



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

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THE BEGINNINGS OF TECHNICAL COMMUNICATION

BY MICHAEL BRADY

In "Gordon the Guided Missile" (July/August issue), Joan Nagle champions editing (and the writer's tolerance of it) as a route to excellence in professional communication. Tales closer to the technical scene corroborate her contention.

The saying to which she refers was coined by British writer H. G. Wells, who once commented that "No passion in the world is equal to the passion to alter someone else's draft." Wells is perhaps most famed for *War of the Worlds*, his first science fiction novel, published in 1898.

Forty years thereafter, on Halloween of 1938, Orson Welles broadcast a dramatization of it on CBS radio. Many listeners mistook it for a real newscast. The reports of Martians "as high as skyscrapers" felling crowds with a deadly gas caused thousands to flee the streets in panic or drive madly out of cities. Roads, churches, and police telephones were jammed. Many people claimed that they had actually seen the Martians, even though four announcements were made during the broadcast that the program was science fiction. This incident proves that communication can convince.

Shortly after that broadcast, efficient technical communication became part of the fighting of the real World War II. In most cases, the wartime problem was one of volume and speed, as much had to be said, taught, and written quickly about technologies that had only been developed in the 1930s. In the case of radar, the technology was so new that its users had no prior knowledge of it. The problem was dealt with in ways that arguably spawned the art of professional communication, and ultimately groups such as the PCS.

For the first time, documentation of the product became nigh as important as the product itself. The MIT Radar School, established in 1941, set a precedent for technical training. The 28-volume MIT Radiation Laboratory Series of technical texts, edited after the war by Louis N. Ridenour, set a *de facto* standard for comprehensive technical documentation. In late 1943, the MIT Radiation Laboratory had also solved a communication problem in a way that then was hearsay in technical circles, but again proved prophetic.

The problem was how to communicate the facts of radar to its users, as radar itself evolved. The U.S. Air Command requested the laboratory to publish a journal titled *Radar* (then stamped Confidential), aimed at air crews who were using radar to gain the air superiority so crucial to winning the war. The laboratory's engineers and scientists were busy developing radar, so who should write and edit *Radar*? Could an engineer or scientist be taught the requisite rhetorical skills quickly enough to meet the need? Or could a skilled writer and editor learn the technology well enough to serve the journal?

The laboratory reasoned that a writer would be best and accordingly headhunted author Dexter Masters of The Board of Economic Warfare in Washington for the position. Masters came from a writing family: He was the nephew of Edgar Lee Masters, best known for *Spoon River Anthology*, the classic satire of life in the U.S. midwest. And he came with a writer's curiosity. He served well. In all, 11 issues of *Radar* were published under his editorship, from April 1944 to September 1945.

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BEGINNINGS OF TECHNICAL COMMUNICATION

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Masters had proved that writing and editing skills can contribute to technology. And in so doing, he had acquired skills that were to have lasting impact. His major postwar book was *The Accident*, a chilling fictionalized recounting of the accident of May 21, 1946, that took the life of Los Alamos Scientific Laboratory scientist Louis Soltin.

On that day, Soltin and seven others had been working at the Omega Site, some four miles from the main compound at Los Alamos. They were performing a "crit test" in advance of the Operation Crossroads test to take place at Bikini Atoll a few weeks later. The test involved assessing the viability of the core of a plutonium bomb by bringing two halves of a beryllium sphere close enough to each other to convert the plutonium to a critical state.

Though he had successfully performed the test a dozen times, this time Soltin slipped as he manipulated the halves. The assembly went critical; a blue glow enveloped the room, and Soltin knew that he had received a lethal dose of radiation. His death, in a matter of days, became a scientific test attended by experts from around the country.

First published in 1955, *The Accident* portrayed the pathos of the incident so well that the *New York Times* lauded it as "excellent, provocative and intellectually exciting." It is still available in paperback, published by Faber & Faber, 1987 (ISBN 0-571-14866-2) and by Penguin, 1985 (ISBN 0-1400776-6). It's an engrossing book as well as a hallmark work by one of the unsung founders of the art now practiced by the members of the PCS.

Bogosity/boh-go'se-tee/*n.* 1. The degree to which something is bogus. At CMU [Carnegie Mellon University], bogosity is measured with a **bogometer**; in a seminar, when a speaker says something bogus, a listener might raise his hand and say, "My bogometer just triggered." More extremely, "You just pinned my bogometer" means you just said or did something so outrageously bogus that it is off the scale, pinning the bogometer needle at the highest possible reading (one might also say, "You just redlined my bogometer"). The agreed-upon unit of bogosity is the microLenat (a reference to noted computer scientist Doug Lenat); the consensus is that this is the largest practical unit for everyday use. 2. The potential field generated by a **bogon flux**; see **quantum bogodynamics**. See also **bogon flux**, **bogon filter**, **bogus**.

— *The New Hacker's Dictionary* compiled by Eric S. Raymond

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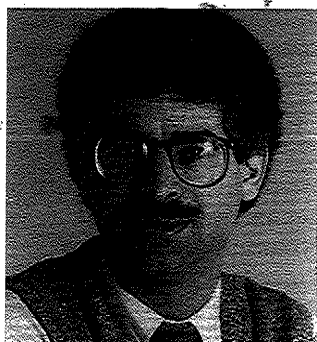
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PRESIDENT'S COLUMN



MARK HASELKORN

MEMBER FEEDBACK ON NAME CHANGE

In a recent column, I promised to share with you the responses I've received regarding a proposed Society name change (see May/June issue). For those of you who like to keep score, I received 10 comments from non-AdCom members; six in favor and four against. I wouldn't take this score very seriously since even if you add these 10 to the 21 opinions of AdCom members, we still have only one percent of PCS membership represented. I do, however, take seriously the various ideas expressed in these 10 responses, and I want to share some of them with you because they can further our discussion of the essential identity and mission of our Society.

Favorable comments were usually brief and then moved on to some other aspect of PCS. For example, Harbans Nakra stated, "I agree with your arguments regarding name change and will support the change when asked." He then went on to volunteer his participation in our proposed "Conversation" on virtual organizations.

Bill Albing said, "There is a real profession called technical communication, and while the title is a little long and clumsy, changing the name of the Society seems like a natural thing to do." He then went on to explore possible collaboration between PCS and STC in a number of areas, including ethics.

In the course of e-mail on her efforts as Publications Chair of the 1997 IEEE Conference on Intelligent Transportation Systems (PCS is a co-founding and sponsoring Society), Emily Sopensky wrote, "I liked... renaming the Society. Professional Communication is very broad. Not that I'm enamored of Technical Communication, but it is better." (For more information on this conference, see page 6 or access the Web page <http://engine.ieee.org/itsc/itsc97/>) In a similar vein, Michael Little wrote, "I agree that a name change for the Society is a good thing as it gives more focus to what you are really about. 'Professional Communication' is far too vague and broad...."

Finally, Dan Jackson wrote, "After reading... the May/June [column] I came to the conclusion that a change in name probably is desirable. I believe the name 'Professional Communication Society' was selected originally to differentiate the PCS from the 'Communications Society'.... As other organizations have used the term 'Technical Communication' to make this differentiation, perhaps 'technical' is a more acceptable term and makes it clearer to others what the Society is about."

Unfavorable comments tended to be longer and many were concerned about potential confusion with the Society for Technical Communication. (Interestingly, STC is also currently involved in discussions that are likely to result in a name change that would resolve this issue.)

Like Dan Jackson, former PCS president James Hill also looked at the origin of our current name, but to argue against change. "I believe [PCS] was originally the IEEE Engineering Writing Society. The substitution of 'Communication' for writing, editing, A-V, etc. was a useful one, and I believe it helped members to spread their interests into realms other than writing. The substitution of 'Professional' for engineering or technical probably helped many writers overcome the fear they had of working or speaking out in an engineering or technical environment. Besides, 'IEEE' says it all.... I believe the substitution of 'Technical' for 'Professional' would be a step backward...."

Other negative responders found "professional" to be of a higher order or more encompassing than "technical." For example, Jack Friedman wrote, "I define 'professional' as a degreed person with experience in a technical or business field.... In simpler terms, the difference between an engineer and a technician or between an accountant and a bookkeeper would be examples of professional vs. technical."

And Vishal Sharma, our new student activities coordinator, wrote that "the term 'professional communication' encompasses the entire area of technical communication

E-mail and far more sophisticated applications of the Internet are basic tools of today's technical communicator.

and then some... it is communication done by professionals (from any area, not necessarily engineering alone)... it is communication done in a 'professional' way... it is communication done in the course of professional activities... given the Society's broad scope, which extends beyond technical communication, I still feel that we should stay with our name...."

For me, the most provocative comments were the highly negative ones of R. L. Nailen, who expressed a number of dissatisfactions with my column. First, "... your obvious assumption that everyone who might read the column is able to contact you via e-mail.... This is thoughtless at best; arrogant at worst." Second, "... you list the names of three other journals and describe them as 'competitors of our *Transactions*.' In what way do they 'compete?' Obviously not for advertising; surely not for content. What accounts for this unfortunate tendency towards paranoia?"

And finally, "... you contend that we are 'equal professionals in the increasingly interdisciplinary engineering endeavor,' and not 'a service organization.' How is that to be interpreted? I happen to be a graduate electrical engineer, a state-licensed professional engineer, and a technical journalist who has authored hundreds of published articles, numerous papers, and several books. In all of those capabilities, I am quite content to be characterized as a provider of 'service' and of an 'advisory function.' What do you find so disturbing about such descriptions?"

It is important that I address these three comments.

When I reviewed the first comment about e-mail, I realized that much depends on what R. L. Nailen means by "is able." If this means that the economics of the Internet make it difficult for our retired or unemployed members to have access to e-mail, then I am completely sympathetic, apologize, and will work to see that PCS/IEEE meets this need by helping to provide this service.

If, however, this means that it is unreasonable to expect that a PCS member regularly uses e-mail, then my concern is quite

different. As one of the two current IEEE President-Elect candidates said in the last issue of *The Institute*, "My highest priority is to work with members to enable their capacity to respond to rapid change in the way the world now works."

E-mail and far more sophisticated applications of the Internet are basic tools of today's technical communicator, just as the slide rule was once a basic tool of the mechanical engineer. If we are to represent the state of the art in our field, we certainly must expect technical communicators to be using the basic tools.

The second comment about competitive "paranoia" is also worth considering. In the past, our field has suffered from, if not paranoia, then at least a healthy inferiority complex. I have often cringed through IPCC presentations that bemoaned a work environment where technical communicators suffer from insufficient resources, authority, and impact. The presenters seemed to assume that our colleagues from other fields, either conspiratorially or ignorantly, had failed to grant technical communication its just due. Perhaps these presenters were "paranoid"; perhaps the field simply needs to grow up.

In any case, these presenters fail to recognize the highly interdisciplinary environment in which we now work, that ours is one of many professions collaborating on equal footing in that environment, and that as professionals we have both responsibilities and requirements that are needed to perform our roles. So "paranoia" is something that our field should not take lightly; however, there is nothing "paranoid" about the ongoing competition among technical communication journals for quality articles. Ask any current or previous *Transactions* editor and you'll find that the hardest part of the job is acquiring a sufficient number of quality submissions. We simply have too many journals competing for too few publishable papers.

The third comment about service is perhaps the most provocative and I have heard it expressed by many others. While individual technical communicators can take the position that the quality of their work is measured by the quality of the service they provide, this is a very damaging

(continued on page 6)

*Ours is one of many
professions collaborating
on equal footing in
interdisciplinary
environments.*

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.

We have a great opportunity to confuse people by choosing inappropriate words.

PC—SILLY OR NOT?

In a recent issue of the newsletter of the South Carolina chapter of STC, president John Shipman quoted Francis Bacon:

"The ill and unfitting choice of words wonderfully obstructs the understanding."

I've been thinking about this. Did Bacon use (choose) the word *wonderfully* because in the 16th/17th century, when he wrote, it meant "in a manner to cause wonder," something like the way we use *awfully* today? That is, was it just an intensifier for obstructs?

Or did he mean...and I like to think of it this way...that we have a really great opportunity here to confuse people by choosing inappropriate words?

We do, of course. In English, we have a broad choice of words to describe most concepts. Take the concept of *problem*, for example. Some synonyms are *issue*, *question*, *difficulty*, *manifestation*.

But there are fine distinctions of meaning here, and even finer shades of effect on the reader. *Difficulty* gives the reader a more negative effect than the innocuous neutral *issue*. If we want to arouse or alert readers, we'll choose *difficulty* over *issue*, *problem* over *question*. If we want to minimize the reader's concern, we'll go the other way.

Certain words and phrases are "loaded"; that is, they carry connotations in addition to their denotations. The phrase *Form 1040* denotes merely a certain piece of paper (which could in fact be one used in or distributed by almost any organization). But it has, for U.S. readers, a specific meaning and a strong affective value. It may connote big government, a citizen's duties, a super difficult task, financial pain, or the joyous possibility of a refund —

depending on our personal experience and belief system.

Connotation can be hidden argument. A news magazine or newspaper might, for instance, quote a politician with whom it disagrees by saying that he "burbled" or "muttered."

Those whom the publication supports would always "assert" or "declare." In fact, Newt Gingrich's GOPAC sent out a list, a few years ago, of words recommended for use by conservatives when speaking of liberal democrats. The list included "pathetic," "offensive," and "sick."

Which brings us to the politically correct. Which has come to be a synonym for silly.

The amazing accomplishments of an Atlantan, blind from birth, were described in a recent newspaper article. She said, "I used to be blind. Then I was vision impaired, now I'm visually disadvantaged. But I can't see any better than I could when I was blind."

(This reminds me of the response of jazz pianist George Shearing to a woman who asked, "Have you been blind all your life?" He answered, "Not yet!")

Politically correct, as a concept, is pretty silly. Like gender neutral. It is only important when it "obstructs the understanding." When we write, "All men entering the containment must wear protective clothing," we give readers to understand that only men enter containments, and possibly exclude women from certain jobs. When we use the term *deaf and dumb*, some readers may understand *dumb* as stupid, rather than as unable to speak. Ill and unfitting word choices, these.

What is not silly is sensitivity, to our subjects and our readers.

Even if you're on the right track, you'll get run over if you just sit there.

— Will Rogers

PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

(continued from page 4)

It is inaccurate and self-deprecating to refer to our role as "service."

position for an organization that represents an entire field. Why is the collaboration between a technical communicator and an electrical engineer any different than that between a computer scientist and an electrical engineer, or between a civil and an electrical engineer? We do not provide service in the way that a travel agent does. We collaborate, as do most professionals who participate in the increasingly interdisciplinary activities that constitute modern engineering.

The roles of technical communicators have been greatly enhanced by rapid advances in

information and communication technology, but these advances have also greatly increased the required skill level and the demands on people seeking to acquire that expertise. Today, technical communicators are as likely to manage more traditional engineers as they are to be managed by them. Our work environment is changing rapidly, and we are one of numerous fields meeting on equal footing with the shared mission of using information and information technology to improve people's lives. It is inaccurate and self-deprecating to refer to our role as "service."

FIRST IEEE ITS CONFERENCE

To help set a sound technical basis for the future of transportation in this country and globally, the first IEEE conference on Intelligent Transportation Systems (ITS) was recently announced by E. Ryerson Case, chair of the IEEE Intelligent Transportation Systems Committee (ITSC). The conference will be November 9-12, 1997, in Boston.

Mr. Case also announced that Lyle Saxton, a long-time national leader in ITS, is chairing this strategic conference. Spanning many of the engineering disciplines under IEEE's umbrella, ITS is now a major focus in evolving surface transportation systems. With increased emphasis on personal mobility and the rise in traffic congestion, solutions to the problems created by crowded highways are being developed by engineers and companies dedicating their resources to ITS.

The purpose of the conference is to bring together the leading technical experts in all fields involved in ITS to explore leading-edge advances in these fields and to clarify the challenges that lie ahead for transportation in all Societies.

The ITSC, a standing committee with membership from established IEEE Societies, was organized in 1994 to provide a single focus for ITS activities. Its members include the IEEE Societies that are sponsoring the conference: Aerospace and Electronic Systems; Antennas and Propagation; Communications; Consumer Electronics; Control Systems; Electron Devices; Industrial Electronics; Microwave Theory and Techniques; Power Electronics; Professional Communication; Robotics and Automation; Signal Processing; Systems, Man and Cybernetics; and Vehicular Technology.

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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.

Leave them with your main message ringing in their ears.

PREPARING OUTSTANDING PRESENTATIONS

Part 5 — The Summary

In this series, I have described a universal presentation structure consisting of introduction, body, and summary. Parts 3 and 4 discussed the introduction and the body in detail. This time, we'll see how to close the presentation with an effective summary.

The Final Minute

Your summary simply is a restatement of your main message and your key points. If you can manage to add an interesting final thought or a "call to action," your closing will be even stronger. The whole thing should take no more than a minute. Here's an example:

In summary, every manager in this department should begin holding weekly one-on-one meetings with his or her staff members. This will reduce misunderstandings, increase morale, and create an atmosphere of trust and real teamwork. I urge you to move on this immediately so we can stem the tide of complaints, rumors, and on-the-job conflicts. And now I'd be happy to answer any questions you might have.

Error #1: Skipping the Summary

One of the most common problems in a presentation is running out of time—either because you underestimated the length of your speech or because your time allowance suddenly was shortened. At this point, many speakers fly into a frenzy, rushing through their remaining overheads—and almost always skipping the summary.

This is a big mistake. Don't ever omit the summary. Instead, be prepared to shorten your presentation by condensing parts of the body.

There are three very good reasons for always summarizing. First, as I mentioned

at the beginning of this series, there is a well established rule of thumb: The audience takes in only about one-third of what you say. So, if you want to make sure everybody has heard your main points at least once, you need to state them three times—and the summary is a natural place for the final repetition.

Second, you want to deliver the main message when the audience is naturally most attentive—and that is at the beginning and at the end of your presentation, as I explained in Part 2.

Third, you want to leave them with your main message still ringing in their ears. Since the last thing you say is always freshest in people's memory, you should make that last thing your main message and not some minor part of the body.

Error #2: Outstaying Your Welcome

I said earlier that the summary should take no more than a minute. Many speakers violate this rule—and they pay for their mistake with a loss of goodwill, even if their total time is right on target.

The reason for the one-minute limit is simple: Mental exhaustion. When you say the magical words "In conclusion" or "In summary," the audience shifts into "high-attention gear." Unfortunately, they can maintain this high level only for a minute or so; after that, they crash.

Think of them as sprinters going for the final 10-yard dash. You can't suddenly move the finish line by 50 yards as they approach! They'll either collapse or just stop and walk off the track, crying foul. Your audience is just like that.

So, do summarize—but don't spoil your last impression by outstaying your welcome!

"We've got a strong candidate. I'm trying to think of his name."

—Senator Christopher Dodd

CALL FOR PAPERS

IPCC 97

CROSSROADS IN COMMUNICATION

Salt Lake City, Utah (at Snowbird Resort) ■ October 22-24, 1997

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 following topics, or on 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

Communicating (The Skills We Need)

- Multicultural and international communication
- Minimalist documentation and training
- Modular and reusable documentation
- Collaboration between technical communicators and engineers
- Virtual organizations (how they make decisions)

Designing (Accommodating Technology to the User)

- Web page and Web site design
- Instructional design
- Visual design
- User interface design
- Usability testing of the product and the documentation

Research and Methodology (The Knowledge That Supports Us)

- Trends in technology
- Integrating new technologies
- Using multimedia in online documentation
- Using Web-based texts differently from other online texts
- Changing the role of the technical communicator

About the Theme

This year IEEE PCS and ACM SIGDOC are hosting a joint conference. Our shared theme is "Crossroads in Communication." We are at the crossroads in many ways:

1. Downsizing is causing many people to leave full-time jobs for a life of contracting.
2. Online documentation is slowly challenging print as the dominant documentation media.
3. Tighter product and document integration is enabling many communicators to participate in usability testing and interface design.
4. Changing job roles are leading many engineers to produce more documentation.

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; published in the conference proceedings
- **Workshop**—A tutorial including 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 your proposal a short bibliography 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 proposal to:

Rob Houser and Scott DeLoach, Program Chairs
1809 Montrose Parkway
Norcross, GA 30092
(770) 623-7241 • (770) 813-3963 fax
rob.houser@atlantaga.ncr.com

Check the IPCC 97 Web page at: <http://www.ieee.org/pcs/pcsindex.html>

SUMMARY OF THE JUNE AdCOM MEETING

BY LAUREL GROVE

The PCS AdCom met on June 7 and 8, at Snowbird, Utah, the site of IPCC 97. One of the highlights of the meeting was a tour of the facilities that PCS will be using in 1997. Linda Kosmin expressed her pleased surprise that a ski resort would have such good handicapped facilities; despite the resort's being nestled in mountains, access for wheelchairs is good. Others were impressed by the environmental efforts being made by the resort.

A Request for Proposals (RFP) for *Transactions* editing was approved (see page 10). The contract it results in will lighten the editor's burden and should help improve the content and quality of the *Transactions* by putting the effort on a professional basis, rather than requiring that it be a labor of love. Options for improving production are also being examined. The RFP is being sent to universities with technical communication programs and published on the PCS Web page.

The first AdCom meeting for 1997 will be held by teleconference. The resulting savings will be determined and used to subsidize AdCom meetings later in the year. Related cost-cutting measures being considered are concentrating meetings at airline hubs and reducing the number of members in the AdCom.

Revisions to the Constitution were again a major topic. Clarification of the Society's mission was necessary. The consensus was that PCS should recognize itself as assisting its members in two core competencies: the effective use of technology in communication, and creation of and capable functioning in multidisciplinary teams. Stephanie Rosenbaum pointed out that the Society could pride itself on being a place where engineers and communicators meet as peers.

While IPCC 96 is almost here and plans for IPCC 97 are nearing completion, Ron Blicq and his committee for IPCC 98 in Quebec are also making good progress. The conference will be held concurrently with SIGDOC. Ron is preparing a series of newsletter articles describing the process.

The AdCom meeting lasted two days to allow time to brainstorm ideas for helping the Society grow and improving services to members. Many of the ideas require approval by IEEE's Technical Activities Board or more information about costs. AdCom members are continuing to look into such possibilities as simplifying the membership application process, publishing position vacancies on the Web page, and developing the core competencies concept.

The efforts of Vishal Sharma as coordinator for student activities were applauded. Vishal has developed an active student Web site and is working on such ideas as an organization based on the model of "clubs" used in other societies and development of "virtual chapters."

A sad conclusion to the meeting was Linda Kosmin's resignation from the AdCom. Her other professional commitments have stretched her too thin to complete her term, which expires in 1997.

The next AdCom meeting will be a full-day meeting, held in Saratoga Springs on the Saturday after IPCC 96. Topics include AdCom elections, the PCS Constitution, and the charter of the Marketing Committee. All members are welcome to attend.

Looking for Volunteers

Membership Chair Laurel Grove asked that any members attending IPCC 96 help out at the membership table if they can. Even if you can't, look out for new people attending the conference and help make sure they enjoy it.

The Editorial Advisory Committee is looking for help in developing guidelines for designing, producing, and distributing IPCC proceedings. If you would like to help on this project, please contact Rudy Joenk (r.joenk@ieee.org).

The time to start planning IPCC 99 is already arriving. If you have ideas and suggestions for that conference, or any other, please contact Meetings Chair Roger Grice (r.grice@ieee.org). If you're hesitant about jumping in, watch for Ron Blicq's newsletter articles on preparations for IPCC 98.

*Cost cutting,
Transactions manage-
ment, Constitution,
student activities...*

REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS

PROFESSIONAL COMMUNICATION SOCIETY OF THE
INSTITUTE OF ELECTRICAL AND ELECTRONICS ENGINEERS

Editorial Home for the IEEE Transactions on Professional Communication

SUMMARY

The *IEEE Transactions on Professional Communication* is the primary journal of the Professional Communication Society (PCS) of the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers (IEEE). The *Transactions* is a refereed, archival journal, published quarterly. Because it is a leading journal in the field of technical communication and perhaps the most visible activity of PCS, we must maintain extremely high standards while complying with the policies of the IEEE. To support this goal, PCS is seeking applications from public and private sector organizations to become the editorial home of the *Transactions*.

- ☐ Proposals in response to this notice will be assessed using the selection criteria set forth below to determine (1) the proposer's potential for producing a high quality journal in the field of technical communication; (2) the proposed editorial team's ability to meet page count requirements and publication schedules; (3) the responsiveness of the proposed management plan to the needs of PCS and IEEE; and (4) the appropriateness of the relationship proposed with PCS.
- ☐ The award resulting from this RFP will be for a period of three years, with responsibility for the *Transactions* beginning with the March 1998 issue and ending with the December 2000 issue.

DATES

Proposals to be the editorial home of the *Transactions* must be received by 6 p.m., M.S.T., on November 1, 1996.

- ☐ The winning proposal will be selected by the PCS Administrative Committee (board of directors) and all respondents will be notified by January 1, 1997.
- ☐ Planning and recruiting for a given issue of the *Transactions* typically begin up to a year before the publication date, and the production cycle typically begins four months before the publication date, so the proposed editorial team will need to be in place by mid-1997.

TASK INFORMATION

PCS is eager to see creative applications that will produce a lasting, fruitful relationship between the Society and the successful proposer. Following is information to help produce such a proposal.

- ☐ **Editorial Responsibilities:** In the past, the editor has been responsible for planning issues; securing previously unpublished material; establishing and managing a system for peer reviewing; editing material; making final editorial decisions; appointing and supervising associate editors; coordinating with IEEE production services; and managing expenses. He or she is an ex-officio member of the PCS Administrative Committee.

Proposals should specify the proposer's plan for management of the editorial functions of the *Transactions*. While we are open to creative management plans, PCS expects that a single individual will have final responsibility for all functions, and that this individual will be of sufficient stature in the field of technical communication to be an effective editor.

- ☐ **Page Count:** For 1998, PCS anticipates budgeting a yearly *Transactions* page count of 320 pages (80 pages per issue). The IEEE penalizes PCS for failure to meet the budgeted page count.
- ☐ **Camera-ready Copy:** PCS does not require that the response to this RFP include a plan for producing camera-ready copy, but because camera-ready copy reduces IEEE production costs, a commitment to delivering camera-ready copy would be seen as favorable.

RESOURCES

PCS will: (1) provide the selected organization up to \$20,000 per year (i.e., four successive quarterly issues) to be spent at the discretion of the editor, (2) cover all production, marketing, subscription, and shipping costs for the *Transactions*, and (3) provide expertise and guidance through the Editorial Advisory Committee.

- ☐ **Overhead Expenses:** No indirect cost overhead will be allowed on the \$20,000 yearly award.
- ☐ **Matching Funds:** PCS anticipates that the successful proposing organization will contribute to the *Transactions* editorial effort. Matching contributions can take many forms, including donated time, facilities, and services.
- ☐ **Payment Schedule:** Due to the considerable interval between the initial planning and the distribution of an issue, the payment schedule is negotiable, and the organization's preferences should be included in the proposal.

SELECTION CRITERIA

Following are criteria that will be used in selecting the new editorial home of the *Transactions*:

1. Stature, expertise, and commitment of the proposed editor.
2. Commitment and stature of the proposing organization.
3. Expertise and commitment of the proposed editorial team.
4. Soundness of the management plan.
5. Soundness of the plan for linkage between the editorial team and PCS.
6. Likelihood of increasing quality of articles.
7. Likelihood of meeting page count.
8. Likelihood of meeting schedules.
9. Likelihood of delivering camera-ready copy.
10. Effective use of funding.
11. Any other aspects of the proposal that will increase quality, decrease cost, or otherwise contribute to the international stature and efficient production of the *Transactions*.

ADDRESS

Proposals should be submitted to:

Dr. Rudy Joenk, chair of the PCS Editorial Advisory Committee,
2227 Canyon Blvd. #462, Boulder, Colorado 80302-5680.

For further information contact:

Dr. Joenk at that address, or phone (303) 541-0060, or send e-mail to r.joenk@ieee.org.

It may also be useful to check the PCS Web site, <http://www.ieee.org/pcs/pcsindex.html>

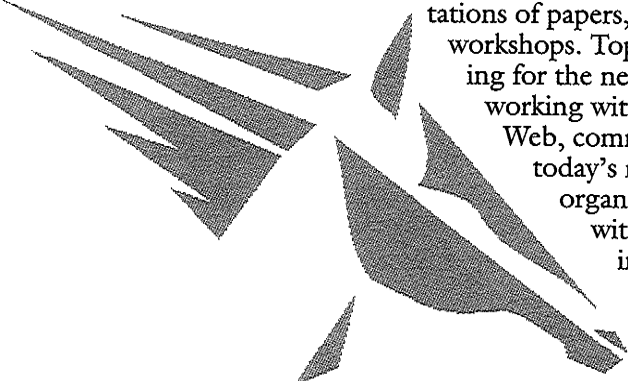
PROPOSAL ISSUED: June 15, 1996

JOIN US TRACKSIDE IN SARATOGA SPRINGS FOR IPCC 96

Time is drawing near for IPCC 96. The three-day international professional communication conference (September 18-20) offers a range of technical sessions, social events, and networking opportunities to entice you to come to Saratoga Springs.

If you have already registered for the conference, we look forward to seeing you there. If you have not yet registered, here's one last reminder of what you have to look forward to at the conference. We hope that this reminder will encourage you to register and start making your travel plans.

Technical Sessions



Three days of technical sessions—presentations of papers, panel discussions, workshops. Topics include preparing for the next millennium, working with the World Wide Web, communicating in today's rapidly changing organizations, dealing with downsizing, finding and using online information, lessons learned from instructional and electronic media, editing, improving the quality of communication, and much more.

Keynote luncheon address by internationally known communicator and educator Edmond Weiss: "From Talmud Pages to Web Browsers: A Brief History of Rhetorically Neutral Documents." Always interesting, usually provocative, Ed will offer us insights into where we're headed and how we can impact our futures.

Social Events

Welcome reception, Tuesday evening, September 17. A chance to relax, unwind, and meet your fellow conference attendees—and to sneak a preview of next year's conference: IPCC 97, to be held at Snowbird resort at Salt Lake City, Utah.

- RPI reception, Wednesday evening, September 18. A chance to meet people from RPI's department of Language, Literature, and Communication and talk with them—and each other—about our profession.

- IPCC 96 at the Races, Thursday evening, September 19. Join us for an evening of harness racing at Saratoga Raceway. Tickets for this activity are \$15 per person and include transportation to the track, admission to the grandstand, and snack.

- Adirondack Balloon Festival, September 20-22. Balloons will be going up at 5:00 p.m. on Friday at Adirondack Community College (in nearby Glens Falls) and then very early Saturday and Sunday mornings from the Glens Falls airport.

- The Masie Center, Thursday, September 19. A program tour with an hour-long Q & A. Elliot Masie is very involved in training, usability, and distance education from the corporate perspective.

Networking Opportunities

- Continental breakfast each morning—an opportunity to talk with fellow conference attendees and get going before the program sessions start.
- Keynote luncheon, Thursday, September 19. An opportunity to hear Edmond Weiss and to talk some more with your fellow conference attendees.

Visit Us on the Web!

For the latest information on IPCC 96 between now and the conference, be sure to check out our Web site:

<http://www.ieee.org/pcs/confrnce.html>
(That's right: it's "confrnce" not "conference".)

You can also review more information about Saratoga Springs at its Web site:

<http://www.saratoga-springs.com>

See you in Saratoga Springs!

*Edmond Weiss, RPI,
Elliot Masie, harness
racing, networking...*

CAN YOU HELP US REMEMBER OUR PAST?

In 1997 the IEEE Professional Communication Society
will celebrate its

40TH ANNIVERSARY!

We're looking for memorabilia of many kinds from any and all of the years from 1957 to the present:

- Analyses of published material (then and now, or in between)
- Anecdotes
- Copies of early minutes and *Newsletters*
- Descriptions of events (meetings, conferences, parties, etc.)
- Highlights of our four decades
- Leads to former members who might have a story to tell
- Personal reminiscences
- Photographs
- Spin-off of the Society for Scholarly Publishing
- Stories (true, of course) about past leaders
- Summaries or overviews of particular years or decades

We are planning to have a special section in the March 1997 *Transactions* for items about our publishing history—content, noteworthy papers, editors, books. Throughout the year, or perhaps in a special issue, the *Newsletter* will feature items about the Society and its people.

If you have something to contribute—even if you don't fancy yourself an author—please send it to or communicate with:

Dr. Rudy Joenk
2227 Canyon Blvd. #462
Boulder, CO 80302-5680
(303) 541-0060
r.joenk@ieee.org

All contributions will be acknowledged, and returned if desired.

STUDENT WRITING CONTESTS UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

The IEEE Student Chapter at the University of California, Santa Barbara, recently co-sponsored the 1996 Student Writing Contest with the STC's Santa Barbara Chapter. The contest attracted more than 40 entries from a number of departments, including engineering and the sciences.

Prize winners are all smiles as they receive congratulations from STC Santa Barbara President Jerry Bradley.

A unique feature of the contest was that it had its own WWW page (<http://www.spetses.ece.ucsb.edu/~vishal/contest.html>) that was linked to the Web pages of all engineering departments at UCSB, and

also had announcements under the "News" section in the computer systems of several departments.

This pilot project helped to demonstrate how PCS partnership with societies that have a similar focus can be valuable in reaching out to a wide student audience.

Prize Winners

First Place (tie)

Stephanie Lockwood, "Programmer Friendly Image Library: A Tool to Reduce Programming Errors."

Wesley R. Strong, "Shape Discrimination and Visual Predatory Tactics in White Sharks, *Carcharodon Carcharias*."

Second Place

Eric Vanek, "Remote Sensing Techniques for the Analysis of Antarctic Ice."

Third Place

Russell Benaroya, Paul Ha, Jose Rodriquez, Keri Peterson; "Price Costco Expansion."



PHILADELPHIA

The PCS Philadelphia Chapter awarded prizes to three winners of the Student Writing contest during the section's annual Student Night held on April 9, 1996.

Jonathon Birge of Swarthmore College won first prize for his paper "Design and Analysis of an External Combustion Commuter Vehicle." Camillo Gentile of Drexel University won second prize for his paper "Stereo Vision and Depth Maps." Evan Dorn of Swarthmore College won

third prize for his paper "Examination of the Magnetorheological Properties of Commercial Ferrofluids."

This was the fifth year for the contest and the fifth year that a student from Swarthmore has won first prize. The PCS provides the money for the awards and local PCS members serve as judges, along with members of the Student Activities Committee. Thanks are extended to judges Barney Adler, John Helferty, Jack Friedman, John Schanely, and Janet Rochester; and to organizer Ed Podell.

"The rule on staying alive as a forecaster is to give 'em a number or give 'em a date, but never give 'em both at once."

—Jane Bryant Quinn



RONALD J. NELSON

PULLING OUT ALL THE STOPS: RICHARD SELZER'S MEDICAL WRITING

Of what value could the writings of an ex-surgeon-turned-writer from the Yale University School of Medicine be to a professional communicator? As it turns out, plenty.

Upon hearing E. Power Biggs play Bach's *Toccata and Fugue in D Minor*, a person cannot fail to recognize the presence of greatness. When a person reads Richard Selzer, a similar recognition occurs. Pulling out all the stops—bringing all the pipes into play—Selzer engages his vast array of writing strategies to reach what Joseph Conrad would have referred to as “the secret spring of responsive emotions” in the reader.

Ultimately, the reader who repudiates the Evelyn Woods School of Speed Reading and allows the self to become receptive to Selzer's virtuosity is likely to experience the satisfying sense of having come in contact with a master of style.

Selzer's essays and stories contain a multiplicity of tools that simultaneously inform and persuade—essentials for any document. One emerges from his works—for he often takes the reader literally into the internal world of the human body where, for example, in “Liver” (from *Mortal Lessons*) one palpably comes to know that organ—with a sure knowledge of whatever the subject is, in this case the size, weight, shape, deleterious effects of alcohol on, and regenerative powers of this, the largest of glands.

And in “The Exact Location of the Soul”—what a hauntingly beautiful title!—from the same collection, Selzer as surgeon recounts his extensive efforts to save the leg of a young diabetic woman. In the end he must amputate the leg in order that she might live. The reader simultaneously comes to know the struggle of patient and surgeon through the author's dazzling display of devices and becomes persuaded anew of the value of life.

Selzer's interplay of poetic tools like alliteration (repetition of consonant sounds),

assonance (repetition of vowel sounds), symbol, metaphor (my love is a rose), simile (my love is like a rose), allusion (references to events external to the poem or document, to mythology, etc.), and imagery that appeals to all the senses transforms his writings into poetic prose. His use of rhetorical tools like anaphora (beginning successive clauses or sentences with the same word), isocolon (creating clauses or sentences of equal length), and other devices establishes indisputably his mastery of his craft.

But the irresistible appeal of his writing depends less on his sound knowledge of poetic and rhetorical tools than it does on the more substantive issue of his approach to subject matter, which is revealed at every point through his authentic voice and tone. The reader becomes convinced at every bit of apt—nay, perfect—phrasing that here, indeed, is a Renaissance man devoted to serving people in need. He willingly deals with difficult medical problems and situations that would make most people squirm.

In describing his efforts to solve these problems, Selzer comes across as one who has deep experience and who genuinely cares about people. He handles ugliness with such tenderness that beauty emerges. Through it all, his ego never interferes with the joy and involvement of service. And the pain that he must often describe is relieved by the occasional sprinkling of humor. The reader comes away with the reassurance that he or she has communicated with someone who profoundly understands the human condition.

So what has the professional communicator to learn from Richard Selzer? Much more than I can cover here. Suffice it to say that we can make a serious effort in our writing to be genuine, to serve, and to use the tools that we have acquired over the years. And, if we are lucky, we may give our writing a measure of elegance and grace, at the same time we inspire trust in our work. The professional communicator

(continued on page 16)

*Approach subject
matter with authentic
voice and tone.*

RICHARD SELZER'S MEDICAL WRITING

(continued from page 15)

goes beyond mere competence in the direction of seeing into the essence of situations. Selzer provides us clues to just that.

If you are interested in reading Selzer, here is a list of his books: *Confessions of a Knife* (1979), *Down from Troy: A Doctor Comes of Age* (1992), *Imagine a Woman and Other Tales* (1990), *Letters to a Young Doctor* (1982), *Mortal Lessons: Notes on the Art of Surgery* (1976), *Raising the Dead* (1994), *Rituals of Surgery: Short Stories*

(1974), and *Taking the World in for Repairs* (1986).

Fortunately, all these books are in print, most of them in paperback. If you want a bibliography of primary and secondary sources relating to Selzer, I'd be happy to send one along. Just write me at James Madison University, English Department, Harrisonburg, VA 22807, or phone (540) 568-3755 or 568-6202. The e-mail address is *nelsonrj@jmu.edu*.

NEWSLETTER SCHEDULE

Contributions are welcome. Send proposals for columns to the editor.

E-mail and ASCII files are preferred.

Reply to:
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Swartz Creek, MI
48473-9403
(810) 655-4682 (h)
dwicks@odo.gmi.edu

| Issue | Deadline | Issue | Deadline |
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