year-old schoolboy who had asked if the Linear B tablets had been deciphered.

Schoolboy Ventris appreciated the challenge and responded admirably to it, as he became the man to conclusively decipher Linear B some 17 years later. In so doing, he set a milestone in history, as Linear B is the earliest known European script, predating ancient Greek by half a millennium.

Ventris' decipherment strategy built upon the fundamental mission of writing as a reflection of spoken language. Indeed, the way we write today differs surprisingly little from the way the ancient Egyptians wrote. That simple though astonishing thought underlies *The Story of Writing* by Andrew Robinson, the literary editor of The Times (London) Higher Education Supplement.

The first sentence of the introduction sets the scene for the book: "Writing is among the greatest inventions in human history, perhaps the greatest invention, since it made history possible." The approach is scholarly, thought provoking, and entertaining. Robinson clearly explains each of the major systems of writing, in succinct text and stunning color photographs and drawings.

Throughout there are lucid descriptions of the connections that we writers take for granted but arguably have seldom contemplated. Average literate Americans and Europeans recognize and write about 52 signs and symbols, including the alphabet, the 10 numerals, and various signs, such as plus and minus and the dollar sign. For their literate Japanese counterparts, the figure is closer to 2000, or to 5000 if they are highly educated.

Differences such as these underscore the achievement of writing, as text in a foreign script is incomprehensible to those not familiar with it. That difficulty triggered the increasing use of symbols, most noticeably starting with the set of 34 devised in the 1970s for airports and other travel facilities in a joint effort by the American Institute of Graphic Arts and the U.S. Department of Transportation.

Despite the efficiency of symbols and of logos, such as the 12 used worldwide for Coca-Cola, writing remains prime, even for many of the concepts so well put in symbols. Moreover, many ancient symbols and scripts remain undeciphered, so work remains to be done. This book is both a page-turner and an accessible reference that belongs on every writer's bookshelf: Andrew Robinson, *The Story of Writing*, London, Thames & Hudson, hardcover, 1995; paperback, 2000; ISBN 0-500-28156-4.

JTBC Call for Papers

A special issue of the *Journal of Business and Technical Communication* devoted to Prospects for Research in Technical and Professional Communication will be guest-edited by Davida Charney. This issue, scheduled for July 2001, aims to broaden research horizons and set priorities for future work in our field. Research may be promoted on issues in workplace communication practices, the nature of scientific or professional discourse or public discourse on related topics, classroom pedagogy, effects of technology, the history of technical or professional communication, or some arguably neglected area.

Submissions are invited in the form of *review essays* or *research articles.* A review essay might interpret the state of research in an area, prioritize the outstanding issues needing further study, and promote the most plausible or promising approach to new work. Given the range of methodologies currently being debated, essays that sketch plausible approaches to these areas using a variety of methods are especially encouraged. Original research articles are also welcome, especially studies that have strong implications for further work or that illustrate the promise of a method.

All submissions will be refereed. Submit three copies by 15 July 2000 to Davida Charney, Division of Rhetoric and Composition, B5500, University of Texas at Austin, Austin, TX 78712. E-mail questions to *dcharney@mail.utexas.edu* or phone +1 512 471 8746 or fax +1 512 471 4353.

From the Editor

(continued from page 2)

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 July 15 for the September/October issue, September 15 for the November/December issue, etc. You won't be far off—and never late—if you observe the Ides of July, September, November, and so on.

NET NOTES

WEB SITE POSITIONING

ELIZABETH MOELLER

Now that your Web site is complete and online, business will just start pouring in…right? Not necessarily. You need to let the rest of the world and, more important, your targeted customer base know that your Web site exists. There are a lot of people and programs out there to help you. The best approach though, is a thorough program consisting of keyword preparation, search engine submission, local directory submission, print advertising, and direct mail.

Keyword Preparation

The goal of any search engine submission is to be listed near the top. As you evaluate offers to guarantee placement in the top 10, remember that these companies are guaranteeing top-10 placement for everyone—even your competitors! The most effective way to be consistently placed near the top of search engine results is to use keywords and phrases that accurately reflect your business and terms that potential customers will use to find your business. Remember to think like your customers; those searching for information on stamp collecting will use the phrase "stamp collecting," not necessarily the industry term "philately."

Understand the difference between search engines and Web directories.

Your keywords and a 25-word description of your business should be placed in META tags on your Web pages. These are hidden tags that search engines access to determine where to index your site in their databases. Your Web designer should be able to help you determine your keywords and set up your META tags for you. You should also place a few strategic keywords in the title of your page. That is another way search engines pick up on your subject matter and index your Web site.

National Search Engines and Web Directories

There are two kinds of search engines: a true search engine, like AltaVista, and Web directories, like Yahoo. A true search engine is completely automated. When your site is submitted, the search engine sends a Web "spider" to verify that your site exists and to grab your title, keywords, description, and other information it needs. A Web directory, on the other hand, is manually maintained. When you submit a site to a category, someone reviews your site to verify that it belongs in the category you requested. Your site is then added to that category by hand. Obviously, it takes longer to be listed in a directory than in a search engine.

Once your site is complete, and not before, you should manually submit the site to the major search engines and directories. Again, this is something your Web designer should be able to do for you. Since the search engines will automatically grab information from your pages, often following links throughout the site, it is important to wait until your full site is online. Submitting with only a temporary home page will cause only that temporary page to be indexed.

Search Engine Watch (*http://www.searchenginewatch.com*) considers the following major search engines: AOL Search, AltaVista, Ask Jeeves, Direct Hit, Excite, FAST, Infoseek, Goto, Google, Hotbot, IWon, Inktomi, LookSmart, Lycos, MSN, Netscape Search, Northern Light, Open Directory, Real Names, Snap, Web Crawler, and Yahoo. Although there are programs that automate this process, it is best to submit to these manually so you will know if they encounter any problem finding or indexing your site.

Most of the search engines will have you in their database within two weeks. The directories take longer—sometimes six to eight weeks. Registering with search engines and directories is free. However, some directories offer faster site reviews for a fee. You decide how long you can wait to be included in a directory and whether shortening the wait a couple of weeks is worth the fee, usually around $200.

Once you have submitted your site, watch the search engines to make sure your site is represented accurately for your key words. There is software available to help you automate this process. Also, some

Web site design companies are now offering site positioning services. After a detailed initial consultation they do the leg work and report periodically on your status with the search engines. Remember that this is not an exact science. Search engines are constantly changing their methods to make it fair for everyone. How well you are positioned in the search engines is a direct result of the amount of preparation on your part.

Local Directories

One area many forget is local directories and advertising venues. In my area of the U.S. there are a number of business indexes and topic-specific search engines. All permit free listings for other businesses. For a small fee many local Chambers of Commerce and business groups will link to their members' Web sites. Other popular venues, such as newspaper sites, often carry much heftier advertising fees. Many businesses search out regional sites and special-topic sites to meet their needs.

Establish a cohesive advertising program for your company.

NearMe (*http://www.nearme.com*), a new business venture from MapInfo (*http://www.mapinfo.com*), looks promising. The premise behind NearMe is that you will search for goods and services only within your region of the country. It is still in the early development stages but bears watching.

Print Advertising

One thing that has always bothered me about Internet marketing is the lack of cohesion between a company's print advertising and its online advertising. Specifically, many businesses fail to even mention their Web sites on letterheads, business cards, and other print advertisements. Your site should be an integral part of your business. It is important to make sure that everyone knows it exists. Not only should you include it in print, you should also send out a press release announcing the new way to reach you—just as you would send out a press release announcing a new phone number or location.

Direct Mail

Finally, do not forget the importance of your existing customer base. A feature article in your company newsletter or an attractive postcard could send your customers running to their computers (or at least checking out your Web site the next time they are online). And don't forget colleagues and business acquaintances; they are a great referral source for new online visitors.

Now is it time for business to start pouring in? Maybe. At least people should be able to find you after you have implemented these suggestions. It won't happen overnight but, slowly, you'll build an online following. Your next step is to keep on top of what people are looking at when they visit your site and how they found you… but that's enough material for another column.

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IPCC 99 Art Wins Top STC Award

The colorful little man with the wide tie took first place for promotional materials design in the 1999-2000 International Technical Art Competition. In March the Society for Technical Communication gave its Distinguished Technical Communication Award to our IPCC 99 promotional materials. A similar award had previously been made by the New York Metro STC chapter.

Leann Kostek was publicity chair and Michael Goodman was general chair for IPCC 99.

Exotic Titles Tend to Irritate the Untitled

By Dan Danbom

It used to be that what people did for a living could be put into nice, neat titles such as "accountant" or "engineer" or "contract killer." Then, somehow, people got the idea that such titles were too prosaic, too boring, so they began to expand them. "Accountant" became "director of management accounting and post-due receivables." "Engineer" became "manager of mechanical design." "Contract killer" became "re-engineering consultant."

Today, thanks to the explosion in the high-technology field, we stand on the shore of a new wave of job titles. They put whatever you call yourself to shame.

What is the job title of someone who works with companies on brand identity? Try "notionologist." What do you get if you cross a consultant with somebody responsible for implementing his or her own advice? A "resultant."

A woman who works in a hotel on "how people feel inside a space" is not, as you might think, a "coffin designer," but rather "director of vibe." A guy with an environmental group who goes from town to town talking about environmental issues has the title "circuit rider."

"Put me through to the 'ringmaster of customer outcomes.'"

Some of these titles lack even a whiff of humility.

The director of a college distance-learning program calls himself, "keeper of the magic." I saw a picture of him, looking smug as all get out, and my first thought was that if I ever met him, I would ask the "keeper of the magic" if he could pull my fist out of his face.

Then there's a woman who works in a post-production audio facility who claims the title "princess of persuasion." You may have met her mother, Queen Convincing, or her father, King Argument II.

You have to wonder what some of these company organization charts look like. You've got the "keeper of the magic" at the top (I assume he truly can work magic), and then reporting to him is a vice wizard and a couple of senior conjurers. The notionologist has under her an impulsivist and a staff of glimmerers. The princess of persuasion reigns over a viscount of reasons and a duke of benefits, and under them is a bunch of wretched serfs.

I'll bet the Internal Revenue Service has a lot of fun when these people file their tax returns and under "occupation" someone has listed "sultan of savvy." The IRS reads something like that and it says to them, "whacko," and they say to the taxpayer, "audit."

And don't you wonder how customers deal with companies that have non-traditional job titles? It s hard for me to see myself calling up some place and saying, "The washing machine you were supposed to deliver didn't arrive. Put me through to the 'ringmaster of customer outcomes.'"

And the person I would be talking to would of course say, "She's not in. May I direct your call to someone else?" And unless I was completely familiar with the company organization, I would only be able to mutter something about the guy with the magic or a resultant.

This is the problem with exotic job titles: They mean nothing to you unless you're an exotic customer. Customers like to deal with solid, recognizable titles. When they want to buy something, they're more likely to ask for a "salesperson" than a "good vibe facilitator." When something goes wrong, they're more likely to ask for a "manager" than a "keeper of the magic."

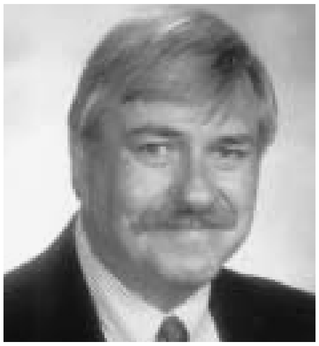
I was once self-employed in a company of one and I could have given myself any title I wanted. Instead of using something hip and indecipherable, I used something familiar, solid, and just a bit lofty: vice president. But even that confused people. They'd come up to me and say, "Hey. Why aren't you the president?"

"Too much responsibility," I answered.

 Mr. Danbom is a Denver writer. E-mail him at danboms@uswest.net.

MASTERS OF STYLE

DAVA SOBEL'S *LONGITUDE*



RONALD J. NELSON

A lustrum has elapsed since the publication of Dava Sobel's *Longitude* (New York: Walker & Co., 1995). That magnificent book was followed by *The Illustrated Longitude* (same publisher, 1998), embellished with illustrations by William J. H. Andrewes—the man who organized and hosted the Longitude Symposium at Harvard University, 4-6 November 1993, and who introduced Sobel to her subject.

The subtitle of the book prepares the reader for the gripping tale that follows: "The True Story of a Lone Genius Who Solved the Greatest Scientific Problem of His Time." As Sobel spins out her yarn, the reader cannot help but be challenged by the difficulty of the almost insurmountable problem of devising a means of accurately determining the longitude of a vessel at sea, chagrined by the way the problem solver was treated by those in power, and charmed by Sobel's writing style.

...how magnificent a vehicle the English language can be for transporting the reader to a worthwhile destination.

Here the professional communicator will learn (or re-learn) the value of dedication to the highest standards of quality and commitment to solving perplexing problems. She or he will also be reminded that it is sometimes necessary to persevere when dealing with less dedicated, even unscrupulous, people who may change the rules of the game in midstream to suit their own agendas. Finally, the professional communicator will emerge from this book with a renewed sense of how magnificent a vehicle the English language can be for transporting the reader to a worthwhile destination.

Precisely determining one's whereabouts at sea was once a knotty matter entailing accurate reading of latitude and longitude. Whereas the former was a relatively simple task, the latter was next to impossible until John Harrison (1693-1776) invented his chronometers: H-1, H-2, H-3, and H-4. Before his inventions, navigators had to depend on dead reckoning, which actually involved the counting of knots on a rope within a period of time measured by a sandglass, and on pendulum clocks that were virtually worthless on a rolling sea. Moreover, changes in temperature and barometric pressure played havoc with timepieces. The results of these variables were devastating losses of life, goods, and ships via scurvy, piracy, and miscalculation of position—one of the most horrendous being the loss of four warships and 2000 lives under the command of Sir Clowdisley Shovell at the Scillies in 1707.

So great were these losses that the Longitude Act of 1714—offering a prize of the princely sum of 20 000 pounds (millions of dollars today)—was passed. That tempting prize brought forth many a bizarre scheme by would-be claimants to the prize, but they were all so scatterbrained that the Board of Longitude did not even convene until John Harrison brought forth his first sea chronometer, H-1, in 1737. Sobel says that it "looked like no other clock ever seen before or since":

> Built of brightly shining brass, with rods and balances sticking out at odd angles, its broad bottom and tall projections recall some ancient vessel that never existed. It looks like a cross between a galley and a galleon, with a high, ornate stern facing forward, two towering masts that carry no sails, and knobbed brass oars to be manned by tiers of unseen rowers. It is a model ship, escaped from its bottle, afloat on the sea of time.

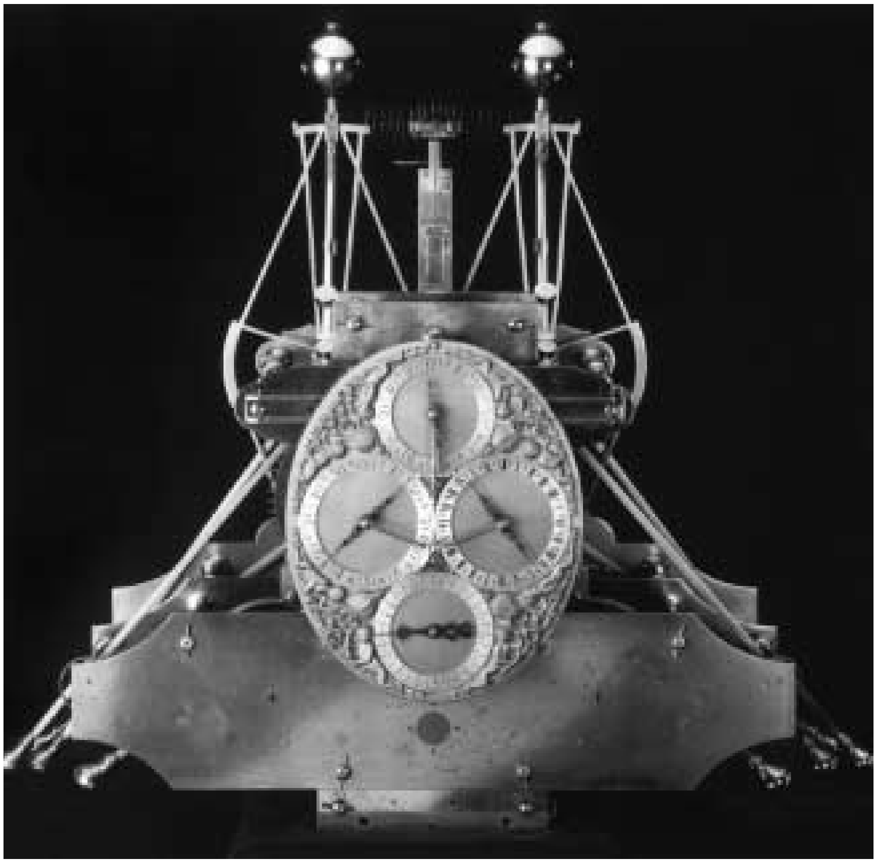
It would have easily passed the test of a trial run to the West Indies, as the Longitude Act demanded, and Harrison would have been entitled to the prize, but when he brought the piece before the Board, he asked to be given more time to work out a few kinks. He was clearly dedicated to perfection.

Harrison worked on his early timepieces (his first pendulum clock, made almost entirely of wood, was finished before he was 20 years old) and sea chronometers for more than 40 years. H-1 was finished in 1735 (brought before the Board in 1737) and weighed 75 pounds; H-2, weighing in at 86 pounds, was completed in 1741; H-3 weighed 60 pounds upon completion in 1757; and H-4, Harrison's masterpiece completed in 1759, was five inches in diameter and weighed only three pounds.

His innovations included (1) clever use of wood in the teeth of the early clocks, drawing strength from the grain patterns of the wood; (2) gears that were friction-free and not in need of lubrication (at Brocklesby Park); (3) the "gridiron" (alternating brass and steel rods in the pendulum, thereby allowing the coefficients of expansion and contraction to counteract each other); (4) the "grasshopper" escapement, the ingenious part that counts the ticks; (5) the use of a bi-metallic strip in H-3 (still used today in thermostats); and (6) the employment of caged ball bearings in H-3 (still used today to smooth the operation of machines with moving parts).

Despite his brilliant innovations he met stiff resistance from those intent on pushing the lunar distance method of determining longitude, an unwieldy and unreliable technique that demanded a series of astronomical observations, lengthy and complicated computations, and consultations with ephemerides (Galileo's timetables of astronomical movements, based on his observations of the moons of Jupiter).

Harrison's first timekeeper, H-1. Copyright National Maritime Museum.



Especially disheartening to Harrison were the deliberate withholding of parts of the reward money, the delaying of trial runs by the Admiralty, the insistence that he supervise production of two duplicate copies of H-4 as proof that it could be duplicated (not part of the original stipulations), and the appointment to the post of astronomer royal of his archrival, the Rev. Nevil Maskelyne, who made life miserable for Harrison by such subtleties as "accidentally" dropping H-4.

Sobel's book honors Harrison's achievements with its masterful style. Witness, for example, her description of the watchmaker's annotations to a textbook by Nicholas Saunderson: "The handwriting throughout appears neat and small and regular, as one might expect from a man of methodical mind." And her summation of H-4 is fitting:

> Coming at the end of that big brass lineage, H-4 is as surprising as a rabbit pulled out of a hat. Though large for a pocket watch, at five inches in diameter, it is minuscule for a sea clock, and weighs only three pounds. Within its paired silver cases, a genteel white face shows off four fanciful repeats of a fruit-and-foliage motif drawn in black. These patterns ring the dial of Roman numeral hours and Arabic seconds, where three blued-steel hands point unerringly to the correct time. The Watch, as it soon came to be known, embodied the essence of elegance and exactitude.

Other stylistic delights abound in this treasure of a book.

The interested reader might go to the Web site of the National Maritime Museum at *http://www.nmm.ac.uk/cmr/long7(8,9,10).html* or call Nova (the TV program) at +1 800 255 9424 for a copy of *Lost at Sea: The Search for Longitude.*

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BOOK REVIEW

CAPTURING NETSPEAK, BUT NOT REINING IT IN

BY BRYAN A. GARNER

Wired Style: Principles of English Usage in the Digital Age
By Constance Hale and Jessie Scanlon (Broadway Books, 2nd ed.)

When linguists talk of dialects, they typically refer exclusively to the spoken word. But the Internet seems to have created a highly unusual beast: a written dialect in which punctuation is abandoned, uppercasing is largely unknown (unless you're shouting), and all sorts of acronyms replace phrases. BTW means "by the way," IMHO means "in my humble opinion," OTOH means "on the other hand," w/e means "whatever" (in the slangy, dismissive sense), and so on.

Knowing these shorthand expressions—and using them—gives one a sense of belonging to the group. Yet the dialect does not really exist except through the written word, and the "group" to which one belongs exists only in cyberspace.

Parents and teachers sometimes ask me whether all this will affect standard American English. The answer is that it is bound to, although predicting the effect would be more difficult than predicting the outcome of the 2004 presidential election. In the main, though, it appears likely that these aspects of Internet style—the punctuationless, generally lowercase style riddled with acronyms—will largely remain confined to the Internet. To what extent children might face greater obstacles in learning to write what we now know as standard American English is a difficult question.

Internet English is relaxed and playful and creative.

People yearn for guidance, though, and the online folks have a style manual: Three years ago two editors at *Wired* magazine, Constance Hale and Jessie Scanlon, produced *Wired Style*, which has just appeared in its second edition. The book is long on attitude and short on principles: "Think blunt bursts and sentence fragments. Writing that is on-the-fly—even frantic." That immediately raises an interesting question: If that is how writers are supposed to be thinking, then why would they stop to consult a style manual? How could they?

And, of course, there is the question of what guidance they will find if they do look at the manual. "Spelling and punctuation are loose and playful. (No one reads email with red pen in hand.)" "Write the way people talk. Don't insist on 'standard' English." "Appreciate unruliness." "Welcome inconsistency." The authors do many of these things themselves. For example, they seem to welcome inconsistency by using media as a singular noun on page 13 and as a plural on page 16. Yet on page 115 they seem to endorse the singular.

The authors embrace the jargon of the digerati, and they even praise the use of jargon. But the discussion stays superficial: They keep it light and quick, presumably because their readers are on the fly (or on-the-fly, as the authors incorrectly hyphenate the phrase).

A certain amount of their advice is sound. Internet English is surely relaxed and playful and creative. The so-called smileys made from text characters—from the commonplace :-) for someone smiling to more complex emoticons—show a delightful imagination at work. And the immediacy of modern communication demands a saving of keystrokes, however much the old-schoolers will lament the lack of reflection that often goes into instant messages.

But the authors are stingy with their advice: Only a fifth of the 192-page text is devoted to usage and style. The bulk of the book is a list of definitions of Internet terms. There is precious little guidance about real usage problems.

Maybe that is understandable. How do you write a usage guide for the unruly? The answer, judging from this book, is that you don't. Your doctrine becomes

(continued on page 20)

AUDIENCE QUEST

AUDIENCES ARE US

VICKI HILL

My previous column (March/April) asserted that few really useful guidelines for reaching audiences exist. This series uses tales describing audience engagement to shed some light on the audience quest. The objective is to increase writers' awareness of audiences and to help writers derive workable techniques from the tales.

A useful approach for my first tale came from Peter Elbow, who likens audiences to magnetic fields that can focus our words. A *get the results* audience exerts a strong force. My initial tale concluded that my boss was just such a force, facilitating a timely, accurate, and expertly targeted telecommunications analysis. This was all due to his insider knowledge. But I had my role to play. The work had to break some new ground and I, having some distance, was able to add the creative element to help *get it right*.

Try to find techniques that intertwine author and audience in new ways.

This tale, instead of sticking to one work and its audience, looks at two pieces.

Illustrative Tale 2

Two articles describing opposite audience reactions (displeased vs. pleased) to two works came across my desk. First, *The Wall Street Journal* reported that the newish media watchdog, *Brill's Content,* "is having trouble being heard." Why? The magazine is considered by some to be "too inside-baseball, too dry and above all, too long." I just had to contrast this with the never-ending hosannas to *The Blair Witch Project.* The *Atlantic Unbound* Web citations column (a typical reaction) called it "one of those blitzkreiging 1990s media machines, like *Star Wars,* or the O.J. trial, that defines everything in its path."

Figuring that all this was somehow a sign, I tried out my *getting results* vs. *getting it right* taxonomy. *Brill's (http://www.brillscontent.com)* certainly stayed *very* close to its target audience (those who care about journalism). But that trait, taken too far, had earned them the "inside-baseball" sobriquet. And long was never a problem if you had the right audience. (Anyone ever seduced by one of the long *New Yorker* pieces that you never intended to read, but that opened a whole new world, knows that long pieces are not necessarily dry.) *Brill's* apparently was just too results-oriented, even for its wonkish audience.

Now *The Blair Witch Project. Witch* got it right, as Elbow said. From out of nowhere it came, delighting audiences with its original story about three students who disappeared in the Maryland Woods. But wait…it seems that actually the film itself is only part of what audiences are reacting to. *The Blair Witch Project* official Web site *(http://www.blairwitch.com)* fills in details and continues the "documentary." And more than that, unofficial sites have mushroomed until there is something for everybody. For example, the literal-minded can become experts on lore and related stories and facts.

The true home of *Witch* is the Internet, and it has been proposed as the film that broke through the barrier separating old and new media. Publications that are tied too closely to old media and that are focused too much on a narrow audience need to find new ways of getting results quickly to users in the new media age. Brilliantly efficient and exciting Web sites can still provide highly utilitarian pieces, too. *The Washington Post* Web version to me is so usable and attractive that I finally broke my obsession with getting the "real" paper every day.

Still, the paper and the Web versions have basically the same content. *Witch* has moved on to a new form based on the Web paradigm. Readers can be producers or consumers at the same time (volunteering to help find the film makers and then experiencing the new version in which the volunteers participated). For now, try to find techniques that intertwine author and audience in new ways, and which take advantage of new media possibilities.

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.*

Some Boosts for Your Career

By Joseph A. Robinson

You can help yourself toward career growth and advancement in several ways:

- Learn your job and what's important about it; develop a clear understanding with your boss about what results are expected, how they will be measured, and what to do if you see they are falling short.
- Build a reputation for reliability in accepting and completing assignments with attention to costs, benefits, and choice among feasible alternatives, coming in with specific recommendations.
- Make yourself available for special assignments inside the organization and for occasional outside assignments, even if it takes personal time.
- Seek out any special development activities that will help you do this job better, especially any that will at the same time help prepare you for advancement.

You, your boss, and your organization are factors in your career growth.

Your boss can help in related ways if you can get him or her to:

- Rethink what is most important about each assignment and how to evaluate satisfactory results, especially to accept approaches, techniques, and work patterns that may differ from "the way we've always done it."
- Stress mutual understanding of the results desired and give honest, direct, objective feedback to help learning from corrective action.
- Delegate progressively more difficult tasks, reward results, and accept occasional failure as part of the cost of development.
- Be aware of the importance of sponsorship or mentoring; if preferable, search out someone else who can fit your needs better, then help set up the relationship.

Your organization can help (especially if you're female or a minority) with overall policies, procedures, and personnel practices to:

- Provide information on career opportunities and options, plus counseling to help you plan and prepare for career growth.
- Restructure jobs to eliminate irrelevant sex-based or other qualifications; see that you and others have equal access to professional activities, industry associations, and luncheon and service clubs important to professional performance.
- Arrange for as many employees as possible to have early successful experiences working under direction of a competent minority or woman boss.
- Reexamine requirements for geographic mobility as part of career advancement and devise alternative ways to accomplish comparable learning and growth.

Dr. Robinson is a Life Member of the IEEE, having started with 1941 student memberships in the predecessor AIEE and IRE. As a consultant to professional management since 1963, he serves corporate clients, law and accounting firms, banks, and professional organizations. He is a frequent presenter at IPCCs. E-mail: sanfranjar@aol.com.

PCS Members New STC Fellows

Among the new Society for Technical Communication Fellows this year are PCS members Saul Carliner, Susan Feinberg, and Jan Ulijn.

PROFESSOR GRAMMAR

A DOUBLE LESSON

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Part 1: Excessive Noun Strings

In English, unlike many other languages, you can use nouns as adjectives. For example, "noun string," a string of nouns—in this case, only two. Longer strings aren't hard to find: "log data set," "DASD read operation," "work load performance control."

Is that a problem? In *The Careful Writer,* Theodore Bernstein writes about Nouns as Adjectives: "It is perhaps one of the strengths of English that its parts are so readily interchangeable. Yet a good writer will not use this license without some sense of responsibility."

Bernstein, you are altogether too gentle. A notice of premium due for an insurance policy says, "This policy does not include earthquake building code update coverage." That string of five nouns is not merely irresponsible, it smacks of total contempt for the reader, who can only assume that the phrase was coined to satisfy minimally some legal requirement that he be warned not to expect whatever it is they're talking about. It was not chosen to convey meaning.

What to do? Criticize your work along these lines:

- Strings of two nouns are usually OK. I am confident that you all understood "insurance policy" above. But beware the temptation to run a familiar pair of nouns together as one word. The language does change, and "database" is now acceptable; but "work load" is still two words.
- A string of three nouns is suspect. Not all readers would comprehend "insurance policy premium" without pausing; anyway, it's rather graceless.
- Four or more nouns are excessive. "Insurance policy premium notice" begins to be laughable.

Also, read Bernstein. He has some other good things to say and he is less irritated about this subject than I am. And if you are the one who wrote "work file table space error range recovery," *Repent before it is too late!*

The Professor rails against too many nouns as adjectives and non-naughty expletives.

Part 2: Expletives Deleted

As the Professor edits this evening beside the fireplace in her cozy study, she is greeting the new year by sipping a nice sherry, smoking an equally nice cigar, and deleting expletives, which are not nice.

Permit the Professor to explain promptly that she is certainly not speaking of the naughty expletives that might occur to you. Such expletives never soil the lips of the Professor (except, perhaps, when she is editing in the absolute privacy of her study very late at night after too many nice sherries, not enough nice cigars, and too much execrable copy).

Instead of those naughty expletives, the Professor is speaking of the expletives "there" and "it." When used as expletives, "there" and "it" are meaningless words that take the position of meaningful words, phrases, or clauses in standard English sentences.

Consider the expletives in these execrable sentences:

There are five writers on the team.
There is one editor on the team.

In these sentences, the meaningless word "there" takes the position of the subject, which should be a meaningful part of any sentence.

Delete the expletives, dear students. Write these sentences:

Five writers are on the team.
One editor is on the team.

Or consider the expletives in these equally execrable sentences:

It is the manager who selects the team.
It is the responsibility of the manager to support the team.

Delete the expletives again, dear students. Instead of the first sentence above, write this sentence:

The manager selects the team.

Instead of the second sentence above, write one of these sentences:

The manager supports the team.

The manager is responsible for supporting the team.

Supporting the team is the responsibility of the manager.

The Professor's resolutions for the new year include more nice sherry, more nice cigars, and fewer expletives (naughty or otherwise). Will her dear students join her in resolving to delete the expletives?

 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.

Capturing Netspeak

(continued from page 16)

linguistic libertarianism, in which the only dogmatic judgments you make are to put down the standard authorities like *The Chicago Manual of Style* and Strunk and White's *Elements of Style* while proclaiming on the front and back covers, and in press material, that your book has attained a status equal to those classics.

That raises a pervasive ambiguity. The authors do not quite say whether they mean for their suggestions to apply to all writing in the digital age or only to Internet writing. Even if their suggestions are limited only to Internet writing, are Web sites on the same footing as chat rooms when it comes to rejecting standard English? Consider again the subtitle: principles for the digital age, not merely for digital technology. It's a chilling thought.

As a professional usage critic, I mainly wanted to know two things when I first picked up the book. What do the authors say about e-mail versus E-mail versus email? And what do they recommend as the plural of mouse? I'm on record in support of e-mail and mouses. *The New York Times* style requires e-mail and mice. *Wired Style* favors email and mouses.

Little battles have been pitched over these points. We will have to wait a few years to see whether the hyphen persists in e-mail. But the more interesting skirmish is over computer mouses. Some Internet users are agitating vehemently in favor of mice. IMHO, it's their dialect, so they can do as they please. OTOH, they might consider how the metaphorical use of louse (a scoundrel) becomes louses—a useful analogue (BTW, not analog in this sense). w/e.

Why English presents problems in learning:

- We polish the Polish car.
- He could lead if he would get the lead out.
- A farm can produce produce.
- The dump was so full that it had to refuse refuse.
- The soldier elected to desert in the desert.
- The present is a good time to present the present.
- The dove dove into the bushes.

A 12-Step Program for Running Meetings

By James T. Heires

A day saturated with high-resolution advice and rich multimedia interchange was a genuine pleasure to behold. Edward Tufte is a true showman and a genius when it comes to communication and the display of information. Not only is Tufte entertaining and informative, he imparts notions that can actually be tried at home. This paper is an attempt to summarize a small portion of the material presented in Dr. Tufte's fascinating one-day presentation in Minneapolis last year and in one of his generously illustrated books (*Visual Explanations: Images and Quantities, Evidence and Narrative*, Graphics Press, 1996, pp. 68-70).

Edward Tufte's advice on meetings

Everyone has experienced meetings that seem to wander aimlessly or fail to deliver value. Some believe that meetings are a necessary evil—a waste of time. But meetings are needed to gain consensus, impart information, or solve problems, all of which require the participation of others. To maximize the value of any meeting or presentation, follow these simple guidelines.

1. Show up early.

This tip can frequently prevent certain disaster—or at least give you that last bit of ever-important preparation time. Use this time wisely to ensure that the meeting room is prepared, the equipment is in place (and working), and you are familiar with the environment. If anything should need attention, arriving early gives you ample time to make any necessary corrections.

2. Start positively.

Never, never, never apologize! One blunder that can ruin your credibility right from the beginning is to say something like: "Sorry I'm late" or "I always get nervous in front of crowds." Also, avoid first-person singular form—it sounds amateurish. The three most important things to remember to avoid problems with a presentation: *Practice! Practice! Practice!*

3. When explaining a complex figure, follow the Particular-General-Particular principle

("Classroom and Platform Performance," *The American Statistician*, February 1980, p. 13). Start with a brief introduction of the figure and show a *particular* detail. Describe the detail, then step back and explain the *general* architecture of the figure. Finally, wrap up with a discussion of another *particular* detail. This approach explains the general organization of the figure and reinforces your message with two specific examples.

4. Give everyone at least one piece of paper.

Paper is the highest resolution medium—use it to your advantage to make your point. In addition, paper leaves traces of who said what, when, and where. Distribute hard copies only when needed, however. If your audience must follow along with the presentation, provide hard copy before or during the presentation. If the hard copy simply documents the proceedings, distribute paper after the meeting to avoid distracting your listeners.

5. Avoid overheads with bulleted lists.

Overhead projectors are one of the lowest resolution forms of communication. The all-too-typical lists of bulleted text do very little to clearly and completely tell your story. Hard-copy prose is a much more effective means of textual communication. A more effective use of overhead visuals involves simple graphics.

6. Don't patronize your audience.

Treat the audience as colleagues who are interested in helping you solve a problem (they just might be). Strive to be simple but not simple-minded. Your presentation should allow the audience to reason about the content (make sure you have some!).

7. Use humor only to build your point.
Effective use of humor is difficult to master in business settings. If you are not comfortable with either your audience or the use of humor, leave it out. If humor supports your point without offending members of your audience, use it judiciously.

8. Avoid the use of gender-centric (e.g., masculine) pronouns.
Keep your message gender-neutral to appeal to a wider audience and avoid political problems.

9. Deal with questions.
When the time comes to entertain questions, ask for them and then wait 10 seconds for responses. *Ten whole seconds?* Ten seconds feels like an eternity while you are in the spotlight—after all, people are there to hear *you* speak, right? If you don't wait long enough, some audience members will not ask their burning questions and might leave the meeting disappointed in your presentation.

10. Show your enthusiasm.
If you believe in the stuff, let your audience know it! Don't hide behind a lectern with your hands at your sides. Use voice inflection, gestures, and other non-verbal communication to share your enthusiasm with your audience.

11. Avoid dehydration.
Drink water before and during your presentation, especially if you travel by air to get to your meeting. In addition to dry mouth, dehydration can cause rapid heart rate, low blood pressure, and lightheadedness. You don't need these symptoms on top of "butterflies in the stomach." Water contains essential electrolytes, which cause energy conversion to take place at a cellular level.

12. Finish early.
How often have you heard someone say: "It would have been a better meeting if it had just lasted another 30 minutes"? Everyone will be happier if you end earlier than announced. Ending late gives the message that you were ill prepared and out of control.

James T. Heires (jtheires@collins.rockwell.com) *is a 14-year veteran of the software industry, mostly with Rockwell Collins, Inc. His professional experiences include design of electronic flight instrumentation, flight management systems, and consumer electronics. Most recently he is improving the state-of-the-practice in project cost estimating using parametric modeling techniques, and he writes software product reviews for* Application Development Trends *magazine.*

IEEE May Ease Entry for IT Practitioners

At its meeting in New Orleans, the IEEE Technical Activities Board (TAB) approved a motion by former PCS president Mark Haselkorn to ask the IEEE Board of Directors to assure that the IEEE Admission and Advancement committee admits any applicant with a degree in an information technology (IT) area (which includes technical and professional communication) or three or more years of experience in the IT industry.

This is intended to provide full membership, without additional review, for people without degrees in engineering but with, for example, degrees in information development, marketing, quality control, and management. If the Board goes along (as Haselkorn believes it will), this will be a major opening up of IEEE membership with significant implications for societies like PCS.

As a follow-on, TAB approved funding for an Information Technology Workshop to bring together leaders from the IT industry and IEEE to develop plans for applying IEEE resources to serving IT employees' interests and needs. Haselkorn is leading the organization of this workshop.

Call for Nominations

By Terrance John Malkinson

The annual election to fill six positions on the Professional Communication Society's Administrative Committee (AdCom) will be held at the 24 September 2000 meeting of the AdCom at the Marriott Hotel in Cambridge, Massachusetts (preceding IPCC/SIGDOC 2000).

New AdCom members are selected by vote of the current AdCom. The term for members to be elected in September begins 1 January 2001 and ends 31 December 2003. Candidates must be regular members of both IEEE and PCS by 1 January 2001. Affiliate members interested in being AdCom candidates must be eligible for IEEE membership and must apply and be elected to Institute membership prior to January 2001.

Six AdCom members will be elected 24 September for the 2001-2003 term.

AdCom members must be willing and able to attend at least two of the three meetings held each year in addition to devoting several days per month to the business of the society. This year's meeting sites are Washington, DC; Minneapolis, Minnesota; and Cambridge, Massachusetts. Currently, for those who do not have company support, some travel subsidy is available. AdCom members outside of North America receive additional financial support. In neither case, however, is it usually enough to cover all expenses.

This is a particularly exciting time to become involved in the administration of PCS. The number of professional, staff, and managerial opportunities opening up in industry is evidence of the increasing importance of communication skills to business, employment, and personal success. PCS is a leader in promoting state-of-the-art practices and theories for writing technical and scientific documentation, exploring the integration of visual communication tools with written and spoken communication, and conducting research on ensuring effective communication in a modern engineering environment.

Recently, our president initiated a strategic planning process to guide the future of PCS to effectively meet the needs of our members (see the President's Column on page 3 of this *Newsletter*).

You may nominate yourself, be nominated with your permission by someone else, or suggest individuals who would be suitable candidates. Each person nominated must supply the following information:

1. A brief biography (50-200 words).
2. A brief description of what you would like to contribute or accomplish as a member of the AdCom (50-200 words).
3. Your views as to the importance of professional communication to personal and employment success.
4. A list of other professional organizations you belong to and your past and present activities with them.
5. Your IEEE membership number and grade. If not currently a member, state that you commit to applying for membership should you be elected to the AdCom.

Please submit your nomination to: Terrance John Malkinson, *malkinst@cadvision.com*, or 1326-18 Ave. NW, Calgary, Alberta, Canada T2M 0W4; +1 403 282 1065.

Completed nominations must be received by 30 June 2000. Candidates' statements will be made available to the AdCom at least 30 days prior to the election meeting. Questions regarding candidacy may be directed to Terrance Malkinson, chair of the Nominations Committee, or visit our Web site *(http://www.ieeepcs.org)* for further information.

"The greatest mistake you can make is to be continually fearing you will make one."
— *Elbert Hubbard*

SEPTEMBER IN CAMBRIDGE

2000 ipcc sigdoc Technology & Teamwork

September in Cambridge, Massachusetts, is exceptional. The first frost has not yet struck the zinnias, cosmos, and marigolds; the days are still long enough to stroll in the early evening; the Charles River sparkles in the clear air.

Rowers crowd the river practicing for the October Head of the Charles regatta (*http://www.hocr.org/home.html*). Mondays until October are Farmers Market Days in Central Square.

For IPCC/SIGDOC 2000 (24-27 September) our base is the Cambridge Marriott, located in the heart of Kendall Square, home to MIT. From the Marriott there is a jogging path along the river, or you can walk across the Longfellow Bridge and find yourself on historic Charles Street at the foot of Beacon Hill.

Also in easy reach by foot, bus, or subway is Harvard Square, where academics and townies gather to watch the street shows—musicians, magicians, puppeteers, and performance artists. Take a Duck Boat Tour (*http://www.bostonducktours.com*) of Boston. Shop in Filene's Basement—it's just three subway stops from the hotel.

Here are some other Web sites to help you plan your visit:

- Getting Around Boston (*http://www.boston-online.com/bos-around.html*)
- Visiting Boston (*http://www.boston-online.com/bos.html*)
- Day Trips (*http://www.boston-online.com/bos-day.html*)
- Dining Guide (*http://diningguide.net/boston/*)
- Museum of Fine Arts Calendar (*http://www.mfa.org*)
- Freedom Trail (*http://www.vboston.com/vboston/content/freedomtrail/index.cfm*)
- Haymarket (*http://www.boston-online.com/cityviews/haymarket.html*)
- Quincy Market (*http://www.boston-online.com/cityviews/quincymkt.html*)
- Harvard Square (*http://www.harvardsquare.com*)

Finally, don't forget to register for our awards dinner, to be held in the spectacular Blue Wing of the Boston Museum of Science (*http://www.mos.org/info/bluewing.html*).

Visit the conference Web site, *http://ieeepcs.org/2000/*, for registration and hotel information.

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