



AuSTCom

Newsletter of the Society for Technical Communication, Australia Chapter

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BAD CONTENT IS BAD CONTENT

Elizabeth Weise Moeller

When sitting down to write this column, I decided to take a slightly different approach. Much of what I have written here has been application oriented. This time, I feel the need to editorialize on a subject I have covered for more than 6 years—bad content.

Last night my New Media class was discussing the use of animation on the web, primarily the use Macromedia Flash, but we covered other types of animation as well. As the discussion turned toward what types of information are appropriate for Flash, the students gave me the jumping off point for this column. It's something I've been saying to clients for years, but it was nice to hear students say it as well. Bad content is bad content, no matter how pretty it is. This is especially true in organizations trying to communicate technical or product information.

The discussion reminded me of a presentation I gave at an Internet Breakfast in early 1997. This was such a unique concept at the time that our local newspaper sent a reporter. I was one of three speakers on a panel. The quote the editor chose to pull out for emphasis was something I said in response to a question—"There's a lot of fluff on the Internet. You don't want to be part of the fluff." So, here I am 6 years later, and I am STILL telling people that bad content is bad content, no matter how pretty it looks.

Let's start with some definitions. Bad content is simply that—bad. It is often poorly written and lacks purpose or informational value. More often than not, it is outdated information. If the content is a photo or drawing, it is often out of focus, poorly digitized, or lacks clarity. One example of bad content is the following text that appears on a real company's home page.

"[company name] is a multi-platform vertical portal matrix to add value to the consumer Internet experience by simplifying the convergence of brands and services. The company is currently developing the interest of strategic partners and is raising capital for expansion."

People put bad content on their site because they feel that any content is better than no content. Or, in the case of the company above, they are trying to impress and manage to muddle their message in the process.

Looking pretty is simply that—looking pretty. These are sites that are often designed by someone who hopes you have some sort of sublime experience while visiting their web site. These sites often contain the latest and greatest bells and whistles, such as Flash animations. To see examples of sites in this category visit *Cool Home Pages* (<http://www.coolhomepages.com>) and choose the *Ultra-Hip* category.

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FROM THE EDITOR

Robin Hutchinson

Welcome to AuSTCom, the newsletter for the Australia Chapter of the STC.

In this edition our lead article discusses bad content. Colin Dawson, our new president, provides us with information about choosing the best graphic source for the task and modelling software.

I would still like to put together *An essential library*. So if you have any **suggestions for books** that are a **must have in a technical writer's library**, drop me a line, a note or an e-mail. See the *Editor's Notes* on page 11 for information about publication dates and deadlines.

I look forward to hearing from you
newsletter@stc-aus.org.au

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Web site visitors want to see a well-done site. At first glance, the graphical look and feel will tell a visitor whether this site is worth exploring further. During that first glance, the visitor needs to immediately be able to tell who you are and what you do. When visiting the vertical portal matrix company above, I was immediately put off by the language. If I can't tell what they do in the first 30 seconds—especially after reading a sentence like that—why should I bother exploring the site further?

If a web site passes the *first glance* test, visitors will start digging for information. I feel like many companies are forgetting that people explore various web sites looking for information. Many sites do not need to entertain, they need to present information that site visitors need. When the information is buried in unintelligible text, or is nonexistent, visitors will go to other web sites to get what they need—or they will pick up the phone and call.

The content issue brings us back to a basic theme in technical communication—understanding the needs of the audience. Who is the audience for the site and why are they visiting? In many of my recent presentations and conversations with clients, I have told them they need to stop thinking about their web site as a marketing task they don't really have time for. They need to think about ways the web site can help them. The first thing I always suggest is to make a list of the questions they receive by phone on a regular basis. It usually only takes a receptionist a few days to create a fairly comprehensive list. Now, categorize those questions by audience type and put the answers in the appropriate sections of the web site. When doing this, you need to think like a person visiting your site. You know your business inside and out and the terminology you use. When answering these questions, do so in a manner that your audience will understand. In many cases, organizations receive fewer phone calls after doing this. One of my clients saw fewer phone calls but a dramatic increase in attendance at a weekly event when a topical listing was placed online and kept current.

Just one word of caution. Just as an overly-designed site with little content can backfire, so can a poorly-designed site with great content. Part of creating a well-defined site is knowing what your users need and what method they will use to find it. Therefore your navigation needs to be clear. In addition, a poorly-designed site will often fail the *first glance* test. A good web site will have a clean, professional, and current design—a design that shows the company pays attention to its site and is willing to keep it current for the benefit of their customers.

Pretty web sites may work for some. But if the content isn't there, what's the point?

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THE COMMITTEE 2003/2004

Jean Hollis Weber

The following people were nominated for the committee positions in the Australia Chapter of the STC. As there was only one candidate for each position, we did not require an election. I hereby declare the committee for 2003-2004. They took office on 1 June 2003.

President—Colin Dawson

Vice-president (next year's President)/Webmaster—Michelle Hallett

Secretary—Peta Moore

Past President/Treasurer—Jill Nicholson

Newsletter Editor (2)—Robin Hutchinson & Judy Gregory

Membership Manager—Sally Taylor

Meeting Manager—Ray Archee

Competitions Manager (2)—Ann Backhaus & Marcia Bascombe

PAST PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Jill Nicholson

Before Christmas I was in a shop when the lady behind the counter said 'Do you realise it's only 7 weeks 'till Christmas. Do you think I should put up a sign?' I thought of what I had to do in those 7 weeks. Wouldn't it be nice if I did something every few days and then I would be ready at Christmas. Every week? Right at the last moment? Unfortunately this pattern also reflects our working lives most of the time. Everything at the last moment—wouldn't it be nice if we could have this in the manual...; that switch doesn't work so we have replaced it...; and the worst of all: I added a new function to one of the screens...—oops, now we have to do domino corrections.

However we will always have the 'right at the last moment' in the manual writing world as at all times we are controlled by forces outside our comfort zone and we can only grin and bear it.

This may be why I prefer my training clients to my writing clients. At least with training I am in control. I could give exactly the same course all the time, but I choose to alter, add, and tweak. I can never use a master (for printing) more than twice. This is my choice.

So where is all this leading? I think toward an appreciation that there is conformity of life experiences even amid the chaos. I know the developers will add late functions, I know clients will want a Word manual when I have used Frame, I know my class material is the best it can be just as I know that one of my friends will bring a Thai salad on Christmas day.

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CHOOSING THE BEST GRAPHICS SOURCE

Colin Dawson

Recent publicity for movie special effects and video games has brought 3-D modelling software into the mainstream. Once the preserve of specialist effects shops, they are beginning to make a presence in graphic design, engineering and training productions.

Should technical writers add modelling software to the burgeoning 'must learn this soon' list? Does it really present any advantages over other graphical technologies?

There are currently three mainstream choices for the creation of original images: photography, illustrating and graphic design. There is a degree of crossover between these techniques, especially between photography and graphic design, where digital artists routinely retouch photographs to remove unwanted detail like a logo or even a facial blemish in a portrait.

Many technical writers resort to paint software when asked to create images, thus styling themselves as temporary graphic designers. While programs like PhotoShop, PhotoPaint and PaintShop can be used to create technical illustrations, they are very poorly suited to the purpose. Results can be acceptable in the hands of an expert, but the obvious question is 'why would you bother'?

Often technical writers use paint program to produce illustrations because there is no alternative. Well-meaning managers buy a paint program because they recognise the brand name and do not understand its true purpose. In the Windows environment, the ubiquitous Paint is sometimes the only graphics package available.

In technical documentation, a sensible use for paint programs is in retouching photographs and cropping screen captures. If images contain hand-drawn content, a paint package is almost always the wrong tool for the job.

Photography

With consumer digital cameras now exceeding 2 million pixels resolution, digital cameras present a viable source of imagery for some types of technical documentation. Naturally this is only viable for graphical content that is based on physical objects such as machine parts. Software user guides do not have much scope for photography.

Digital photography is best approached with the following limitations in mind:

- > it creates instant photographs, not instant photographers. The skills and support equipment needed to get a professional result have not changed as a result of the digital medium.
- > anything more than minor retouching of photographs is a major undertaking—rarely an efficient use of time.

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Past president's report continued from page 2

So when we are muttering under our breath about the changed screen, remember that it is only a reflection of what happens throughout our lives. Smile at the developer and say, 'I just knew you were going to do that'. Smile when the Kris Kringle produces the present you gave someone last year or the salad that doesn't meld with the meal.

I have had a wonderful 2 years as President and as I hand the mantle on to Colin I hope the STC Australia chapter will grow and prosper for the benefit of all technical communicators in Australia. I thank the ASTCs, both of whom have been cooperative and easy to work with; may this alliance also continue for the benefit of all technical communicators in Australia.

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Colin Dawson

I am thrilled to be the president and I look forward to the year ahead. The outgoing committee has done a good job in establishing a routine – no small task when we are spread around Australia. We have also made good progress in conducting virtual meetings.

I especially want to thank Jill Nicholson for her dedication in getting the chapter started and serving two terms as president.

For the year ahead, I believe it is important for us to get all chapter members involved and to establish a 'community'. This will likely involve some experimentation with web faculties such as conferences and chat rooms.

We are faced with a double challenge: wide geographic distribution and small budget!

It is important for us to continue cooperative work with the various ASTCs. I see the STC having a continuing role in this regard, with ASTCs focused on local issues. It has been my passion for many years to see a national technical communication conference and I hope that we can work with the ASTCs to make this happen.

Our technical communication competition grew in its second year, despite nearly every other chapter having reduced submissions. The competition gives every indication of becoming an important event in the Australian technical communication community.

Our volunteer program is still running quietly and we have two complete volunteer web sites. I encourage members to promote this and to consider participating. It is great mileage for the portfolio!

With the IT industry showing some faint signs of recovery, we do perhaps have some reason for optimism in the coming technical communication year. I know the committee already has some good ideas to discuss and I am looking forward to the coming year.



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When a physical object is available for photography, this is potentially the fastest and cheapest way to create images. The example photograph below shows the siren for an alarm system. This photo was used in an installation manual. The manufacturer changed the alarm system's name during the project and the photograph has been retouched to remove that name. If it had been necessary, a new name could have been inserted. This is a perfect situation for the use of photography as a source of images.



Devices with electronic displays are far more difficult to photograph than passive objects. Showing a working display on a properly exposed object is very challenging and rarely successful with consumer photographic gear. Many professionals shy away from this—look at the next junk mail electronics catalogue that arrives in your mail box: devices with an electronic display are almost always turned off, or have a completely washed-out, unreadable display.

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DEFINITION OF BITMAP IMAGES

A bitmap is an image composed of many dots (pixels), with the file containing a definition for every individual dot. Bitmap images are very big and cannot easily be resized without loss of sharpness. Details cannot easily be edited, although global changes like contrast, lightness and colour tint can be easily achieved. The purpose of a bitmap image must be known at the time of creation: either printing or on-screen display, since printing requires a much higher resolution. Common bitmap formats include BMP, TIFF, PNF, JPEG. Every publishing package supports most of the common bitmap formats. EPS images often contain a small bitmap as well as a vector image.

COMMITTEE NEWS

Jill Nicholson

The committee is actively recruiting people to help with charity work—Colin Dawson has written about this.

We had two more entries in this year's competition and we also did online. I think we may have been the only chapter that increased the number of entries as most chapters reported a steep decline in numbers for this year.

I was able to keep some of the online winning entries from the USA from the 2001 competition. I have these if anyone is interested in seeing them. Email me about this.

The STC agreed to pay the cost of getting the winners of the 2002 competition sent out for the ASTC (NSW) conference but I think the cost was not worth the response. At that conference we had budgeted for one overnight stay for an STC member, but as there were only two there from outside of Sydney, Jean Weber and Ana Young, both got a free night at the hotel from the STC.

Our membership has decreased over the last few months, and this is happening everywhere in the Society. I would like to see our membership rise so please do all you can to recruit one new member in this membership year.

These activities, and the continuation of the newsletter and the website are our activities for the year. We found the organisation of virtual meetings needs more thinking and testing-type work and this will happen later rather than sooner. We will have a virtual banquet again, I hope, when the competition entries are honoured. Those who attended the one we had in 2001 had a great time.

Please contribute to the newsletter through our editors Robin and Judy, or contact any of the committee members if you have queries or suggestions.

DEFINITION OF VECTOR IMAGES

A vector image contains instructions for creating an image rather than the image itself. This typically makes the file much smaller and more portable. Vector images can be scaled infinitely without loss of sharpness and they always print at the best resolution available on the printer. Unfortunately vector files are not always portable across platforms and packages. Common file formats include WMF, SWF, SVG, DWG, DXF, PostScript and EPS. Note that EPS often contains a small bitmap image for viewing on-screen, or for printing in a non-PostScript environment. Most Windows packages support WMF, although FrameMaker requires FMV.



Graphics sources continued from page 4

Fortunately, electronic displays can be improved using a paint packages. Perhaps the simplest way is to take two photographs from an identical position (using a tripod). One is exposed properly to show the overall device, the other to show the electronic display. The display is snipped from the second image and composited onto the first.

Digital photographs have one use that requires only modest photographic skills and no special equipment: as a background in illustrating packages, where they are traced to produce an illustration. This is discussed in detail later.

Illustrating

For most technical writers, most of the time, an illustrating package is the best choice for creating images. It can be used to create pictures that show physical objects, or concepts and data flow. Illustrating packages can easily save images in a bitmap format for use in on web sites, or in vector formats for use in printed documentation. Some also support portable document format (PDF) and new initiatives to produce vector images for the web, such as Macromedia's SWF and Adobe's SVG.

Popular illustrating packages include Adobe Illustrator, CorelDraw and Macromedia Freehand. Each of these can exchange files—not only with each other, but also with popular CAD packages such as AutoCAD. However, there are a multitude of file variations and file compatibility should be tested before you make a commitment. This is especially true when the image contains lines of various thicknesses and graduated colour fills.

Design packages such as Visio are optimised for IT-related images and can also be used as simple general-purpose illustrating. PowerPoint is another widely-available package but it is extremely limited for general-purpose illustrating.

Vector images have three critical advantages over bitmap images:

- > fast and efficient editing of image detail. For example, a new department can be added to an organisation chart in seconds
- > infinitely scalable without loss of sharpness
- > smaller file size, especially for large images. Unlike bitmaps, vector images can be expanded without increasing the file size.

Illustrating packages are versatile and capable of producing good results for a variety of media. Images can be exported as either vector or bitmap, depending on the destination. The skills needed to produce typical IT diagrams can be learned in about an hour. Naturally, advanced skills needed for mechanical illustrations with perspective and sectioned views take rather longer to learn (as they do with a pencil and ruler!).

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TIPS FOR EFFECTIVE INFORMATION ARCHITECTURE

Jill Nicholson

In the October 2001 issue of *Webtechniques*, Andrew Chak offers some tips in his article *Effective Info Architecture*. He describes information architecture as a two-step process.

Step 1: define your goals and define your audience.

Step 2: determine the content and functionality that will support your goals.

To follow through the process, he suggests selecting a target persona from your audience and creating a scenario to fit that persona. Then, base your design and site architecture on that specific persona and scenario.

Create a bottom-up design that uses wireframes (mockups) that show the basic layout and content of your pages and a navigation map that shows how the pages are linked together. Also, decide if your approach should be to guide your users through a process or through your content.

Next, consider your site's architecture. Use a technique called card sorting to find out what ideas users may already have about the structure of your site. Write the main components of your site on cards; then ask your users to group the cards. Additionally, name your sections so that users can find exactly what they need, use a site map to focus on the overall structure of your site, and maintain a consistent structure by creating wireframes for the site-level components, such as your home page, main section pages, and search.

Effective Info Architecture by Andrew Chak
Webtechniques Oct 2001 <http://www.webtechniques.com>

ANNUAL AWARD FOR TECHNICAL COMMUNICATION STUDENT

Judy Gregory

The STC (Australia Chapter) now offers an annual award, the STC Prize, for students studying technical communication at Australian universities or colleges. The winning student will receive a \$250 cash prize and an award certificate.

The STC Prize is designed to encourage excellence in technical communication, profile universities and colleges that include technical communication within their programs, and promote the STC to the next generation of technical communicators.

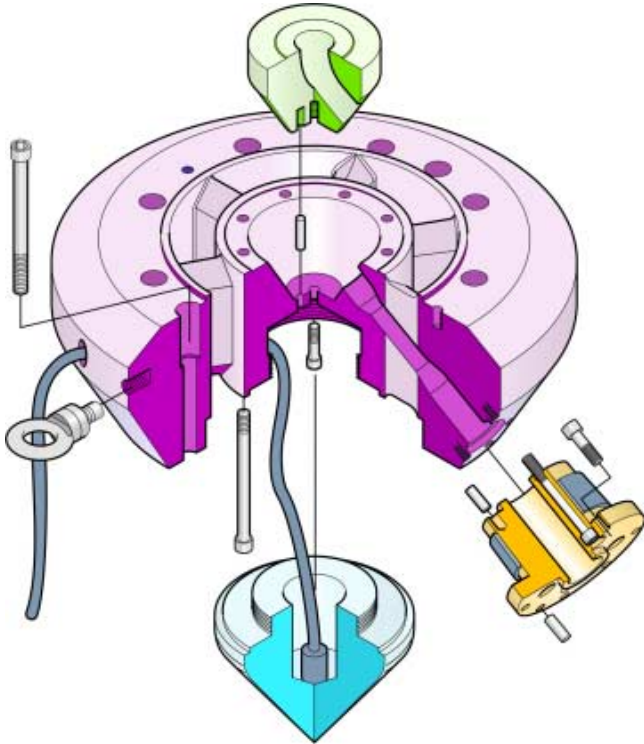
Students can enter the STC Prize through nomination by their program's coordinator. Coordinators can nominate up to three students from their institution.

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Illustrating enables internal details and sections to be shown in a way that is much more intuitive than traditional engineering drawings. The following illustration was extracted from a very detailed drawing showing the internal details and setup of an extruder. It helps to visualise the relationship of components as well as their functions.



When a realistic image of a physical object is required, the marriage of illustrating packages and digital photography is a happy one for technical writers. By loading the photograph as a fixed background, it can be quickly traced to produce attractive perspective images. This bypasses the need to learn traditional drafting skills. Unlike the original photograph, images created in this way show only important details and omit everything else.

The example image shown on the next page is part of an industrial electronic sensor. Late at night with the manual almost finished and the illustrator asleep in another city, one last image was required. It had to be a line drawing because that is how all the other illustrations had been produced. Tracing over a photograph produced a result in under an hour, and did not require skills in perspective illustrating.

Some packages actually have an automatic trace feature that is claimed to detect edges in photographs. Results vary between disappointing and disastrous. At best this can be regarded as a starting point for a long session of correcting by hand.

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STC student prize continued from page 5

Nominations should include a copy of the student's academic transcript and an example of the student's technical written work. A panel of judges drawn from the STC (Australia Chapter) Executive will choose each year's winner. Mahalia Tabaquero, a student at UWS, won the prize for 2002 for her work rewriting a brochure.

Nominations for the 2003 STC Prize will close in early August, with the prize to be awarded in November.

For more information about the STC Prize, contact the Prize Coordinator, Judy Gregory, by email at j.gregory@qut.edu.au

PLEASE EXPLAIN—CHAOS 2

Last time I described the basic features of chaos and complexity theory and asked you all how it might change the way people think. Here is some of what I've been thinking and some research that's being done.

The major feature of any chaotic paradigm would be the need for adaptability. Whilst changes to complex systems cannot be predicted with any degree of accuracy, a careful observer can point to possible points of change within the present system and attempt to extrapolate the development of these changes. Implicit in the lack of predictability is the possibility of failure but also the possibility of 'nudging' a system to a more optimal position in the phase space.

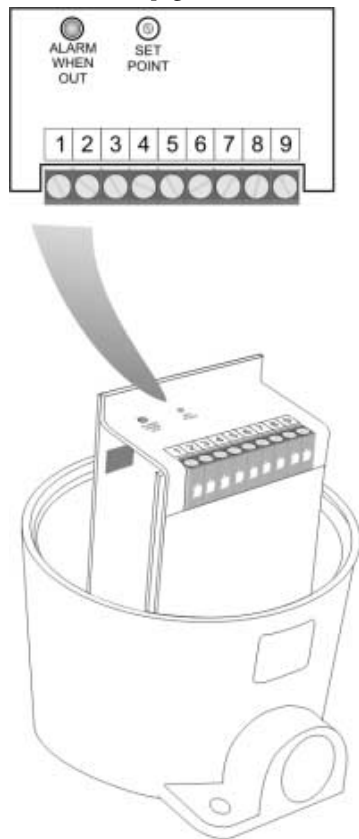
What types of problems does a chaotic paradigm allow us to explore and perhaps solve? Initially, scientists visited problems which had proved intractable using a causality paradigm. Many scientific disciplines have problems with initial causes. If, for example, the Big Bang created our universe, what caused the Big Bang? I haven't seen any research purporting to explain the Big Bang using a chaotic paradigm and I would hesitate to tackle this problem alone. However, chaos theory allows for the possibility that our universe organised itself from some kind of existential chaos of which we have no knowledge or understanding, either because we have yet to discover it or because it is outside our frame of reference.

The question of how life arose out of inorganic matter is answered by the self-organisation of proteins with life evolving as an emergent property. An interesting explanation of how this might have occurred is provided by Stuart Kauffman's work with autocatalytic sets (discussed in *Waldrop, Complexity, 1994, p. 124*). Kauffman posited that groups of proteins could form a chain of catalytic reactions (reactions using catalysts) which would ultimately become self-sustaining and able to reproduce itself in a new environment. Successful autocatalytic sets might continue to evolve by beating rival sets within their environment.

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Modelling

When a physical object needs to be shown from a variety of angles, it may be time to consider using a modelling package. Sometimes it is desirable to provide a physical representation of objects that cannot be viewed in real-life, such as planetary orbits or chemical reactions.

If you have to create a three dimensional (3D) model from scratch, the effort overwhelms any other method of creating images. Typically, a single perspective view might take 10 times longer to create in a modelling package versus an illustrating package.

Modelling is ideal for mechanical maintenance manuals where an object, such as a gearbox, may need to be viewed from many angles, or even shown in motion. Once you have created the basic components, it becomes fairly simple to re-orient them and create animations. Popular packages include Lightwave, 3DMax, Maya and SoftImage. They are relatively expensive, typically costing about five times as much as an illustrating package. Some companies better known for illustrating packages also produce less expensive and less capable modelling packages.

Traditionally modelling has been the preserve of special effects houses and up-market architects, but two trends have emerged to make it more accessible:

- > CAD packages have developed integrated modelling capabilities
- > dedicated modelling packages are better able to work with imported CAD data.

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Chaos part 2 continued from page 6

Likewise, chaos and complexity theory provided an explanation for technological lock-in. (*Waldrop, Complexity, 1994, pp. 35, 326*) Classical economics assumed a market economy which would always tend towards optimal equilibrium due to balancing forces (supply and demand). As the best technology would attract the greatest demand, optimal choices would always be made. But in fact, small chance events can lock in particular technologies, such as the QWERTY keyboard (designed to slow typists down so gears didn't lock), VHS video format and clocks which move clockwise. Once people become used to a particular format, it is easier to work with this format and it becomes 'the way it's always been done'.

Other possible research questions arise out of the unique epistemological space created by the chaotic paradigm. Such is the example of the computer tournament held in Michigan (*Waldrop, 1994, p. 263-265*) where participants were asked to submit a program to play an iterated version of the Prisoners' Dilemma. The Prisoners' Dilemma is a conundrum where two prisoners are offered a chance of freedom if they tell all, implicating their partner-in-crime. If one partner accepts, the second partner faces three years imprisonment and a fine. However, if both prisoners choose to implicate their partner, both are forced to serve ten years in prison.

In the computer tournament a program entitled 'Tit for Tat' produced the best results. It began by keeping silence, cooperating with its partner (or opponent in the game) but thereafter did exactly what the other program had done on the move before. It was nice because it never defected first but would get tough with uncooperative behaviour. It was clear so other programs could understand what they were dealing with. This seems to explain the value of cooperation. If the value of cooperation could be demonstrated, perhaps it would lead to a society in which increased trust where possible.

In *Waldrop* (1994), there is some discussion of the second law of thermodynamics, the law that states that over time, all things are reduced to their simplest form. While all concerned accept the validity of the second law, many confess that they have always wondered how a universe in which the second law operates could develop complex structures such as intelligence, life and even planets and solar systems. The studies of the development of complex systems make it possible to posit the existence of some organising principle working in opposition to the second law of thermodynamics and while such a principle has not yet been found, the chaotic paradigm makes possible the search and perhaps provides direction.

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One fact needs to be stated up front: learning to use a 3D package is a big commitment. Unlike most tools where you can learn as you go, no worthwhile results will emerge until you have a good level of mastery. A word processor opens by default with a blank document and you can begin text entry right way. You may decide to apply a more attractive template at some time in the future, or add graphics, but you can be productive from the outset. Modelling packages offer no such 'soft-start' option. Plan the object from the outset and know how to achieve the final outcome.

In some rare circumstances, you may be granted access to modelling data that you can use to quickly create images. However, such data is used for manufacturing and most companies guard it as rigorously as software source code. This is further complicated by real-world products that are assembled from a variety of modules, each manufactured by a different company with different modelling data.

Some modellers have made modelling files freely available for download and in some cases you may be able to fast-track your project by seeking out such files. Naturally prospects are much better for generic content like World War II fighter aircraft than for say the emergency brake mechanism for a high-rise elevator.

Creating a model is not the end of the process: you need to render the image. This is where modelled data is converted into a realistic bitmap image. Depending on the size of the image and the level of realism that you select, it is not unusual for rendering to be an overnight process. Top-shelf packages that are used for movie special effects can be networked, enabling the rendering to split over many computers.

The car image used in this article took about 10 minutes to render on a 600 MHz Pentium III. At 640 x 480 pixels, it is a fraction of the size required for colour printing, especially for posters. The same images rendered at 1800 pixels wide took about 20 hours.



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Chaos part 2 continued from page 7

If a chaotic paradigm were to enter the public consciousness and form the basis of our beliefs about what we know about the world, what sort of world would we be living in? Would it be one where opponents search for possible solutions instead of each claiming to be 'right'? Would courts consider each case on its merits rather than being restricted by rules, or would we create rules with greater flexibility (including laws and constitutions)? Would we consider the current state of our lives to be one that could be improved by looking for small things which could become a bigger part of our lives? Would we learn to explore possibilities before making decisions?

One final question that I find interesting is the concept of time travel. This is a popular theme in science fiction and many novels have been written exploring paradoxes such as the 'grandfather paradox' which can be expressed as 'What would happen if I travelled back in time and killed my grandfather? Would I then cease to exist?' As science fiction tends to be a male-dominated field, these authors rarely considered that it would be more pertinent to ask this question about one's grandmother. However expressed, this question is a causal one—I could not exist if my grandparents hadn't given birth to my parents. More generally, this paradox implies that earlier events cause later ones and if we travel back in time and interfere with the earlier events, the later ones cannot occur. How does a chaotic paradigm view this? Obviously, interfering with an event (even a small event) may cause a system to develop in a completely different direction from that in which it might originally have developed. Could I continue to exist if the new time line precluded my existence? One answer might be parallel worlds, the simultaneous existence of all possible solutions of states. What other answers could a chaotic world view find? Would we be able to travel in time and view history as it happened or would we be able to change history to produce the optimal world?

REGION 8 CONFERENCE

Michael Stern

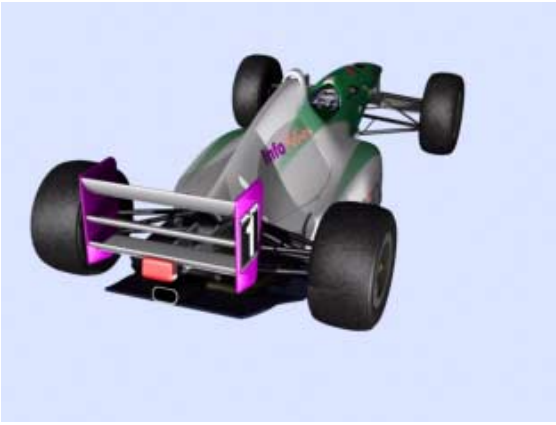
As a chapter, the Australia chapter is part of the STC region 8. Each year regions hold their own conferences. This is just a reminder that the Region 8 conference is coming up this July 20–22nd in Las Vegas.

For more information about the conference and reservations, please go to www.stcregion8conference.org

Michael Stern is the Publicity Chair for the Region 8 Conference - Las Vegas.



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Most first attempts at rendering produce images that look like plastic toys. Getting realistic surface finishes is another areas of expertise to be mastered. Discussion forums are a good source for surface textures and colours settings that provide realistic renders.

When complete 3D data is available for an object, it can be expressed using Virtual Reality Markup Language (VRML). This is a portable format that is sometimes used for walk-through demonstrations and novel navigation schemes. Although not widely used, it offers potential for e-learning resources where students need to manipulate objects (such as medical procedures), or move through complex virtual areas (such as ship maintenance). This provides further return on the initial investment in creating the object. But VRML is yet another skill to master!

3D modelling will probably continue its migration from the fringes to the mainstream. Whether it has reached a point where it is viable for technical communicators depends very much on the type of information that you need to show.

For one-off views of mechanical objects, illustrating is still much more accessible. However, for objects that are often re-used, the investment in creating a 3D model can become worthwhile. When objects need to be included in animations, 3D modelling is often more efficient.

WORTH NOTING

WIPO launches CD-ROM on intellectual property

The World Intellectual Property Organisation (WIPO) has released an updated version of its free CD-ROM *Intellectual Property for Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs)*.

'The CD-ROM is intended to raise awareness about the role of intellectual property in leveraging business development and improving competitiveness among the global SME community', says a statement from WIPO.

To order a copy of the CD-ROM, email sme@wipo.int, or see website www.wipo.int/ebookshop

MARKETING OPPORTUNITY

Diane Robertson

The editors of the international journal *Document Design* are interested in interviewing someone about document in a large organisation. This could possibly be someone who is the Communications Manager or who works in the IT Department. In the past interview candidates have included:

- > Karen Schriver, author of *Dynamics in Document Design: Creating Texts for Readers*
- > Robert Horn, author of *Visual Language*
- > Wim Pols, Chief Editor of Editorial Department of Corporate Communication and Strategy Division of ING Group
- > Robyn Penman, Principal of Robyn Penman & Associates and Professor in Communication at University of Canberra
- > David Sless, Director of the Communication Research Institute of Australia and Professor in Science Communication at Australian National University.

The interview candidate need not necessarily be a practitioner in the area of document design, but could be a manager responsible for document management and design within their organisation.

The editors of this journal are based at Tilburg University in The Netherlands. (See their Web site at <http://let.kub.nl/docdes>). As you will see on the home page of the Document Design Web site, this journal has a very broad vision in examining the topic of document design. The editors see the journal as a platform for researchers and practitioners in organisational communication, and they include articles 'in which aspects of (electronic) discourse—written, spoken or visual—are combined with aspects of text quality (function, institutional setting, culture)'.

If you look under 'editors' on the Document Design web site, you will see that Diane Robertson is one of two interviewers. Diane is a Communication Consultant, and she helps organisations with written and verbal communication strategies to win contracts, raise the comprehension of readers and listeners, increase rapport with clients, and get decision makers to sit up and take notice. She does this through workshops, writing and editing services, and conference speeches.

To find out more, you can go to Diane's web site www.austral-comm.com.au.

In the interview that Diane is proposing, she would like to focus on the problems of a large organisation managing documents and document design.

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TAKING THE 'DIS' OUT OF 'DISABILITIES':

Special Needs SIG seeks support

The Society's newest special interest group (SIG), the Special Needs SIG, is looking for new members to support them in their twin mission to:

- > assist technical communicators with disabilities in the practice of our profession
- > provide all technical communicators with information that will help them make our communication products more accessible to users with disabilities.

A detailed mission statement is available at the web site.

The SNSIG has already made significant progress:

- > a comprehensive web site—www.stcsig.org/sn/index.shtml
- > an online newsletter—first edition is posted at www.stcsig.org/sn/newsletter.shtml
- > extensive support to the 49th STC Conference—publication of Guidelines for Persons with Special Needs and an Addendum thereto, a successful progression, and several articles in the Proceedings—conference materials available at www.stc-orlando.org/prodev/49notes/SNC.asp.

But there is much yet to do and, to accomplish it, the SNSIG needs more people. It is looking both for active members to join its initiatives and patrons whose affiliation will help the SIG secure the budget it needs to fulfil its objectives.

If you wish to support the Special Needs SIG, download the SIG sign-up form from www.stc.org/PDF_Files/sigform.pdf and submit it directly to the Society Office.

In either case, in order to be added to the SNSIG's newsletter and/or listserv without delay, contact daniel.w.voss@lmco.com or jvinegar@myranch.com.

VOLUNTEER PROJECT

Update

The STC Australia Chapter decided to place volunteers with community organisations to help the individual develop skills and the organisation to complete a project. We extended the project to include the ASTCs. Volunteers from both ASTC (NSW) and ASTC (VIC) came forward.

The first volunteer placement was with the Aunts and Uncles charity in Sydney. This group matches up volunteer families with children who need an opportunity to enjoy outings away from an institutional environment.

The ASTC (NSW) volunteer has almost completed the assignment of creating a web site for Aunts and Uncles. A second ASTC (NSW) volunteer has begun work on a web site for a Sydney-based cultural charity.

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Diane would like to do this from a positive perspective so that the readers understand what some of the issues are and how a large organisation is dealing with them. The questions will depend on what issues both she and the interviewee agree to focus on, but they may include:

- > Does the company have a particular person or section that considers aspects of document design?
- > Does the company attempt to standardise documents?
- > What are the issues that large organisations face in designing documents?
- > Do large organisations need to consider cultural issues when designing documents?

The process will include the following steps:

1. Diane will contact the interviewee to discuss the scope of the interview.
2. She will then prepare and submit written questions.
3. The interviewee will prepare written responses and return them to her.
4. If necessary, Diane will prepare follow up questions for clarification or expansion on any interesting aspects of the replies.
5. She will then prepare the draft interview article for review and comment.
6. After the company's agreement on the draft article, Diane will submit the article to the journal editors along with a small passport-size photo of the interviewee. These are then sent to the publishers, Benjamins.

If you would like to be a candidate, or you can give the name of someone who might be interested, please contact Diane Robertson, of Austral Business Communication Pty Ltd in Brisbane by telephone +61 (0)7 3279 7373, mobile +61 (0)417 279737, fax +61 (0)7 3319 6084, or e-mail diane.robertson@austral-comm.com.au.

The interviews are published three times a year, so Diane is interested to hear from anyone who would like to be a candidate for an interview now or in the future.

Diane Robertson is a member Society for Technical Communication, in Brisbane.

HAIKU ERROR MESSAGE

unknown

Serious error.

All shortcuts have disappeared. Screen.

Mind. Both are blank.



ADVERTISING RATES

STC Committee

We are happy to run advertisements for activities that are in line with the objectives of the STC.

While the STC does not give copies of our mailing list, we will deliver advertisements on your behalf.

Our fees for advertising in a single issue are:

Full page—\$75

1/2 page—\$35

1/3 page—\$25

1/4 page—\$15

The STC is a not-for-profit organisation and not registered for GST so we do not charge GST on advertising.

All copy for advertisements must be submitted as .tif files.

Deadlines for newsletters are the first Wednesday of August, November, February and May for inclusion in the next newsletter.

We reserve the right to refuse to carry any advertisement.

EDITOR'S NOTES

It is our intention to publish this newsletter four times a year.

Publication schedule for 2003–04

Issue Target Publication Date

Winter	June
Spring	September
Summer	December
Autumn	March

Disclaimer: This is a volunteer effort and publication dates may vary. We will make every effort to publish on or near the targeted date.

AuSTCom is the newsletter for the Australia Chapter of the STC.

Editors: Robin Hutchinson and Judy Gregory

Copy Editors/Proofreaders:

Jill Nicholson and Magda Drozd.

Submission

Submit articles and news items to the editor by the first week of the month before publication. Please send files to Robin Hutchinson and Judy Gregory at newsletter@stc-aus.org.au.

Reprints

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WHITE CHOCOLATE AND MACADAMIA NUTS BISCUITS

100g macadamia nuts

100g butter, room temperature, cubed

100g brown sugar

250g white chocolate melts

150g plain flour

75g self raising flour

1 and 1/2 tsp vanilla essence

1 egg, slightly whisked

Method:

1. Preheat the oven to 170 degrees
2. Roughly chop the nuts and roast on a tray in the oven for 3-4 mins
3. Melt 1/2 the chocolate
4. Mix the butter, sugar and vanilla
5. Add egg and beat until combined
6. Add melted chocolate and beat until combined
7. Roughly chop the rest of the chocolate and add to the mix, along with the macadamia nuts
8. Stir through with a wooden spoon
9. Sift in the flours and combine the mixture with a wooden spoon
10. Cover the mixture and put in the fridge for 1 hour.
11. After 1 hour, roll the mixture into 1 tablespoon(ish) balls and place on a lined tray 3cm apart
12. Flatten (very very) slightly
13. Bake for 18-20 minutes
14. Leave on the tray for 5 minutes then on a wire rack to cool

Makes 20-25 biscuits.



STC Australia Chapter

