



IEEE PROFESSIONAL COMMUNICATION SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

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SEPTEMBER AdCOM MEETING SUMMARY

BY LAUREL GROVE

The Administrative Committee (AdCom) of the IEEE Professional Communication Society met in Saratoga Springs on September 21, at the end of IPCC 96. The timing allowed participation by many members who had never attended an AdCom meeting before.

IPCC 96 was a success, and preparations for both IPCC 97 and IPCC 98 are well under way.

Elections

A major focus of the meeting was the election of AdCom members. George Hayhoe, Gene Hoffnagle, Rudy Joenk, Bill Kehoe, LeAnn Kostek, Beth Weise Moeller, and Cheryl Reimold were chosen from a slate of 11 well-qualified nominees for terms running from 1997 through 1999. Mark Haselkorn and Roger Grice were re-elected as president and vice president, and Bill Kehoe and George Hayhoe were confirmed as treasurer and secretary for 1997.

Constitution

The PCS Constitution was once again debated. The size of the AdCom was a topic of some concern. A decision was made to move details concerning the number of committee members from the Constitution to the bylaws, which are easier to change as needed. The requirement that AdCom members hold at least Member grade within IEEE was also removed to allow participation by more of our membership.

The Society's field of interest was updated to broadly include the theory and practice of technical communication. A means of removing officers and AdCom members from office was introduced.

AdCom members cheered after finally voting to approve the Constitution as amended. The Constitution will now undergo review by the IEEE Technical Activities Board before being submitted to the full membership.

Richie Robinson, who has been leading the revision effort, was pleased to have it move to the next stage. George Hayhoe will now lead the effort to revise the bylaws.

Member Upgrades

A topic of concern was the fact that some PCS members applying for upgrades from Associate to Member grade in IEEE have been turned down (see the President's Column on page 3). There has never been an appeals process, but an ad hoc procedure is being implemented and the overall process re-examined. If you have been unaccountably turned down for an upgrade, contact Mark Haselkorn (m.haselkorn@ieee.org).

Changes in IEEE

Bob Wangemann and Fran Zappulla, IEEE staff, attended the meeting to talk about changes happening within the organization. Like many other organizations, IEEE is re-engineering to be more responsive to its customers, in this case the members and societies.

Opportunities

The Educational Committee hopes to provide more courses. If you have courses available, know of courses that you would like to see offered, or know of places where PCS might offer courses, contact Janet Rochester (j.rochester@ieee.org).

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

*Engineers and scientists
do communicate
technically.*

Dear Editor,

The June 1996 issue of the *IEEE Transactions on Professional Communication* had Charles Campbell's article "How Much B.S. Should I Put into This Presentation." The September 1996 issue had Ahmad Ibrahim's Letter to the Editor presenting the point of view of an engineer who is allergic to B.S. Now, in the September/October issue of the *IEEE PCS Newsletter*, you made Michael Brady's "The Beginnings of Technical Communications" the lead article. In my opinion, Brady's opinion is B.S.

Brady seems enamored with the idea that author Dexter Masters "spawned the art of professional communication, and ultimately groups such as PCS," by editing 11 issues of *RADAR* from April 1944 to September 1945. What stupidity! Author Masters acquiring enough knowledge of radar technology to use his writing skill and technical information to contribute to technology did not spawn technical communication or make it professional. Did Masters ever hear of Archimedes, da Vinci, Newton, Gauss, Einstein, Steinmetz, and other scientists and engineers through the ages? Their writings were technical communications to the world long before World War II and Masters.

Our textbooks on mathematics, grammar and composition, physics and chemistry,

and engineering subjects in elementary and secondary schools and in college were technical communications, in my case in the 1920s and 1930s. So were all of the many scientific and engineering journals, even *Popular Science* and *Popular Mechanics*, which aroused my interest in engineering in 1925. Brady should go to a nearby engineering library and thumb through the old books and journals on engineering and the sciences to learn that art of technical communication did not begin with Masters. Engineers and scientists do communicate technically. An author who learns a little about a technical subject and writes about it may not be the best professional communicator on the subject. Many engineers and scientists are skillful professional communicators.

When I read the *IEEE Transactions on Professional Communication*, I sometimes wonder why IEEE sponsors it. Perhaps one author in 20 is a member of IEEE. It has become a publication medium for the teachers of English even though the PCS began almost 40 years ago as an IRE (Institute of Radio Electronics) group led by engineers and physicists, members of the IRE.

—James A. Cronvich

The writer is a lifetime fellow of IEEE and an early member of the IRE group on Engineering Writing and Speech.

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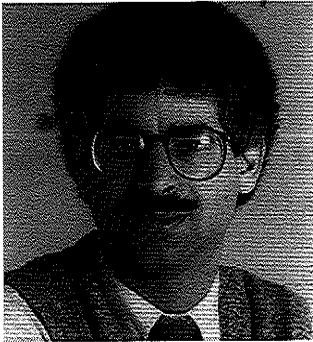
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PRESIDENT'S COLUMN



MARK HASELKORN

MEMBER STATUS A KEY ISSUE

Since our last newsletter, PCS has been at the center of an Institute controversy surrounding the granting of IEEE member status to people who are extremely active in the overall engineering endeavor, but who are not traditional engineers. While this has been an ongoing concern, the issue was recently raised again when a highly qualified applicant on our AdCom was denied member status by the Institute's Admission and Advancement (A&A) committee.

The initial rejection was followed shortly by a second rejection of another very prominent, highly active member of our field. This prompted the following e-mail from me to Bruce Eisenstein, Vice President of TAB. (I hope that Professor Smart will forgive my using his name in the interest of making what I think is an important point—Karl knows how highly we value his knowledge and contributions, and I would not do it if we hadn't recently learned that his application had been reconsidered and accepted.)

To: Bruce Eisenstein
From: mark@uwtc.washington.edu (Mark Haselkorn)
Subject: Serious Problem
Cc: Wally Read, Charles Alexander, Ray Findlay, James Roland, TAB_BlueRibbon, PCS_AdCom

Bruce,

PCS has a serious problem related to membership that needs both immediate attention and long range consideration. I suspect our problem is symptomatic of problems that other societies may be having and it certainly relates to TAB autonomy. For this reason I'm copying the Blue Ribbon Committee on this because I'd like to add it to our agenda—if not this weekend then later. Here's the situation.

For the second time in a few months, one of our AdCom members has been turned down for Member grade by the Membership Committee. After the first case, Dave Kemp and I met in Montreal with James Roland [A&A Chair] in an effort to inform him about our society and the field it represents—technical communication. Obviously we failed.

Now they have turned down Professor Karl Smart of Brigham Young University.

Professor Smart teaches and performs research on issues of technology and communication in the workplace. Prior to his academic appointment, Karl spent four years as a documentation manager for Word-Perfect/Novell. His recent publications have appeared in the Journal of Systems Management, a chapter in a book from MIT press, and the IEEE Transactions of Professional Communication. Karl is also the conference chair for our 1997 IPCC in Salt Lake City, which is being piggy-backed with the ACM SIGDOC conference, which Karl also is chairing.

The immediate issue is how to reverse the current decision, as I have already received a letter from Karl informing me, sadly, that since our rules require Member status to be on AdCom, he will have to resign. This can't be allowed to happen.

More importantly, it seems silly to talk about "the buck stopping at TAB" on society issues if a RAB committee [I was wrong here—A&A is administered by RAB but is a committee of the Board of Directors] is going to decide who is fit to be a full member of a society.

I recognize that many IEEE members do not join societies, but in the case where a member joins the Institute because he or she wants to join a society, the membership committee should not be in the position of telling the society whether or not someone is qualified in the field that the society represents.

As you know, the engineering endeavor has changed greatly over the last decade, and if IEEE cannot accommodate the growing set of disciplines contributing to design, operations, customer support, etc., then we will decrease both our potential for growth and our representation of engineering as it is currently being practiced.

In Karl Smart's case, the primary difference between what I do and what he does is that my department happens to be in the College of Engineering and Karl's happens to be in the Business School. We should not judge applicants on narrow interpretations of their employment or education but rather on what they **do** and **what** they know—to do so will deny membership to a great number of young applicants contributing in new ways to the

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RUSSIAN CHAPTER GRATEFUL FOR DONATIONS

BY HENRICH LANTSBERG

On returning from the IEEE Region 8 Committee meeting in Helsinki (Finland), I want to share my views concerning the IEEE project to supply libraries in Eastern Europe, including Russia and CIS countries, with microfiches and IEEE book editions.

The political restructuring of Eastern Europe, especially in Russia, had negative effects on funding for library subscriptions to scientific journals and literature. It is, of course, a problem of economic reasons.

In previous years for example my Institute, the Institute of Radioengineering and Electronics of the Russian Academy of Sciences, in which I have worked for more than 40 years subscribed to and received all scientific journals in the field. Now it is quite another picture.

Under such conditions the Eastern European project, which is being conducted by the RAB/TAB Transnational Committee and Region 8 of the IEEE is of great and vital importance to the Russian scientific community. Some Russian libraries have already received shipments of nearly 100 IEEE books including microfiches from 17 IEEE societies, one Council and one Inter-Societal Committee.

The libraries of Russia receiving donations are as follows:

- Institute of Radioengineering and Electronics, Russian Academy of Sciences, Moscow;
- Institute of Information Transmission Problems, Russian Academy of Sciences, Moscow;
- Russian Research Center "Kurchatov Center" (Institute for Atomic Energy) Moscow;
- Russian Research Institute for Industrial and Feasibility Studies "Informelectro", Moscow;

- Rostov on Don University, Rostov/Don;
- Saint Petersburg University, St. Petersburg;
- House of Optics, Moscow; and
- State Public Scientific-Technical library of Siberian Branch of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Novosibirsk.

The IEEE Professional Communication Society Russia Chapter has taken an active part in coordinating this project in Russia. Great efforts for promoting the goals of the project were made by Dr. Michael Adler—Member, Task Force on Transnational Activities—IEEE RAB/TAB Transnational Committee, as well as by Dr. Robert Winton, Region 8 Forward Planning Coordinator.

The project was of vital importance to many engineers and scientists in Russia. The reaction of my colleagues was very positive. The project greatly enhanced the image and position of the IEEE, which is well known within the Russian scientific and technical community.

I should say that the IEEE books and journals are the every day food for scientists and engineers and are always on their tables. Now in Russia, within the IEEE Russian Section, we have 13 IEEE Russian chapters of different IEEE societies. Some new chapters are in the process of creation.

There is an increased interest in the IEEE. As a whole the project is a great contribution for further cooperation and a very important new step in mutual understanding and the development of science and technology.

The author is vice-chair of the IEEE Russia Section and chair of the IEEE PCS Russia Chapter.

The project was of vital importance to many engineers and scientists in Russia.

CURMUDGEON'S CORNER



JOAN G. NAGLE

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

I always read these things; it's interesting to see the readers' take on what the professionals have written.

DEAR SIR, YOU CUR...

My husband recently submitted a news article to Dave Barry (as people are wont to do), and received in reply a postcard saying "This certifies that Elliott Nagle is an Alert Reader and should seek some kind of treatment immediately."

The article my husband sent, in case you missed it, was about a woman who was being tried for, as I recall, drunken driving. In the course of the trial, her ex-husband served as a non-character witness, one might say. He introduced a videotape of the accused wrestling in cole slaw on a recent vacation in Florida.

Wrestling in cole slaw? Here in South Carolina, cole slaw is something you have with barbecue, and, therefore, sacred. "Bubba, you and Junior git outta that tub-a-slaw raht now!"

Nevermind. The subject here is letters to editors, and the like. Barry apparently gets a lot of mail from his readers. I suppose newspaper and magazine editors do, too.

I always read these things; it's interesting to see the readers' take on what the professionals have written. (And also how many times the pros have indeed got it all wrong, fact- or interpretation-wise.) And I find I'm writing a lot more of letters, too.

It's one of the things retired people do. (Along with playing golf, reading obituaries, and complaining about their children.) I mean, here we are with all these years of accumulated wisdom, and the curmudgeonliness to insist that all the world partake of it. And time to write.

English novels used to make a point of this... that civil servants and military types, retired from India or wherever, would read the *London Times* over breakfast each morning, say "Humph!" and then pick up pen and paper to create suitably scathing replies.

In *The Economist* (May 11, 1996), an anonymous columnist says, "It was a fairly time-consuming business, and it had a tax on it in the shape of a stamp—all of which served to concentrate the minds of would-

be letter-writers, to make them stop and think whether they really had something to say that was worth saying."

"Nowadays," the columnist continues, "many people make their comments by e-mail." They are often urged to comment thus by interest-groups, who may even furnish the message itself. Sometimes these writers are (in typical British understatement) "intemperate." That means flaming.

"Users of e-mail say it has only a narrow emotional bandwidth, meaning they find it difficult to express inflexions [sic] of the voice by the mere use of words on a screen, so all their criticisms tend to come across as rude. (Nevermind that the bandwidth of the typewriter never stopped letter-writers making their points politely, nor did that of the quill pen inhibit Shakespeare and company from putting quite complicated thoughts and emotions into words.)"

We take two newspapers here. One, from the nearest major city, has an e-mail address; the other, a local paper, does not. We have found that it does no good to send one's "humph" to Atlanta by snail mail; everyone else is using e-mail and hard copy is out of date by the time it arrives.

We have gotten printed in the local rag, which doesn't require much more than staying out of the cole slaw.

But on this basis, I feel qualified to suggest some criteria for corresponding with the publications one reads.

- E-mail it, if at all possible. The primary advantage here is speed, but perhaps an overlay of urgency, if only in the perception of the editor. And possibly the advantage of its being already keyed in/on line.
- Keep it short. If you were the editor, wouldn't you rather print three or four responses to an issue, and thus reflect three or four different viewpoints, than one long harangue? And if you were a reader, you wouldn't read that long

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NOTES OF INTEREST

The Society/Technical Council now has an electronic newsletter for its many volunteers. The council is using the newsletter to improve communication between IEEE staff and the volunteers. The second issue of the newsletter was sent September 25.

K.R.S. Murthy, Vice President of IEEE's Engineering Management Society (EMS) is looking for volunteers to help plan future conferences. EMS is an IEEE society that focuses on management of engineering and technology. It has affiliated arrangements with other international management associations. For more information, contact Murthy (skmurthy@attmail.com).



A member of the Editorial Advisory Committee of PCS was given a Super Recruiter award for his efforts in India and the surrounding region. The award was presented to him this Spring by IEEE President Wallace S. Read.

S.S. Narayanan receives a Super-Recruiter award from IEEE President Wallace S. Read.

Vishal Sharma, IEEE PCS Coordinator for Student Activities, is continuing with plans for establishing an IEEE PCS Student Club at the University of California, Santa Barbara. Free membership to all entering freshmen in the College of Engineering is being offered. The Club will meet quarterly and offer lectures and a student writing contest. The project will be evaluated this Spring.

I have grown fond of semicolons in recent years. The semicolon tells you that there is still some question about the preceding full sentence; something needs to be added. It is almost always a greater pleasure to come across a semicolon than a period. The period tells you that that is that; if you didn't get all the meaning you wanted or expected, anyway you got all the writer intended to parcel out and now you have to move along. But with a semicolon there you get a pleasant little feeling of expectancy; there is more to come; read on; it will get clearer.

—Lewis Thomas, *The Medusa and the Snail*

TOOLS OF THE TRADE



CHERYL REIMOLD

Cheryl teaches courses and workshops for PCS on this and other communication topics. For information, c.reimold@ieee.org.

Just decide exactly how you will use each visual. If it doesn't serve a legitimate purpose, throw it out.

PREPARING OUTSTANDING PRESENTATIONS

Part 6 — Effective Visuals

Good visuals can strengthen your presentation tremendously—but unfortunately, they're rare. Here are their four key attributes: *few, big, simple*, and (occasionally) *memorable*.

How many visuals per minute? People often ask me how many visuals they should use per minute of speech. I think they hope I will say expansively, "As many as you like!" Instead, I tell them the opposite: "Use no more than you really need." The key is this: Use a visual only if it has a clear purpose.

Now, there are only a few legitimate purposes:

- 1) to get a difficult technical point across—say, with a flow diagram or line chart;
- 2) to make a process or concept more concrete with an example;
- 3) to reinforce a key point through a strong symbolic image;
- 4) to clarify the structure of the talk by listing the major points to be covered; and
- 5) to provide a prompt for yourself so you don't forget the next point.

The last purpose is the least legitimate—yet in many presentations, it seems to be the only reason for most of the visuals. Imagine writing every word of your presentation on transparencies and just reading the whole speech off the screen. Well, the more overheads you use as prompts, the closer you get to this absurd extreme!

Just decide *exactly* how you will use each visual. If it doesn't serve a legitimate purpose, throw it out. Sometimes, that leaves just two or three visuals. That's fine. Many presentations can be improved dramatically by omitting half of the visuals. For one thing, cutting them out encourages you to talk to the people rather than hide behind your visuals.

Of course, some of your visuals may be objects, such as product samples. Such demonstration objects can be very effective. If possible, avoid passing them out while you speak, though, as this always creates some distraction.

How big should it be?

Usually, the visual should be bigger than you think. Make typed text at least 18 point; anything smaller is difficult to read from the back of the room. This means you can't fit more than 16 double-spaced lines on a transparency.

However, that allowance shrinks further, because you shouldn't use the bottom third of the transparency at all. The reason is that the overhead projector tends to block this portion for some listeners. (You can avoid this problem by always using transparencies *sideways*, or in "landscape orientation.")

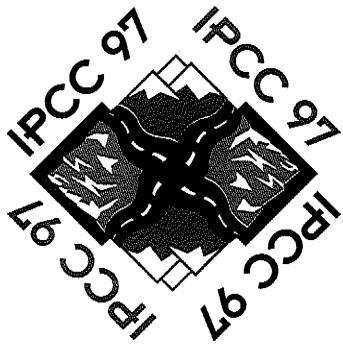
If you are an accountant or controller, please *suppress* the urge to photocopy that 12-column computer printout! Are you really going to read all the invisible numbers in all 12 columns to your audience? Perhaps you need just a list of the 12 column headings and then the numbers for one or two interesting or representative examples.

Making the type big usually forces you to use short phrases rather than full sentences. That's as it should be. You don't want to turn your presentation into a speed-reading exercise or insult your audience by parroting verbatim what's on the screen!

Keep it simple and easy to process

As much as possible, avoid competing with your visuals for the audience's attention. Anything that takes them away for more than three to four seconds constitutes destructive competition. Therefore, it's crucial that you make all charts simple and immediately understandable.

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CALL FOR PAPERS

CROSSROADS IN COMMUNICATION

October 22-24, 1997 in Salt Lake City, Utah at Snowbird Resort

A Special Invitation

The IEEE Professional Communication Society (PCS) invites you to submit proposals for papers, workshops, and panels to be presented at the 1997 International Professional Communication Conference (IPCC). You can contribute by preparing a presentation on one of the suggested topics or another that interests you:

New Technology the tools we use

- HTML, VRML, Java, and other internet tools
- Multimedia development
- Windows 95 online help, cue cards, wizards, and tutorials
- Electronic Performance Support Systems (EPSS)

Communicating the skills we need

- Multi-cultural and international communication
- Minimalist documentation and training
- Modular and reusable documentation
- Collaboration between technical communicators and engineers
- Decision making in virtual organizations

Designing accommodating technology to the user

- Web-page and web-site design
- Instructional design
- Visual design
- User-interface design
- Product and documentation usability testing

Research and Methodology the knowledge that supports us

- What are the trends in technology?
- How are organizations integrating new technologies?
- How are organizations combining online presentation methods, such as online text, web-based text, online help?
- How has the role of the technical communicator changed through the years?
- What skills beyond an English or communication degree does the technical communicator need?

About the Theme

This year IEEE's PCS and ACM's SIGDOC are hosting a linked conference with a shared theme of "Crossroads in Communication." We are at the crossroads in many ways:

- Downsizing is causing many people to leave fulltime jobs for a life of contracting.
- Online documentation is slowly challenging print as the dominant documentation media.
- The increasing popularity of the internet is encouraging WWW-distributable documentation.
- Tighter product and documentation integration is enabling many technical communicators to participate in usability testing and interface design.
- Changing job roles are leading many engineers to produce more documentation.

Meet with us in Salt Lake City at Snowbird to talk about these crossroads (and others) that we all face as technical communicators.

What You Need To Do

All you need to do now is submit a 300- to 500-word proposal describing your topic, objective, and presentation format:

Paper— A report of research results or pertinent experience by one or more authors to be published in the *Conference Record*

Workshop— A tutorial that includes hands-on participation by attendees

Panel— A series of complementary presentations by three or four speakers followed by an extensive question-and-answer session

Include with the proposal a short bio-sketch of each participant (up to 100 words each). You'll learn by March 1997 whether your proposal has been accepted and what to do next. Proposals are due by January 17, 1997.

Send Your Proposals to

Rob Houser and Scott Deloach, Program Chairs
1809 Montrose Parkway

Norcross, GA 30092

Phone: 770-623-7241 Fax: 770-813-3963

E-mail rob.houser@pobox.com

Check out the IPCC 97 web page at: www.ieee.org/pcs/pcsindex.html

SEPTEMBER ADCOM MEETING SUMMARY

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Mark Haselkorn reported that many IEEE-wide committees invite PCS participation. For example, Paul Seesing was recently appointed to the Communications & Information Policy Committee. There are quite a few other openings. For many of

these positions, IEEE members of any grade are eligible. Some positions have budgets to support travel to meetings. If you are interested in being nominated to a committee, contact Haselkorn (m.haselkorn@ieee.org).

PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

(continued from page 3)

creation and implementation of information and communication technology.

I am confident that applicants to societies can be judged better by TAB than by the current membership committee, and I hope that in our restructuring we establish a procedure for this to happen. Meanwhile, would you please advise me on appropriate steps for assuring that Professor Smart will remain an active Member of IEEE and PCS.

Thanks.

Since the writing of this e-mail, much has happened. Other societies, including the Computer Society, supported our position and told admission horror stories of their own. The VPs of RAB and TAB have joined to establish an ad hoc appeals committee until a more formal appeals process can be established.

There has been movement to clarify the vague bylaws governing member grade.

And best of all, four PCS cases which came up at the last A&A committee all were rightly judged as deserving of either member or senior member status (this thanks in large measure to the participation in the meeting of former president Ritchie Robinson).

While unfortunate, and certainly not closed, this "crisis" has had positive repercussions. It has given us another forum to make the case that technical communicators are important partners with engineers and computer scientists in the design, development, delivery, and maintenance of quality electrotechnology products. This is particularly true as when the product itself is information.

We should all be pleased that the Institute has been both attentive and responsive to our concerns.

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ADVERTISING

Space in this PCS Newsletter is available for advertising communication-related events, jobs, products, and services. For rates and information, commu-

nicate with Susan Schneiderman at the IEEE Service Center, (908) 562-3946 or s.schneiderman@ieee.org. The publisher reserves the right to reject any advertising.

CROSSWIRE

*Editor's Note:
This article is reprinted
from The Economist
and first appeared in
late 1995.*

It is a sign of these strange wired times that the biggest development in the incipient electronic publishing industry sounds like a joke: Michael Kinsley, one of America's best-known journalists and political commentators, is joining Microsoft, a software giant. No joke: Mr. Kinsley will edit a new on-line magazine for the company. In fact, the announcement on November 6 (1995) is the most striking signal that the race to publish on the Internet is getting serious.

Mr. Kinsley is a former editor of the *New Republic* (and once a visiting journalist at *The Economist*); he is about to end a stint on "Crossfire," a TV talk show. He plans to launch the new magazine early next year, but it will involve nothing more mundane as paper and ink. Instead, it will be distributed in electronic form, on both the World Wide Web, the Internet's multimedia side, and on the Microsoft Network (MSN), the firm's commercial on-line venture.

Most on-line publications today are electronic versions of printed magazines or newspapers, or Internet-only publications covering the Internet and the computer industry itself. In contrast, the new Microsoft magazine will carry original comment on politics and culture. This may seem unusually reflective material for a medium tailored to immediate information and short attention spans, but Microsoft is counting on next year's presidential campaign to arouse interest in its new venture.

What's in it for Mr. Kinsley? In part, the opportunity to start a new magazine on the cheap. Publishing on the Internet neatly dispenses with the costly bits: printing, paper, distribution, and postage. Microsoft will simply put the magazine on the network, and readers will come and get it.

Such advantages have already struck many others: nearly 200 daily newspapers, at least three times as many magazines, and more than 1,000 newsletters, "e-zines," and assorted other media products are already on-line. But most are derivatives of a paper publication, amateur productions, or marginal scribblings. Very few have brought top-flight editorial content exclu-

sively to cyberspace. "Somebody is going to produce a great magazine on the Web sooner or later," Mr. Kinsley says. "I'm gambling that it might be sooner, and it might be me."

For Microsoft, Mr. Kinsley's appeal is his pulling power. Its MSN on-line service, launched in August, needs more subscribers: it has about 300,000 now, compared with nearly 4m each for its two main—and much longer-established—competitors. But the new venture could also help Microsoft out of an awkward strategic corner. When the company first planned MSN, such proprietary commercial services were the main route to get on-line. This is no longer so, thanks to the explosive growth of the Internet, an open network not owned by any company. Now Bill Gates, Microsoft's chairman, talks of turning MSN into a "branded community" on the Internet, attracting readers by the quality of its content. Thus its decision to cover its bets by distributing Mr. Kinsley's magazine directly on the Internet as well as on MSN. Mr. Gates is pursuing "unique content" of all sorts, says Russell Seigelman, a Microsoft vice-president. Short of setting up its own newsgathering organization, he says, anything is fair game.

Can any of these efforts make money? The early success of *HotWired*, the on-line sibling of America's hipper-than-thou *Wired* magazine, and of an electronic version of Silicon Valley's local newspaper, the *San Jose Mercury News*, led others to think that Internet publishing was a sure bet. But almost none of the other on-line ventures—from *Time* to the *Financial Times*—is making money yet, not least because most are given away free.

Nevertheless, the potential for profitable electronic publishing seems clear, for two reasons. The first is the startling growth of the Internet's audience: Nielsen, a market researcher, reported last month that it reckons there are 37m users in North America alone, and—astonishingly—that Americans spend as much time on the Internet as they do watching rented videos.

*Most on-line
publications today are
electronic versions of
printed magazines or
newspapers, or Internet-
only publications*

But if politics does not excite Net users, other journalistic material such as entertainment, sports, business, or travel might.

The second reason involves advertising, in which a company pays to put into an on-line publication a teaser that leads the user to its own Web site. If such advertisements can cover all of a publication's costs (easier on the Internet, where distribution is so cheap), readers can browse without charge and the publisher can still profit. This year, companies will spend a mere \$10m to advertise on the Web, according to Forrester Research, a consultancy. But it predicts that Web advertising revenues will reach \$2.2 billion a year by 2000.

It is that figure, combined with the growth of the Internet use that brings both Micro-

soft and Mr. Kinsley to the Internet. Neither can be sure of success—like everyone else, they are feeling their way in a new medium. But if politics does not excite Net users, other journalistic material such as entertainment, sports, business, or travel might. Microsoft is sure to try many of these; it is drawn to Internet publishing in part because there is plenty of scope for experiment. But that makes electronic publishing just as easy, and as hard, as everyone else.

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CURMUDGEON'S CORNER

(continued from page 5)

harangue anyway, would you? Consider the Unabomber.

- Remember that emotional bandwidth problem, which is that we usually only write when we are truly wrought up about an issue. But wrought-up often comes through, in print, as crazy. Psychologist Joyce Brothers says that written material is typically perceived more negatively than intended. "A mild compliment, for instance, will be thought of as a neutral statement; a neutral statement will be heard as negative." And sarcasm doesn't work at all.

Wait a minute. These might be good criteria for all our written correspondence. Timely, short, and sweet.

The Economist columnist concludes with the suggestion that there be a tax—"call it a stamp, if you will"—levied on silly or tiresome e-mails. Or, "still more tempting," an electric shock sent interactively to senders of the more offensive messages.

Think about it. You, too, might need to seek treatment immediately.

TOOLS OF THE TRADE

(continued from page 7)

Include only what you need to make your point.

This means cutting out all clutter (unnecessary grids, numbers, and details). Include only what you need to make your point. In most cases, it also means you should replace tables with other types of charts, such as bar or line charts. These charts are more quickly absorbed, because they show *relationships* visually. Use tables only when you're talking about simple numbers rather than trends or relationships—say, when giving a cost breakdown.

One of the hardest things for the audience

is "cross-referencing," or having to go back and forth over certain sections of your visual. A *legend* asks them to do just that.

The smarter approach is to label things directly. Even though it may be a little extra work for you, you'll be rewarded by better audience attention.

Earlier, I said that you should make some of your visuals *memorable*. Next time, I'll expand on that advice.

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All contributions will be acknowledged, and returned if desired.

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Already in this decade, the IEEE has published nine books written or edited by PCS members, and more are on the way. This is a very high output for a small Society. It demonstrates our dedication to helping engineers and technical communicators improve their technical communication skills—the key to every professional's career growth.

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David L. McKown, 1991

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