

## Building an Effective Multi-Site, Multicultural Project Team

By Kit Brown

If you haven't worked with multi-site, multicultural teams yet, you will soon. Such team experiences can either be the ninth level of management hell or an enriching cultural exchange that will give you new appreciation for how people in other cultures live and work, depending on your team-building skills. The good news is that, as a manager and team leader, you have a great deal of influence on how well the team functions. [Read more.](#)

- **Professor Grammar**

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- **Thinking Globally, Teaching Locally**

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### Examining Face, Culture, and Communication

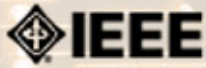
The concept of face – or external public appearance – is of importance to all cultural groups. Accordingly, communication behavior that contributes to or saves face is good, and actions that threaten face are bad. What constitutes acceptable “face behavior” in an exchange, however, differs along cultural lines. Such differences can, in turn, lead to...[Read more.](#)

- **Ask the Expert**

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What do you think are the three most important considerations for an effective scientific presentation? Contrarily, what are the three major mistakes presenters customarily make? [Read more.](#)



## Feature

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If you haven't worked with multi-site, multicultural teams yet, you will soon. Such team experiences can either be the ninth level of management hell or an enriching cultural exchange that will give you new appreciation for how people in other cultures live and work, depending on your team-building skills. The good news is that, as a manager and team leader, you have a great deal of influence on how well the team functions.

Working with people in different time zones and countries, adds several layers of complexity to the task of managing a team or a project. This article provides several suggestions for facilitating team-building and ensuring that the team works effectively.

- **Build a Rapport.** Take the time to get to know your team members and to do team-building. With companies being sensitive to costs and cutting travel, you may need to get creative. Encourage your team to post pictures and a paragraph or two about themselves on the team intranet site or project web portal. If you have several different cultures represented on your team, you might want to have each locale do a “show and tell” that provides information about the culture and history, as well as do's and don'ts for working in the culture. Even a few minutes a week of chatting or IMing will go a long way later in the project when things become stressful.
- **Be Respectful and Inclusive.** Recognize that not everyone shares the same world view or work ethic. Don't force your personal or cultural values on the other members of your team. Treat your team members as you would want to be treated. Take the time to learn a few phrases in their native languages. Find out the typical business courtesies used in the other locales and extend them. Honest interest and appreciation are generally reciprocated.
- **Facilitate Interaction.** When you have a team spread out all over the world, holding team meetings becomes tricky. Little things, like ensuring that you include the times for each location in a meeting announcement, go a long way to demonstrate your respect and to help all the team members feel included. If you are working with both Asia and Europe, alternate the times of meetings so that one group isn't always having to get up in the middle of their night. Find out the local holiday schedules and include those in your project planning. Use a custom page size of (8.26in x11in; 210 x 279 mm) so that everyone on your team can print documents without having to reformat them. (A4 paper, which most countries use, is longer and narrower than letter size.)
- **Communicate Early and Often.** Lack of communication is the number one complaint in project post-mortems. Add multiple locations and cultures, as well as technology differences to the mix, and communication becomes even more challenging. You need to communicate more frequently and with greater precision. Verify understanding by using active listening skills. Follow up telephone or IM conversations with emails that confirm action items, responsibilities, and dates. Agree on a date format (I recommend ISO dates—yyyy/mm/dd, which is equally different for everyone). Recognize and accommodate cultural differences in communication styles. Be responsive to requests and questions.
- **Recognize and Accommodate Cultural Differences and Language Barriers.** When you form the team, establish guidelines for interacting and for information exchange. For example, Americans tend to be less formal and more boisterous and direct than many other cultures, which can make some team members uncomfortable and reluctant to contribute during meetings. As a manager, you need to ensure that every member of the team has an opportunity to be heard, and that you are listening for nuances that may indicate discomfort or disagreement. Europeans

traditionally take most of August off for vacation, so you need to consider that when building the project schedule. In Asia, ‘no’ is rarely stated explicitly and most Asian cultures have a smaller personal space than Americans and Western Europeans do.

Even if someone is extremely fluent in a second language, they may have difficulty with comprehension over the telephone because body language cues are not available. Be sure to enunciate clearly and to speak more slowly than you normally would (though not so slowly that you are being insulting). In addition, there is often a 10-20 second delay on international calls, so it is even more important not to interrupt (On such calls, I count to 10 when someone is done speaking before I begin.)

- **Don’t Take It Personally and Have a Sense of Humor.** When working with a group of people with varied personalities and cultural backgrounds, misunderstandings are almost inevitable. When a misunderstanding occurs, assume the best intentions. Clarify and reiterate your request both verbally and in writing. If you are upset or confused about something, pick up the phone and call rather than emailing. Nothing escalates a situation faster than an angry email exchange where someone overreacts to another person’s email. Use emoticons and other indicators of mood and humor. Making a small extra effort to communicate and understand the other person’s viewpoint goes a long way.
- **Be Clear and Specific.** As in any technical communication endeavor, avoid idioms, acronyms, and jargon. Use short (fewer than 25 words) sentences and active voice. Clearly identify responsibilities, dates, and answer the who, what, when, why, where, how, and how much questions. For example, is 01/05/2004 January 5, 2004 or May 1, 2004? As another example, Mountain time has no meaning outside N. America. Instead use Greenwich Mean Time (GMT) to express times (e.g., a meeting that starts at 9:00 am MT [GMT-7], starts at 9 am in Denver, 4 pm in the UK and 5 pm in Germany). Use both metric and Imperial measurements—the US is the only non-metric country in the world. (One of the Mars missions failed because the engineers didn’t do the measurement conversion correctly...)
- **Use Technology to Support the Team.** Web portals are a great way to centralize communication about bugs, progress, and other project information, as well as for transferring large files. In addition, having a secure portal or intranet/extranet site enables you to take advantage of the time differences and keep a project moving forward. For mission-critical handoffs, you may want to supplement the portal with a conference call to exchange information during the shift change. Other technologies include webinars and elearning for conducting training, web cams for video conferencing, voice over IP (VoIP) for less expensive calls (though this isn’t available everywhere yet), and instant messaging for quick communication.
- **Implement and Use Repeatable Processes.** With multiple sites and cultures, process becomes even more important. You need to have agreement on how you will interact with each other, in order to reduce misunderstandings and frustrations. If you are working on a “version 1” type project, you can develop procedures based on best practices and tweak them as you go. In addition, you need to define roles and responsibilities very clearly. Hierarchy is more important in some cultures than in others, so clearly defining who’s doing what with whom and when will improve communication and team interaction.
- **Keep a “Beginner Mind”.** This is a Buddhist philosophy that essentially means to keep a clear, open mind and to maintain an attitude of learning. By approaching each person and situation as though they are your teachers, you gain far more from the experience than by dictating instructions or by assuming a stance.

By taking a few minutes early in the project to establish a rapport and to accommodate differences, you can save hours of time in misunderstandings and missed deadlines. While challenging, building an effective multi-site, multicultural team can be one of the most rewarding opportunities of your career.

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## Professor Grammar

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# Words That Cause Translation Problems

by Professor Grammar

Many companies translate their products into other languages. Writers of information that is translated should, and typically do, try to write information that is easier, quicker, and less expensive to translate.

But, think about the readers who are not professional translators. They might be reading our information in English, but English might be their second or even third language. Each of these readers must translate the writing individually, frequently when they are trying to perform a critical task or solve a problem. The Professor encourages all of you to think about this audience when developing technical information.

That is a long-winded introduction to a short list of words, which complicate translation because of their multiple meanings in English. Frequently, we intend one meaning when we write these words, but some readers (for whom English is not their first language) think we intend a different meaning. The result is that these readers find technical information unclear and difficult to parse. They must read sentences with these words more than once to figure out the meaning. Therefore, the Professor urges you to use the following words with care:

- as
- once
- since
- while

**As**--Avoid using in place of "because."

- **OK:** Your database can have as many columns as you want...
- **Not OK:** You cannot delete the file, as you do not have authority...
- **Instead:** You cannot delete the file because you do not have authority...

**Once**--Avoid using in place of "when" or "after."

- **OK:** You can issue the CREATE command only once per session...
- **Not OK:** Once the database is available, you can issue...
- **Instead:** When the database is available, you can issue...
- **Or:** After the database is available, you can issue...

**Since**--Avoid using in place of "because."

- **OK:** If you have created a table since you started the system... ("the time" is implied after "since")
- **Not OK:** Since you created the table, you have authority to...
- **Instead:** Because you created the table, you have authority to...

**While**--Avoid using in place of "although."

- **OK:** While the database is available, you can issue any command... (in this context, "while" means "during the time that")
- **Not OK:** While you do not have CREATE authority, you can still...
- **Instead:** Although you do not have CREATE authority, you can still...

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Copyright (c) 1996, 2005 by IBM Corporation. Used with permission. Professor Grammar is an advisor to the IBM Silicon Valley Laboratory Editing Council. Each month she sends a lesson to the technical writers at the Laboratory. Many of the Professor's lessons are based on tenets described in the Prentice-Hall book *Developing Quality Technical Information: A Handbook for Writers and Editors*, recently authored by the Council.

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# Newsletter



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## Society News: Events

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### B'Gorra! 'Tis Time to Register for the IPPC Conference

by IPPC 2005 Conference Committee

The IPPC conference is being held in lovely Limerick, Ireland on 10-13 July 2005.

#### Register Now

IEEE Professional Communication Society invites you to register now to attend IPCC 2005. Link directly to the registration page: <https://www.iccbookings.com/ipcc/registration.php>

#### See Featured Speakers

Dr. Reinhard Schäler, a noted localization expert, will deliver the keynote address. A number of outstanding invited speakers are on the program, together with more than a hundred others whose presentation proposals passed the selection process. You will see a broader range of communication-related topics than ever before at IPCC!

See the conference program preview (<http://ieeeps.org/limerick/conference.htm>).

A list of all the presenters and their affiliations will be posted on the web site this week.

#### Meet International Colleagues

The presenters are from all over the world, and represent a broad cross-section of engineers, managers, professional communicators, practitioners and academics. IEEE Engineering Management Society, INTECOM, ATTW, CPTSC, tekcom, and others will be represented.

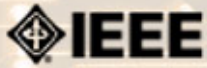
#### Become a Sponsor

Want to sponsor or co-sponsor the conference to draw attention to your company's services and products, or to your university's academic offerings? Link to <http://ieeeps.org/limerick/conference.htm#sponsors>.

#### Make Your Travel Plans

Shannon Airport is an easy destination from anywhere! Ireland is a beautiful, hospitable country to visit!

Limerick Travel will be happy to help you discover it. Here's their link: <http://www.letsgotravel.ie/>.



## Society News: Members

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### Luke Maki Wins IEEE-USA Professional Achievement Award

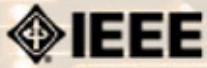
from IEEE-USA Awards Announcement

Congratulations to Luke Maki on winning the prestigious IEEE-USA Professional Achievement Award. Luke received this award "for significantly improving the IEEE-USA Committee on Communications and Information Policy's effectiveness and image in the technology policy areas of broadband communication and improved spectrum use".

According to the IEEE-USA Awards website, these awards are given to "recognize professionalism, technical achievement, and literary contributions to public awareness and understanding of the engineering profession. Award recipients are announced each year at a special Awards Ceremony held in conjunction with the annual IEEE-USA Leadership Workshop."







# Newsletter



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## Society News: Conferences

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### IEEE Conference Strategy Being Updated

by Luke Maki

If there is one thing IEEE is known for, it is conferences. Did you know that IEEE, each year...

- Sponsors or co-sponsors approximately 325 conferences worldwide?
- Provides event management services for approximately 1000 events?
- "Technically co-sponsors" (no financial sponsorship) another 150-200 conferences?
- Conducts about 500 small workshops or tutorials (mostly geographical meetings)?
- Produces over 450 Conference Proceedings?
- Serves over 100,000 conference attendees (about 50% members and 50% non-members)?

With such a volume of business, it is vital that a strategic plan for this portion of IEEE's business be developed, and re-visited periodically. Efforts began in 2004 to better understand the business, and to develop such a strategy. To date, several meetings have been held, with representation from most, if not all, Societies. The e-mail distribution list for this activity includes several PCS members, so we are well-represented.

Currently, six strategic goals have been proposed that need more discussion among the participants of this effort. A meeting in April is planned to further the work, and of course, there will be e-mail communications all along.

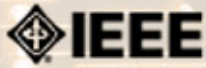
As the Meetings Chair for the PCS, Luke Maki has been involved in this effort, and will share outcomes in future issues of this newsletter. If you have any questions, [email](#) him.

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## President's Column

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### President's Column

by Eduardo Clark

#### The News

Late last year, I was approached by the then chair-elect of the IEEE Technical Activities Board (TAB), John Vig. He wanted to know if the Professional Communication Society (PCS) had the expertise to participate in recommending improvements to the TAB section of the IEEE Web site. I enthusiastically agreed and mentioned a couple of names of PCS AdCom members who have the required expertise. One of them, Beth Moeller, became quite involved in the effort. Well, the effort grew to involve the re-architecture of the whole IEEE site (some 13k pages, I understand). Now, Roger Grice, Beth Moeller -- both past presidents of PCS -- and I have been invited to participate on the ad-hoc committee that will oversee the effort, and I will be the committee chairperson.

If you have ever felt lost in the IEEE Web site, you might agree that the site needs better structuring, more logical navigation, and a better searching capability. The current search engine tends to return results that are neither timely nor strongly connected to the searched string. A member of the TAB mentioned that he couldn't find the IEEE copyright form on the IEEE site using the site's native engine. With Google, he found it, in a fraction of a second.

In February, I attended the first TAB meeting of the year in San Francisco as your voting representative. During the meeting, Roger did a presentation of the issues affecting usability of the IEEE Web site.

The next TAB meeting is in Chantilly, Virginia, in June. Right before the TAB-related meetings that normally start on a Friday, PCS will be the subject of a review in which conferences, membership, and publications will be audited. This is a five-year recurrent event for all IEEE societies.

In early March, I had an opportunity to visit MOS 13, a semiconductor fabrication facility for integrated circuits at Freescale Semiconductor (my employer) in Austin, Texas. MOS 13 is considered the cleanest fab in the world and features a great degree of automation in the manufacturing of wafers. From each wafer, the company can produce up to thousands of very large-scale of integration "chips"; the exact number produced depends on the size and complexity of the chip. I had to wear a "bunny suit", which is like an extreme surgical outfit that covers everything except your eyes. Safety glasses cover your eyes. The experience was truly unforgettable. I had a chance to visit the roof, the crawl space under the massive concrete structure, and the fabrication area itself, which is incredibly large, automated, and has lattice-type floors that allow circulation of the highly filtered air moved by thousands of networked fans.

#### This Month's Theme—Multicultural Projects

Well, I don't have much to contribute to the Newsletter's theme, but I can share my own experience with multiculturalism. The other day, I was browsing at a major electronics store (Fry's) looking at the new televisions and projecting systems, confused by the competing and expensive technologies available. On a projection-based system, there was an amazing performance with superb sound by a female singer whom I had never seen (although I had heard about). She sang in English and later in Spanish, although I couldn't understand much of either because of her yodeling in a Stitch-like voice

(as in Lilo and Stitch, for those of you who watch cartoons). I was so fascinated and intrigued by the performance that I had to ask a salesperson about what I was watching. Very conveniently, the performance was part of a music album being promoted in another part of the store, of Shakira. This Colombian singer is defined on her Web site, [www.shakira.com](http://www.shakira.com), as being multicultural, multilingual, and socially conscious. Wow, I remember when, not long ago, multicultural was not a compliment and bilingual used to mean: No habla inglés.

Well, I recommend her Live and Off the Record album from performances in Rotterdam (or RRRotterdam as she pronounces it). You can watch clips of her performance on the Web site I mentioned. Also, in some music stores, you can now listen to any of the music offered for free.

Regarding multicultural leadership, I was quite surprised by the news from *USA Today*, that Sony had ousted its (Japanese) leader. The subtitle of the story was “Japanese company names American CEO”. As it happened, Nobuyuki Idei stepped down as chief executive officer in favor of Welsh-born Sir Howard Stringer, who became a naturalized U.S. citizen in 1985 and was knighted by Queen Elizabeth in 1999. Apparently, Idei-san was not able to maintain the winning momentum that Akio Morita started in 1946 in a company then known as Tokyo Tsushin Kogyo or Tokyo Telecommunications Engineering Corporation.

Morita-san had had the vision to change the name of the company to Sony Corporation in 1958, with the idea that a name with international appeal wouldn't limit the scope to telecommunications. He went as far as writing Sony in katakana, which is normally used for words that are foreign to Japanese, instead of hiragana the native Japanese syllabary, or the much more complex Kanji inherited from China, which is normally used for proper nouns.

With the accession of Stringer to the CEO post, Sony is attempting to capture its former magic. Given Stringer's impressive achievements in the entertainment side of Sony, it is likely that Sony will succeed. Interestingly, according to the story, Idei-san said, “that the time was ripe to hand over the leadership to a new team to ensure Sony continues to grow as global company”. Notice that he said “team”, not mentioning Stringer.

Freescale, a seemingly all-American company, has a chief executive officer who is native of France, Michel Mayer. The vice-president of the Wireless and Mobile Systems group, where I work, is Franz Fink, a native of Germany. They both work in Austin, Texas in the office adjacent to mine. Finally, my manager, Mary Thomas, a former colleague of Roger Grice at IBM, is from India. Is that a multicultural corporate team, or what?



## Reviews

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### Book Review: Non-violent Communication: A Language of Life

by kit brown

While I have not read this entire book (though I've read excerpts), many many people have recommended it as a way to becoming more conscious in how we speak to others. Marshall Rosenberg is a world renowned clinical psychologist and peacemaker, who has taught these principles in many war-torn areas, from Africa to the Middle East, Ireland, and Bosnia. He is also the founder of the non-profit group, Center for Nonviolent Communication.

I perused some of the 30+ reviews for this book on [Amazon](#), and some common themes emerged:

- The book is very readable--almost too readable--because the concepts and actions require thought and conscious changes in behavior. The depth of what's being explained can be missed if you don't take the time to really think about the message.
- The examples and exercises sometimes sound a bit stilted and formulaic because the emotional context isn't available when simply reading the text. One reviewer recommended supplementing the text with a workshop so that you can practice the techniques.
- A key factor in successful nonviolent communication is the ability to set aside one's own schema, biases, and understanding of the situation. That old "Seek first to understand" axiom.

All in all, an important book that can help all of us become more conscious and compassionate in our everyday communication. Hmmm--maybe we should all send a copy to the world's leaders....

*Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Life: Create Your Life, Your Relationships, and Your World in Harmony with Your Values, 2nd Edition* by Marshall Rosenberg. 2003. Puddledancer Press. ISBN: 1892005034.



## Thinking Globally, Teaching Locally

### Examining Face, Culture, and Communication

by Kirk St. Amant

The concept of face – or external public appearance – is important to all cultural groups. Accordingly, communication behavior that contributes to or saves face is good, and actions that threaten face are bad. What constitutes acceptable “face behavior” in an exchange, however, differs along cultural lines. Such differences can, in turn, lead to problems in today’s global business environment.

In many international business situations, if one causes another to lose face, then the relationship between the two parties is ended. As a result, individuals could accidentally foil international business relationships by inadvertently jeopardizing the face of an overseas counterpart. This face-threatening behavior, moreover, often relates to how cultures expect others to present criticism or displeasure.

To help students appreciate face, culture, and communication, instructors from universities in different nations could work together in a particular online exercise. This activity would have students from two different cultures use online media to discuss a particularly “face threatening” situation.

Instructors would first divide both sets of students into teams of 2 or 3, and each team would be assigned a “partner team” or “business partner” from the other culture. All teams would be informed that they had just received a shipment of substandard product from an overseas business partner. (Each team would be assigned a different product.) Each team must now draft an email message that conveys their displeasure to that international partner in a way that also provides that partner with the opportunity to rectify the situation (i.e., save face). Each team would then send this message to its overseas partner team for review.

Instructors would then ask the recipients of these messages to perform the following tasks:

- Identify what the sender is trying to get the recipient to do.
- Comment on how effective that message would be in getting recipients to perform that task.
- Provide suggestions for how to better present such a critical request according to the cultural expectations of the recipients’ culture.

The results of these activities would then be shared among students from the same culture, and the instructor could facilitate a discussion on face, culture, and communication expectations.

The instructors overseeing this exercise could also compile notes or suggestions from this discussion and send them to their partner instructor. This partner could then share this information with his or her students. These “external discussion notes” could serve as a foundation for further discussions on how cultural differences of face could lead to communication problems.

This exercise helps students in the following ways:

- Learn the importance of face in relation to the communication expectations of other cultures.
- Examine how to revise messages to address different cultural perceptions of face.
- Realize how different perspectives of face can affect discourse among business partners.

To further expand student understanding of these issues, instructors could repeat this kind of exercise, using teams from different cultures than the initial exercise. Students could then compare how different cultures reacted to the same situation. Such comparison could reveal the degree to which face expectations can vary across cultures.

By understanding these factors, students can develop communication guidelines or protocols that set standards for how to convey certain kinds of information in international virtual teams. In so doing, they can improve the exchange of information in these teams.

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**Kirk St.Amant** is an Assistant Professor with the Department of English at Texas Tech University.

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## Ask the Expert

### Three Major Mistakes of Scientific Presentations

by Jean-luc Doumont

*What do you think are the three most important considerations for an effective scientific presentation? Contrarily, what are the three major mistakes presenters customarily make? --Jacqueline Mintz (New York)*

Scientists presenting their research work at a conference or other venue usually mean well, yet their presentations can be an impenetrable fog indeed. It is not that other professionals necessarily do better; public speaking is a difficult art for all. But when the subject matter is highly technical, the audience can more rapidly get discouraged. Here are three shortcomings I frequently witness on the part of scientists (and other presenters): trying to say too much, failing to reveal the structure of the presentation, and neglecting the beginning and end of it.

#### Simply Trying to Say Too Much

Scientists presenting at a conference typically report on a whole year of research in a mere 15 minutes: quite a challenge. As a result, most presenters simply try to cover too much detail, losing all but a few audience members in the process. These few--the experts in this very specific subject matter--are usually familiar with this content if they are up to date at all, so they hardly need it repeated. Numerous details thus serve only one person's need, that of the speaker trying to establish how incredibly clever (or painful) his research has been.

Beginners somehow believe they must mention in their presentation everything that is already written down in their proceedings paper. Not so, of course. Written documents are for conveying details accurately and lastingly. In contrast, oral presentations are for convincing an audience of key messages, not with detailed evidence, but with nonverbal communication.

#### Failing to Reveal the Structure

Most audience members "get lost" in a presentation, not because they lack the knowledge or intelligence to comprehend the content, but because they lack a map. Oral presentations indeed lack the numerous visual clues orienting the readers of written documents, such as paragraphs, headings, or page layout. Most speakers do show a preview of their presentation (the map), but one that is usually too detailed and shown too early, so it is hard to remember. Few, alas, include truly helpful transitions between points, indicating where they are on the map. Fewer still provide a recap of their main points before the conclusion (and those who did provide one eventually drop it because the chairperson said "two minutes left" about four minutes earlier).

The lack of structural clues and the sequential nature of slide shows too often make a well-built hierarchical structure look like a long, flat, undifferentiated path, one that will progressively disorient even the most attentive audience members.

#### Neglecting the Beginning and the End

Professionals involved in long-term work, as scientists often are, too easily lose sight of the motivation for their work and of the outcome of it--precisely what most audience members are primarily interested in, especially in a presentation. Above



all, they want to know the beginning and the end of the research story. Presentations that shun or under-develop both motivation and outcome, but jump at or stop with the work itself are self-centered, not audience-oriented.

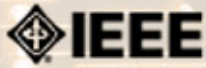
By failing to relate to their audience at the beginning and at the end of their presentations, speakers fail to make a strong first impression and a lasting last impression. Taking the audience for granted, most presenters start with their name and the title of their talk. This title, which can easily run on four lines on a slide, is often so intricate that it requires further and immediate explanation, perhaps even a few definitions of terms. How attention-getting can it be? Similarly, too many speakers end their presentation because they run out of time or run out of things to say. How carefully prepared does it look? Effective presentations start and end in a forceful, relevant, audience-oriented way.

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**Dr Jean-luc Doumont** teaches and provides advice on professional speaking, writing, and graphing. He also trains instructors and can facilitate any process that requires solid structuring and effective communication. For more than 15 years, he has helped audiences of all ages, backgrounds, and nationalities structure their thoughts and construct their communication, in English, French, Dutch, and Spanish. He is an engineer from the University of Louvain and a doctor in applied physics from Stanford University.

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## Editor's Column

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# Communication

by Kit brown

Isn't it funny how, at every project post-mortem you attend, the participants list communication as the biggest problem? And, it doesn't seem to matter that you had a centralized portal for the project info, held weekly project status meetings, discussed changes ad nauseum, and so on.

Despite my weekly horoscope's prediction to the contrary, this week has been full of "opportunities" to work on communicating effectively. Starting with a project post-mortem where I probably should have listened more and talked less, to babbling incoherently at a waitress when trying to order my food the other day, to losing my memory stick on a business trip (and I never lose things), to realizing that my flight for the US-TAG meeting leaves at 7 a.m. on the first day of daylight savings time (what was I thinking?!), and generally saying "Yes" when I should have said "No", this week has been crazy. Other people have felt it too, though it could just be the chaos field I seem to be generating lately.

At Winwriters last week, I had the opportunity to party with the Aussies, to practice my very rusty German on two very patient Germans who are also great dancers, and to learn more about politics from a South African living in the UK, a couple of Canadians, and a good-humored American whose views radically differ from mine. Despite the sometimes heated discussions about politics, our profession, and trends in business, we all respected each other enough to listen to all perspectives, even if we continued to disagree. In the end, I think we all learned something.

Which brings us to the theme for the month--multicultural project management. Like everything else, it all boils down to--you guessed it--communication. However, we can't just send out the information and assume that it is received in the manner it was intended. A key component of communication is closing the feedback loop--in other words, checking in with the recipient of the communication to ensure that the message was received and understood properly. As such, communication is an iterative process. Add the complexities of culture and language, and it's easy to see how a simple misunderstanding can ruin relationships and start wars.

By following the suggestions in this month's articles, and by always having the highest and best outcome as your intention, you can reduce miscommunication, and might even develop a greater understanding and appreciation of your colleagues and friends. My hope is that, as we set the example for effective communication across cultures, our efforts will ripple out to the larger citizenry and ultimately will enable humankind to act more kindly toward each other in daily interaction, and to work together as more effective stewards of Spaceship Earth.



## Tidbits

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### Bad English Spoken Here--And There

From National Public Radio (NPR)

Sheila Kast interviewed James Cochrane, the author of *Between You and I: The Little Book of Bad English*. This book provides many examples of how poor the English vernacular has become, particularly in the spoken word. [Listen...](#)

### Winwriters Conference

by Kit Brown

Bill Albing, Brenda Huettner, and I attended the [Winwriters Conference](#) last week in Las Vegas, NV. The conference was loaded with great information about tools, trends, and best practices. Among the tidbits:

- RoboHelp is no longer being supported by Macromedia. Several of the senior RoboHelp team members have founded MadCap Software, which will produce a help development tool called Flare. Look for it sometime this fall.
- DITA, developed by IBM and now available for download from [Oasis](#), shows real promise as a way of getting writers away from the print paradigm and into a more topic-based architecture.
- Wikis are capturing the imagination of many people as a great way to collaborate on projects and to share information. Bill set up a [Winwriters Wiki](#) so that we could write about our experiences. Check back over the next couple of weeks as we add more details.
- Bill Horton did a fun presentation on simple simulations that you can create on a tight budget.
- The trends panel, composed of Joe Welinske, Paula Berger, Matthew Ellison, Char James-Tanney, and Tony Self, provided a lively discussion of what's hot and what's not. What's hot included the movement from in-person training to elearning, subscription services for software, greater accommodation for multiple languages and locales withing applications, database-driven content, XML, and more refined searches.

Special thanks to Rudy Joenk for his contribution!



## Guidelines

# Newsletter Article Submission Guidelines

by **Kit Brown**

Submit articles by the 15th day the month before you want the article to appear. The newsletter is published monthly around the 1st of the month. The [editorial schedule](#) provides the proposed themes for each month. Additional suggestions are always welcome.

If you have questions, comments, or suggestions, please contact [Kit Brown](#).

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**Guidelines:** Moving the newsletter from a print to an electronic format has necessitated some changes in the submission guidelines. Please review the following information when submitting articles or regular columns to the newsletter:

- **Submit articles electronically in MSWord or RTF format to [pcsnews.editor@ieee.org](mailto:pcsnews.editor@ieee.org).** These formats are more easily available to me than other word processing applications.
- **Provide articles that are 200-700 words in length.** People tend to scan rather than read in an online environment. Short, well-written and relevant articles will be more beneficial to the audience than longer ones.
- **Provide a short bio (~25 words) and contact information.** Readers want to know about you. At a minimum, write a bio that tells your name, company, primary job title, email address and why this topic is of interest to you or what experience you have in the area you wrote about. (This doesn't count as part of your word count.)
- **Indicate whether the article is time sensitive.** Because of size considerations and editorial schedule, newsletter articles may not be published immediately upon submission, unless it is date critical (e.g., information about the upcoming conference or an article about a current event that relates to technical communication.)
- **Indicate copyright information if applicable.** If you own the copyright for an article, indicate this with your submission so that we can provide appropriate attribution. If you don't own the copyright, but think an article is interesting, provide the article, along with the contact information for the copyright holder and the name of the publication where it was originally published.
- **Insert the URL into the text so that I can easily create the link.** For example, if you want to reference the w3c, you would say "refer to the W3C (<http://www.w3c.org>) guidelines". Don't create the hyperlink in Word.
- **Provide complete bibliographic information for references.** Include author(s), title, date of publication, publisher, page numbers, or URL.
- **Use a friendly, casual tone.** We want to invite people to read and to make the information as accessible as possible.
- **Use 1-inch (2.54 cm) margins; don't indent paragraphs.** I have to reformat the text so it's better to minimize the formatting you include. Instead of indenting, put an extra line between paragraphs
- **Avoid using lots of formatting within the text.** I will have to format the articles for the online environment, so

don't put lots of bold and italic in the text.

- **Use subheadings generously.** Subheadings help the reader identify the information that is important to them. Subheads are especially helpful in orienting the reader in the online environment.
- **Use active voice and short sentences.** At least 40% of our audience is outside of N. America. For many members, English is their second (or third) language. Short sentences and active voice are easier to absorb and understand than complex sentence structures.
- **Avoid jargon and "big" words when a simpler term will work.** Approximately 90% of our audience is engineers who need to write effectively on the job. Avoid using writer's jargon, or explain the term in the context. By "big" words, I mean complicated, less commonly used words that may have the same or similar meaning to other, more commonly used words (e.g., instead of "obfuscate", just say "confuse").
- **Avoid idioms.** Idiomatic phrases are those colorful sayings we use to mean something else. For example, "once in a blue moon", "jump right in", "on the fly". Unfortunately, these sayings often have no equivalent in other languages, and can be difficult for non-native English speakers to interpret.
- **Submit graphics as JPGs or GIFs.** Web graphics need to be in one of these formats for most browsers. SVGs and PNGs are not yet universally accepted. If you want graphics included in your article, you need to give me the JPG. Don't just embed it in Word.

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# Newsletter



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## Guidelines

### Editorial Schedule for 2005

by **Kit Brown**

The following table shows the proposed themes for each issue through January 2006. If something particularly timely occurs during the year, these themes may change.

If you have questions, comments, or suggestions, please contact **[Kit Brown](#)**.

**Editorial Schedule for 2005**

Month	Theme
February	Electronic Publications
March	XML
April	Multi-site, Multicultural Project Management
May	Usability
June	Content Management
July	Caengail (KANG-guhl): Making Connections
August	Internationalization
September	Content Modeling
October	Writing and Editing in English
November	Working with SMEs
December	Proposals
January 2006	Trends

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