



AuSTCom

Newsletter of the Society for Technical Communication, Australia Chapter

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The Meeting of the Future

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Lately, committee members have been considering the exciting possibility of hosting the 2007 Region 8 conference. Regional organisers have invited us to host the conference and we are currently crunching the numbers to see if it could work.

People on both sides of the Pacific are keen on the idea, but we have to temper this with some caution: this would be the first regional conference to be held in the Southern Hemisphere, and one of only a few to be held outside North America. Based on the today's environment, with depressed IT spending and the constant threat of terrorism, we have to assume that attendance would be small. Would it be viable? Without having reviewed the costing figures, my guess is that a conventional conference would not be successful.

The real question is "Do we have to run a conventional conference?" This is a wonderful opportunity to explore other alternatives. I am proposing an alternative conference that has both physical and virtual components. Even with today's internet standard, the virtual elements of such a conference would be workable. In three years, most delegates should have access to broadband.

We have the chance to do some real pioneering. Obviously we face some significant challenges—not all of them technical. Would STC members worldwide be interested in participating in a virtual conference which local delegates might attend physically? We would have to go well beyond the usual stodgy webcast formula, offering flexible and interesting interaction over many simultaneous channels. It's the ad hoc networking that really make conferences worthwhile—can this be effectively supported in a virtual format?

Continuing the theme of virtual meetings, we also having a more immediate need locally. We conduct committee meetings using a bulletin board. This requires a fair amount of discipline to ensure a fair hearing for all, especially when we are faced with greatly differing internet access capabilities. Often a big parcel of comments comes though at once. Since the chapter is likely to continue its dependence on this type of meeting, I would like suggestions on available facilities. Currently we pay nothing for the bulletin board. I'm hoping we don't have to increase the budget much beyond that for any new facility!

Colin Dawson

FROM THE EDITOR

Michelle Hallett (temporary)

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

This newsletter is devoted mostly to STC and ASTC (NSW) news. We've listed the results of last year's Technical Communication competitions and provided information about the current STC Transformation.

From the ASTC, we have information about the Accreditation system developed by the Western Sydney group.

STC AUSTRALIA ELECTIONS

We're hoping to continue with new initiatives next year so now's your chance to be involved. See inside on page 10.

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TECHNICAL PUBLICATIONS, ONLINE COMMUNICATIONS AND TECHNICAL ART COMPETITION 2003–2004

Ann Backhaus & Marcia Bascombe

The Technical Publications and Online Communications Competition continues to be a highlight of our STC Australia year, and last year we offered the International Technical Art Competition (ITAC) for the first time.

Although the total number of entries was down on 2003, it was pleasing to see the breadth of categories covered and the high standard across all competitions.

There were a total of ten entries from nine companies or government agencies. This is good news and shows that although our membership is relatively small, it is very active.

Judges

Five judges volunteered to evaluate the entries, using STC (international) criteria and evaluation forms. The experience gained by judges in the first and second years of judging was extremely valuable in this competition, as the experienced judges could act as team leaders. Again, huge thanks go out to the judges, who gave time, expertise and much more to this competition!

Ann Backhaus*
Marcia Bascombe*
Stuart Burnfield
Rhonda Bracey
Michelle Hallett

*Competition Co-ordinators

Awards

As in previous years, the standard was very high—50% of entries received an Excellence award, and 90% received Merit award or higher.

Each entry was individually judged by three judges and then judged again by a panel of three judges to reach consensus on an award, if given. No entries were eligible for international STC judging, i.e. no entry received a Distinguished award, the qualification for the international competition.

All entrants received the judges' critiques and a letter of acknowledgement, and each award winner received a certificate to add to their portfolio, or to frame and impress the other departments in their organisations!

Technical Art

Excellence Awards

Mechanical Illustration—Tone:

Colin Dawson, Info Action P/L,
RK3 Extruder—Maintenance Training poster

Online Communication

Excellence Awards

Help:

Rhonda Bracey, CyberText Consulting P/L,
Survey Author

Merit Awards

Technical Marketing:

Colleen Sattler, Practical Enhancements,
Book Catalogue

Books:

Corporate Policy Group, Victoria Police,
Victoria Police Manual

Technical Publications

Excellence Awards

Informational Materials:

Helen Ward, DSTO,
P-3C SLAP, NER, Dev. of Corrosion Sensors brochures
(3)

Ann Backhaus, Edith Cowan University,
Working Online with Blackboard @ ECU: Broadening
Options, Enhancing Outcomes

Newsletters:

Robin Swindell, Fractal Technologies,
FracChat

Merit (+) Awards

Software Guides:

Robin Swindell, Fractal Technologies
FracSIS 4.1 Tutorial

Merit Awards

Promotional Materials:

Cindy Barrow
Clyde Manor Wedding Coach Hire brochure

Well done everybody!

Entering a competition is an ideal way to raise the profile of your technical communications department or your role within your organisation. And for those of you who have professional development reviews or key performance indicators to achieve, what better way to help secure your pay rise than to be awarded a certificate of excellence in technical publications, art or online communications.

So get cracking now and be ready for the 2004 competition!

For more information, go to the STC Australia website at <http://www.stc-aus.org.au/>

To CAPITALISE OR NOT TO CAPITALISE

Jill Nicholson

Recently I had a heated discussion with a very good friend of mine. It was about capitalisation. She had, from her school days, not capitalised the subsequent mention of an entity after the initial capitalisation. I had, in a University career, capitalised all subsequent mentions of an entity that was initially capitalised. For example, the *Geology Department* became the *Department*.

The example on which we disagreed was reference to the *Australia Chapter* as the *Chapter* (me), *chapter* (her). It niggled me so I decided to look up some Style Manuals. I went first to the new Government Style Manual. What were the results—well here the picture gets complicated.

Reference one—Style Manual, 6th edition, ©Commonwealth of Australia, 2002

The *National Gallery of Australia* becomes the *gallery*, but the *National Gallery*. Why? Well the use of *gallery* is a generic form. At this point the Style Manual and I fell out—the word *gallery* is not used generically if it relates to the previously mentioned *National Gallery*. A generic use is any art gallery when no particular gallery is specified.

However the 'generic' use of Commonwealth, Treasury, Bar, Bench, Cabinet and a few others should be capitalised. Why them and not us I ask?

Well I lost that round although I think, in this context, the Style Manual definition of generic is incorrect.

Reference two—The Chicago Manual of Style, 14th Edition, The University of Chicago Press

Well I thought the way the title was capitalised was promising. But it was not to be, they were even less agreeable as the *National Gallery* of the above example became the *national gallery*.

I did however find out that the *U.S. Supreme Court* is always the *Court*.

Reference three—The Cambridge Australian English Style Guide, Pam Peters

Pam generally agreed with the above definitions although she did say: *'second and subsequent references to senior title- or office bearers- are also capitalised in Australia, even if they are abbreviated.'* Later she says: *'However in-house company publications and prospectuses may capitalise all references to their executives.'*

The situation was getting better.

Reference four—a Style Guide for a medium-sized company

The rules generally agreed with all the above, but it was stated in the manual that you must *'be sensitive to the client's wishes about this issue.'*

Even better.

Reference five—Copyediting; A Practical Guide, Karen Judd, 1990, Crisp Publishing

Judd basically reiterates the rules as given in the Chicago Manual of Style, then concludes with this paragraph: *'It is important to realize that the rules I've given here are extremely general and provide merely a hint about how to decide when a capital letter is needed. As you become familiar with house styles and style guides, you will learn new rules and perhaps even some that clash with mine. It will be your decision—with your employer's help!—which rules to follow.'*

I am now happy that we are both right, and that a writer can choose their style, if it is not already chosen for them.

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ACCREDITATION

This material is extracted from the presentation made by the ASTC (NSW) Western Sydney group at the 2003 ASTC (NSW) Conference. It is an ASTC (NSW) initiative which we're making available for national consideration.

Many proposed accreditation solutions are very complex and require a lot of administration. ASTC (NSW) is not in a position to administer a complex accreditation system, so for our system to work successfully it must be simple and, to a large extent, self-administering.

Why do we need an accreditation system?

Technical Communication has:

Low public profile

We are not well known as a profession. That is something we must do something about and accreditation will help us do it. Many technical communicators are not aware of ASTC and why they should be members.

Many directions

The profession has a broad scope and it's getting broader. As an example, consider the Collins submarine project. Documents about machinery, ventilation systems, hydraulic systems, electrical systems, electronic systems, navigation systems, weapons systems, administration, payroll, personnel and so on were all written, illustrated and published by members of our profession.

Low membership

When people see MASTC on your business card they will want to know what it's about. Tell them. When employers start asking for ASTC membership – or accreditation – our membership will rise. Trainers have done it, accountants have done it, and we can do it too. Every business card becomes an advertisement for the profession.

Mixed esteem

When I stand in the middle of a workplace I might ask myself how my qualifications stack up. Accreditation will help answer that question.

We argue that if ASTC accreditation is mentioned in CVs and business cards, the news will get around the employment industry. That will immediately lift our profile and our public image a little. Ultimately it will help people realise that a technical communicator is a trained and experienced professional.

If we can get it right we can make it easier for employers to find the right technical communicator for their vacancies. And that should make life better for everybody.

How does our accreditation system work?

- We recognise that the skills a person needs in one workplace are not necessarily useful in another.
- We require a standard that keeps people employed while being attainable by all of us.
- We recognise that experience is probably the most important asset of a technical communicator.
- We recognise that suitable training is valuable, but it is not, and can never be, the arbiter of a person's fitness as a technical communicator.

The model we use is similar to many other accreditation systems. These are the same four grades of membership that most professional bodies have. We already have a grade of Student Member. What we are doing is adding the grades for practising professionals. Obviously, accreditation is only available to current financial members.

Student Grade

Engaged in suitable training
Wants to be a technical communicator

Associate Member

Has suitable training
Has a technical communicator job
Has less than three years' experience

Member

Has suitable training
Has more than three years' experience

Fellow

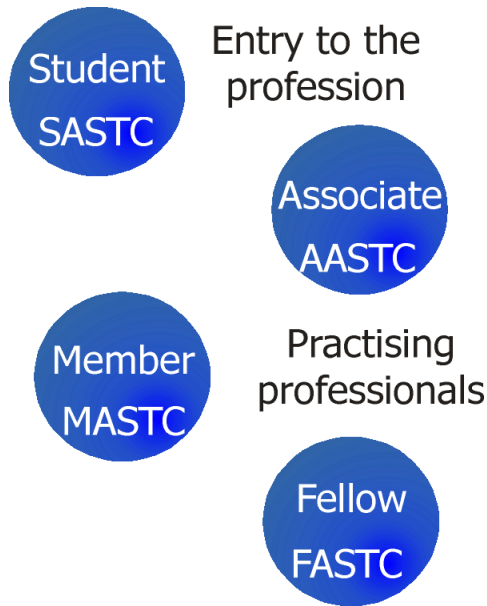
Has academic and vocational training
Has more than eight years' experience
Has three years in a leadership role
Has been a presenter at at least one ASTC annual conference

The grade of Fellow is not granted lightly.

Suitable training

A lot of us have argued for some time that the ability to write isn't something you acquire in a training course, and there are many good technical communicators out there with no formal qualifications of any kind. However, training certainly helps, and the best writers are probably those with both training and experience-honed skills.

We recognise that training suitable for one job might be useless in another. For example, to a person who is writing a maintenance manual for a motor vehicle, a mechanic's trade certificate is more valuable than a law degree. We also recognise that there is good value in generic training such as writing, illustrating and project planning courses.



The one sticking point is that we need some sort of measure, and we're agreed that tertiary training such as a degree or diploma is often limited in value. In terms of accreditation it does only two things:

- Demonstrates a certain level of mental discipline
- Shows that the candidate can take on a major project and see it through

These are both necessary attributes of a technical communicator.

Suitable training is defined as training that's appropriate to the work undertaken by the member. It might be in technical writing, journalism, communication or anything else that might reasonably form a good base. It might be engineering, science, law or whatever the candidate writes about. The identity of the course provider is of little importance. The key is the suitability for the work that the member does.

Standards

We can't set standards for everything, but we must have a minimum standard that is acceptable to the majority and that any practicing technical communication professional can reach. No matter what entry level we choose, we know that it will be wrong, but we can adjust it. If we wait for a perfect system to be devised before moving, we will never make that move. This proposal gives us a point from which to get moving.

Skills

The assessment of skills has been a major issue with every attempt to create an accreditation system. Most organisations start out with a list of required skills that can be examined, but that approach is very rarely successful because of the complexity and expense. Our group has

been down this path, and we will continue our work on tabulating skill sets with a view to creating some order from the present chaos.

ASTC (NSW) is not, and probably never will be in a position to examine candidates to see if their skills are sufficient for a practising technical communicator. Someone else must do it for us. We argue that if a candidate can hold down a job for three years, the employer is a de facto skills examiner. Continued employment is recognition that the candidate has the skills required to perform the required work. If the candidate was inept, the employer would stop paying.

We acknowledge that using the employer to assess the skills for us is taking a leap of faith. Some workplaces are more demanding than others and some might demand a very low level of skills. However, we believe that those cases will be few and that the risk is acceptable.

We also acknowledge that contractors might have to glue several contracts together to get the three years. We see no problem with that.

Experience

Experience is a vital component of a communicator's training. There's no better trainer than a good mentor, although occasional failure is a good trainer, too.

We'd like to see associates working in documentation teams where they can have the benefit of a good mentor. However, this is one of the things we can't control.

Who will do the Assessment?

We propose auto-assessment wherever possible, to reduce the administration work for the Committee. Student, Associate and Member grades could apply on a form on the ASTC (NSW) website.

The Society of Editors' scheme for requiring the candidate to submit some sort of statement of experience and skills might have merit, but someone – some group of unpaid volunteers – must be responsible for checking each one against a list of requirements. Our proposal requires basic information to be entered on a web form that is then automatically checked against requirements.

We propose that applications for the grade of Fellow should be individually assessed by the Committee.

Implemented this way, our accreditation system can apply to every member who is interested in using it, without imposing an administrative burden and without interfering with the membership of people who prefer to not participate. If we invite ASTC bodies in other states to participate, ASTC accreditation can be portable.

You've put a lot of effort into learning your craft and you've gained the recognition of your peers. It's time to tell the world that you're a trained and experienced professional.

STC TRANSFORMATION

Transformation heralds a dramatically new face for the STC. It will affect how the Society is managed and its members organised. In the last newsletter we published the reasons for transforming the STC. This is the second article and summarises all initiatives so far. Further information will be provided as we receive it from the STC.

As we all know, the last several years have brought wrenching change to many industries. In the mid-90s, the advent of the Internet forced organisations to deal with a “disruptive technology.” The Internet uncovered new business opportunities and new organisational demands. In many industries, the competitive landscape was abruptly changed, introducing new competitors, and changing the balance of power among established ones. Then in 2001, the Internet bubble burst, beginning a recession and exacerbating the trend of corporate restructuring and downsizing.

In riding the Internet boom and bust, organisations were constantly challenged to reinvent themselves. They often sought the counsel and support of management consultancies with unique expertise in managing organisational change. These organisational “transformation practices” (sometimes called organisational “change management”) existed well before the past decade, but over the last few years, they have become more sophisticated and refined. In dealing with STC’s transformation, we have borrowed from these practices to create a workable methodology for STC’s transformation effort. Our methodology includes:

- A “readiness assessment” to understand the willingness of an organisation to embrace change, and to gauge its ability to adapt to proposed changes without damaging critical structures.
- Clear principles to guide the transformation effort.
- A thorough analysis of where STC is now.
- A clearly defined “perfect world” vision.
- Documented “organisational requirements” to guide the development of the structures and processes that support that idealised vision.
- A gap analysis that describes in detail the difference between the current state and the ideal organisation.
- A road map of specific initiatives that close the gaps, moving the organisation step by step closer to the ideal state.
- An identification of problems that can come up and how to address them.

To use transformation methodologies typically applied to corporations, the STC Steering Committee has worked with a consultant to accommodate STC's status as a

volunteer-based professional society. In this regard, the transformation methodology has been adapted in three ways:

- It has been streamlined and organised linearly, so that the core team can focus on one step at a time, rather than juggling multiple initiatives. Their investigation will focus on ways to fix things.
- Because of limited outside support, various team members and STC members with special expertise have been assigned significant portions of the transformation work. The consultant’s focus is to provide structure to the process, expert interpretation of the data and best practice frameworks. The STC transformation team members and the extended list of stakeholders bear the load of gathering of data and developing key documentation, organisational structures and communication plans.
- Typical transformation processes involve extensive collaboration among stakeholders throughout the organisation. Consultants in workshops usually moderate this collaboration. Given the geographically dispersed nature of the STC and the limitations of time and budget, the transformation team will not have in-person meetings before the board meeting in January. We will work around this situation by having individuals or small groups develop plans. These plans will be further developed by the larger group.

The readiness assessment work included interviews with seventeen prominent leaders of STC. We found unanimous agreement on the need for organisational change to address the changing industry and evolving needs of the membership. Moreover, complete agreement on the top three goals of the transformation effort also exist: 1) increase/improve member services, 2) achieve long-term financial stability and 3) increase membership growth.

The assessment also gauged a realistic pace for the change effort (three years) and encapsulated the leadership’s goals and concerns for the effort into a set of “Transformation Principles”:

- Do no harm.
- Respect existing communities currently operating under the STC “umbrella.”
- Build on the organisation’s strengths.
- Develop a forum for vibrant, meaningful, and supportive interchange for communities of practice.
- Support a geographically and professionally diverse membership.
- Deliver increased choice to members.
- Promote the value of technical communication to members, academia and industry.

The Team

The board of directors realised that it would take a specialised team to lead this effort, so at the May 2003 board meeting, a "core" Transformation Team was appointed. That team developed a vision, goals and principles to guide them. The people involved represent many of the communities of practice within STC. Two past Society presidents, the current president and the two current vice presidents (who will be STC presidents over the next two years) are all working closely together so any recommended programs and improvements can be implemented consistently in the future.

The Transformation Team added representatives who could provide the chapter, SIG, international, marketing, management, financial, business owner and historical perspectives to their committee. They called this "extended group" the Stakeholders. The twenty Transformation Team members and the perspective they each bring to the team is provided in the table below.

The board of directors has engaged John Nardone, a strategy and marketing consultant, to give us professional assistance in our transformation process. In addition to being a "friend of the Society," John brings us a wealth of experience. That experience will help us ensure the

Team Component	Individual (alphabetical by last name)	Society Position	Perspective Brought to the Team
Core, Steering	Andrea Ames	First vice president President 2004-2005	Corporate management, education, large chapter
Core	Rahel Bailie	Director-Sponsor Region 7	Canadian, business owner, medium chapter
Core	Jon Baker	Director-Sponsor Region 1	Regional, financial, large chapter
Stakeholder	Mike Bates	Director-Sponsor Region 4	Proposal writer, corporate management, medium chapter
Stakeholder	Judy Glick-Smith	President 2001-2002, Member of SAC	Management, business owner, Senior Advisory Council (SAC), large chapter. Judy started the Leadership initiative.
Core	Bonni Graham	Director-Sponsor Region 8	Regional, business owner, metrics, medium chapter
Stakeholder	Sandra Harner	Assistant to the President for Academic and Research Programs	Educator, faculty advisor to a student chapter
Stakeholder, Steering	Peter Herbst	Executive Director	Historical, office 20 years, management
Stakeholder	Vici Koster-Lenhardt	Director-Sponsor Region 2	Regional, international (European), corporate management, small chapter
Core, Steering	Suzanna Laurent	Second vice president, President 2005-2006	Management, business owner, small chapter
Stakeholder	Taryn Light	Boston chapter past president	Large chapter, former president
Stakeholder	Whitney Quesenbery	Usability SIG and helped establish UPA (Usability Professionals Association)	SIG, large chapter
Stakeholder	Ginny Redish	Founder and former president of the Usability SIG	Former board member, SIG, added value, large chapter
Core	Jim Romano	Assistant to the President for Membership Development	International, business owner, metrics, large chapter
Stakeholder	Fred Sampson	Silicon Valley chapter president	Large chapter, current president, offshoring
Core, Steering	Ed See	Immediate Past President, President 2002-2003, SAC	Corporate management, marketing executive, large chapter
Core, Steering	Mary Jo Stark	Transformation Team Manager, Board Treasurer	Financial, subject-matter expert, education, large chapter
Stakeholder	Bill Stolgitis	Former Executive Director	Legal, historical, management, office
Stakeholder, Steering	Thea Teich	President 2003-2004	Management, marketing, business owner, finance, medium chapter
Stakeholder	Debbie Wiles	Lone Star chapter president	Large chapter, current president

transformation is successful. He has developed a structure for the entire process, is facilitating the process and is providing unbiased experience and perspective.

As the team grew, we realised that a steering committee was needed to facilitate and approve the critical activities of the Transformation Team, including John Nardone's work. Members of the Steering Committee are Mary Jo Stark, Peter Herbst, Thea Teich, Ed See, Andrea Ames and Suzanna Laurent.

Business Landscape Analysis

The STC's Business Landscape Analysis provides a snapshot of the organisation as it is today. Following are the major points:

- STC's best opportunity for growth is to lead its members and the industry into the future by focussing on emerging disciplines and growing opportunities within the profession, while also meeting the needs of its core writer/editor base.
- STC would better serve the membership by leveraging new technologies to build this benefit.
- STC would be a better industry leader if we had more leaders in industry and academia.
- STC could provide better exposure to its value if more corporate managers are members.
- STC's greatest benefit to its members is the forum for the exchange of information and ideas.
- STC would better serve its membership if it had a formal structure to its education/training program.
- STC should celebrate volunteerism and provide better "cultural support" for its volunteers.
- STC membership interaction is a key benefit that we can enrich by creating opportunities for involvement and commitment for members early in their Society experience.
- STC will better represent the membership if the board is structured to represent practice-based communities as well as geographical communities.
- STC will benefit financially by rethinking how services can be delivered in new and different ways.

Vision Model

The Vision Model provides an idealised picture of how STC will look in the future. Following are the major points:

- As a global "community of communities", STC will welcome all professionals concerned with communicating technical information, and with the technology used to communicate.
- STC will support its communities, which will support their members as well as the larger organisation.

- STC governance and the board will represent the major constituencies and strategic interests of the organisation.
- STC will pursue membership growth and leverage its scale to provide greater value for its members.
- STC will promote the value provided by the fields of technical communication.
- STC and its communities will draw vision, guidance and strength from its strong connection to industry and academia.
- The board will develop a multi-year strategic plan that will keep their focus on long-term goals.
- STC will be financially stable, with sound business planning and fiscal management processes.
- STC resources will flow to the communities and activities supported by our members through selection and participation.

Operating Model

In order to implement the vision described in the previous section, the following three questions must be answered:

- What are the differences between what we are now and what we want to be?
- How do we bridge those gaps?
- What areas of the organisation need to be developed or changed for transformation to succeed?

The following seven operational areas have been identified as requiring development in order to reach our ideal vision of the Society.

Communities - virtual and geographic

Membership - grow and retain

Financial - stability and growth

Education - shared services

Technology infrastructure - shared services

Governance - structure and representation

Communication - keeping members informed

Committees are being formed to develop and implement the changes required to these operational areas. Jill Nicholson, from the STC Australia Chapter, has been appointed to the Communications Support Committee.

Transformation Roadmap

Part of the work performed by these support committees will be to create and expand a transformation roadmap which will guide us in closing the gaps between our current organisational status and our vision of the future. The roadmap will provide step-by-step plans and specific initiatives.

Development of the roadmap is currently in progress.

STC COMMUNITIES

As part of the STC Transformation and the development of the transformation roadmap, a discussion was held regarding current and possible future STC communities. The following is a summary of this discussion.

An STC community is a group of people who share common interests, activities and initiatives; who communicate regularly; and who derive benefit from their association. STC communities must provide value worth paying for to their members.

Currently the STC has 118 geographic communities (chapters), 21 communities of practice (SIGS) and 33 communities at universities and colleges. Many communities are geographically diverse, making the need to communicate across large distances critical.

We need to redefine communities within the STC as our structure is no longer in alignment with the reality of our communities:

- 42% of respondents to STC's 2002 membership survey said they had not attended a single chapter meeting in the last 12 months.
- 43% of STC members belong to at least one SIG.
- Many members belong to more than one SIG.

Despite this, the STC board continues to be organised around chapters. A key element of the transformation will be equal treatment from STC for all communities.

The types of communities which might exist within the STC include communities based around:

- What you create (manuals, books, websites etc)
- How you work (consultant, independent, permanent employee)
- The tools you use (Frame, Word, HTML etc)
- Where you are in your career (student, team leader etc)
- The industry in which you work
- Where you live
- What you focus on (usability, research, content management etc)

Any of these communities could be created and supported under the STC umbrella. Communities would be created as required by those who require them. As part of application for support by the STC, initiators of a community would create a vision statement and gather charter members. While the community provides value to its members, it will prosper and contribute to the STC and to technical communication. If it falters, members either re-invent it based on the needs of the time, merge with another group or decide to end the community.

In order to prosper, a community needs:

- A clear definition of itself as a community
- A clear statement of its purpose (mission statement)
- A clear statement of why the community should exist
- Benefits that members perceive as being worth the cost of membership
- Leaders and a process for developing future leaders
- Financial support and fiscal responsibility
- Recognition

Obviously this model of communities within the STC will change the way we look at existing STC communities (chapters and SIGs). As part of the transformation process, the STC is asking all existing communities to examine the value they offer to members in terms of:

- Meetings and networking opportunities
- Education
- Communication
- Employment information
- Regional activities

Communities will be asked to prepare a mission or vision statement and to apply to be re-chartered. They will be asked to examine the value they bring to their members and the technical communication community. In the future, members will choose the communities they wish to belong to and communities wishing to prosper will have to consider the value they offer and how this is marketed to members.

The STC will support all communities equally regardless of how they are organised or how they define their purpose. This includes parity in financial support and in awards and recognition.

YOUR PART IN THE STC TRANSFORMATION

If you are interested in more information or wish to participate in the transformation process, you can:

- Talk to members of the communities to which you belong about their involvement within the community and why they value it.
- Start to think in new ways about communities.
- Post questions to the transformation website and read the articles posted there. The site is at <http://www.stc.org/transformation>
- Contact your director-sponsor, chapter or SIG leader with questions or comments
- Download the transformation talks from <http://www.stc.org/transformationextras.asp>

ELECTIONS FOR THE AUSTRALIA CHAPTER

Elections for the STC Australia Chapter committee will be held in May and the new committee will take office on 1 July. Our annual face-to-face committee planning meeting will take place on 10 July in Sydney.

Currently we have the following nominations:

- President: **Michelle Hallett**
- Past President: **Colin Dawson**
- Vice President: open
- Secretary: open
- Treasurer: **Jill Nicholson**
- Newsletter: **Jean Weber**
- Webmaster: **Rhonda Bracey**
- Membership: **Kirsty Taylor**
- Competitions: **Marcia Bascombe**
- Meetings: **Ray Archee**

We are looking for a second newsletter editor, a second person to assist with the competitions, a secretary and a vice-president but you can nominate for any position except for president and past president. The vice-president will become president next year and would require some experience working in committees.

We also need someone to supervise the elections.

In the past the STC Australia Chapter has supported the ASTC (NSW) with assistance in bringing speakers to the annual conference. We would like to extend our support, both financial and as volunteers, to help with any initiatives the ASTC (NSW) and ASTC (VIC) are implementing in the future.

We will also run our annual competition again this year including the Technical Publications, Online Communications and Technical Art competitions. Entry is open to non-members as well as to STC members. We would like to see greater participation in this competition. Winners of Best of Show (chosen from all those who receive a Distinguished award) are automatically sent to participate in the International STC Competition.

We hope to have other new initiatives this year which will be developed and discussed at our planning meeting. Nominate, get elected and you'll be eligible to attend.

Finally I would like to say thank you to two members who aren't returning this year: **Ann Backhaus**, a rolling stone under whom no moss gathers, who has moved to Indonesia. Ann has been instrumental in the success of our competitions over the past three years. **Robin Hutchinson** has other commitments this year but over the last three years has produced excellent newsletters.

STC AUSTRALIA WEBSITE REDESIGN

If you've checked out the Australia Chapter website recently you'll notice it's gone through a radical redesign, the work of Rhonda Bracey, who came to our assistance midway through the year.

Rhonda has streamlined the website and added a more professional touch. We now have a Javascript menu which allows the major categories to be broken into sub-categories so you should be able to find what you want faster. We have a News page and are working on a Members Only section which will include access to a bulletin board where members can discuss issues related to their work and to technical communication in general, as well as chapter-related discussions.

The Events pages are still there if you're looking for an opportunity to make contact with other technical communication professionals in Australia and New Zealand, or if you're travelling further afield and would like to attend a conference in the US or Europe. We would appreciate it if you could let us know of any events you are holding or anything that we haven't heard about.

We have also maintained our Consultants and Resources pages. We would encourage all consultants and contractors to list their names there, whether or not they are members of the STC. If you don't have a company name, list your own name. Also, if you use any web-based resources that are not included on our pages, please let us know.

If you'd like to send us any information, or to comment on our website, please email webmaster@stc-aus.org.au.

WORST MANUAL CONTEST

Technical Standards, Southern California

A company called Technical Standards and based in Southern California holds a competition each year in which the STC's members can nominate the worst manual they have seen that year. The competition is designed to underscore the importance of clear technical writing. The worst manual wins, though the prizewinner is not the author but the nominator.

This year, the winner is our highly skilled webmaster, Rhonda Bracey. She nominated the two-page Safety Section of a friend's air conditioning unit. If the phrase: "...to have the observance without fail to prevent the damage to harm and the property beforehand to the person who use this product and other persons" doesn't scare you, then some of the other text will!



Director Sponsor Candidate for Region 8: Alison Reynolds, Christchurch, New Zealand.

Greetings to all of you from 'down under'! My picture is probably a surprise to those of you who think New Zealand is a land of hobbits, orcs and strange, flightless birds that only venture out in the dark. I am sorry to disappoint you! I don't have large hairy feet and I do make appearances in the daylight (although some of you who have met me at conferences might disagree).

Let me tell you what I can offer if I am elected as your director sponsor.

My greatest 'claim to fame' is my experience building virtual and real communities of technical communicators and information designers from all around the world. In recognition of this experience, I have recently been asked to be a member of the STC Board Communities Support Committee.

My 'community' experience has grown from my association with STC and from my role as the director of the world's first international online Graduate Diploma of Information Design (formerly Technical Communication) beamed 'live' from Christchurch Polytechnic Institute of Technology here in New Zealand. We have a talented student group from New Zealand, Australia, Canada, the US, India and Europe. Our staff and advisory board also span the globe and we have a virtual STC student chapter of over 100 students. I arrange and supervise work placements nationally and internationally and I have worked steadily to raise the profile of technical communication among employers and in organisations.

In my role as an academic, I am a frontline leader in the development of technical communication and information design as a profession and as a research-based discipline. I have a Masters of Business Management and a Graduate Diploma of Business Administration in Communication Management from Massey University (New Zealand). My thesis was a comparative study of technical communication and information design trends in New Zealand and North America.

Forget flightless birds! This 'bird' is a sought-after international speaker. I have presented papers at STC's 45th, 49th, and 50th Annual Conferences; at the 2002 region 7 conference; and at the 1998 region 8 conference. I taught in China and India as part of an STC initiative to promote technical communication in developing countries, was a guest visitor at the San Francisco chapter meeting 1998, and attended STC's 43rd Annual Conference in Seattle.

In 2003 I trebled the New Zealand chapter membership with the creation of virtual student membership. I also established the first New Zealand STC student scholarship and arranged seminars by international STC speakers such as Carol Barnum, JoAnn Hackos, and Raymond Urgo.

I believe my experience, innovativeness and skills to represent the international face of the region will ensure its continued growth, strength and diversity.

SELLING STC TO THE BOSS

Having trouble selling the idea of STC membership to the boss? Get it paid through your corporate training budget. Dictionary.com defines 'training' as follows: "to make proficient with specialised instruction and practice."

- 'Training' happens when a chapter workshop helps you develop superior company documents - faster and more efficiently.
- 'Training' happens when an STC telephone seminar teaches you and your colleagues the basics of a new technology which might streamline your company's production processes.
- 'Training' happens when an article in Intercom or Technical Communication shows you how to solve a problem that has been hampering dissemination of company documents.

Non-members pay considerably more for STC programs, conferences and workshops than do members. Only members receive STC publications.

For information about joining STC or renewing a membership, visit

<http://www.stc.org>

INTERESTING WORDS

Yourdictionary.com sends a **Word of the Day** to anyone who subscribes. Here are some of their more interesting choices (*my comments are in italics*):

Gradgrind - A dull bean-counter, an impersonal person, interested solely in facts and figures with little sympathy for human needs. *One of those words that sounds like its meaning.*

Gossip - (1) A sponsor, a godfather or godmother (to the end of the 17th century); (2) a familiar acquaintance, especially a woman invited to be present at a birth of a friend (to the end of the 19th century); (3) a person, especially a woman, who spreads stories about others that they would prefer not known; (4) the stories spread by a gossip in sense (3). *This word seems to have an interesting evolution.*

Heterophemy - The inadvertent use of one word or phrase when another is intended. *I'm sure I've committed that on one or two occasions.*

Matutolypea - A rare word for an everyday occurrence: ill-humor in the mornings, getting up on the wrong side of the bed. *No comment!*

Snowdropper - Someone who steals clothes from a clothesline. *It seems there's a word for everything.*

PUBLICATION SCHEDULE FOR 2004-05

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.

Copy Editors/Proofreaders:
Jill and Paul Nicholson

Michelle Hallett is guest editor for the June issue.

ADVERTISING RATES

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 logo for AuSTCom features the text 'AuSTCom' in a bold, sans-serif font. The 'A' is significantly larger than the other letters. To the right of the 'm', there is a stylized graphic element consisting of a curved line that starts under the 'm', goes up and over, and ends with a small arrowhead pointing to the right.

Newsletter of the Society for Technical Communication, Australia Chapter