



AuSTCom

Newsletter of the Society for Technical Communication, Australia Chapter

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Michelle Hallett, President, STC Australia Chapter, president@stc-aus.org.au

I've been President of your chapter for three months now and despite some setbacks, we are moving ahead with this year's plans.

We're running the Technical Publications, Online and Technical Art competitions again this year. The deadline for entries is November 15, 2004 and the cost to STC members is \$55 AUD per entry. The competition is a chance to get some feedback on your work by your peers in the industry. I've always found the feedback useful and an opportunity to improve the work I do. I hope you will consider this an opportunity for you as well.

We're also running a student competition again this year. This competition is open to undergraduate students and covers printed documents of a technical or scientific nature. The deadline is November 26, 2004. Details about both competitions are available on the chapter's website at <http://www.stc-aus.org.au>.

Our former Vice-President, Marcia Bascombe, resigned from her position earlier this year due to ill health. I would like to welcome Ray Archee as the new Australia Chapter Vice-President. Ray has been on our executive committee and has organised our chapter meetings since we began four years ago and so he is an ideal choice to continue moving the chapter forward in coming years.

Unfortunately, we received only one nomination for Marcia's position and that concerns me. I would like to see more members participating in the chapter. I realise that we are all busy people and that the jobs we do can take a lot of our time. My feeling is that if more of you aren't volunteering to help us, then perhaps we are not offering you enough of what you need.

So I'm hoping that you will tell me what you would like your chapter to do. We receive a small portion of your annual membership fees to promote and invest in technical communication within Australia. The annual competitions are one way we do this. But what else would you like us to be doing with your money?

Would you like us to hold training sessions or online question-and-answer sessions? If so, what topics would you like covered? Would you like us to support local meetings or meetings of people working in similar industries? We are happy to work with local groups such as the ASTC. In the past, we have supported the ASTC (NSW) conference and would gladly do the same with the ASTC (VIC). In fact, we're happy to look at all possibilities. It's your chapter, so if you have any ideas, please email them to me at president@stc-aus.org.au or post them on the bulletin board available at our website under "Forums": <http://www.stc-aus.org.au>.

continued on page 2

FROM THE EDITORS

Jean Hollis Weber and Robin Swindell

Hello from the new co-editor. This is the first full issue Jean and I have worked on together, and we hope you find it informative (and fun!). As part of our plan to bring some new features to the newsletter, this issue introduces our Technical Communicators Highlight section. We want to show the diversity of the technical communication community in Australia—we do a lot more than just software documentation! Many of you will already know this issue's intrepid participant, Rhonda Bracey. Read more about her on page 12.

We are always looking for suggestions, feedback, or submissions. You can get in touch with us at newsletter@stc-aus.org.au. We welcome your input!

—Robin Swindell

CONTENTS

President's Message.....	1
STC and Chapter News.....	2
(including Competition Deadlines and Scholarships Available)	
Survey of Australian Technical Communicators 2004.....	3
STC Membership.....	9
Mission Statement for 2002	
Onwards.....	10
STC Transformation News.....	10
Why Good Projects Fail	
Anyway.....	11
TC Highlight: Rhonda Bracey....	12

STC AND CHAPTER NEWS

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE (CONTINUED)

Finally, would you like us to hold regular meetings of chapter members? Given our small numbers and our geographic spread, this may pose some difficulties. However, currently we are trialling several online meeting methods. The committee regularly holds meetings online (we have one committee member in Perth, one in Brisbane, one in North Queensland, four in Sydney, one north of Sydney on the Central Coast and one currently moving from Perth to Canberra). We are looking at putting the technologies in place to hold a meeting of all members, perhaps early in 2005. I would like that meeting to focus on your vision of what the chapter can do for you.

I look forward to hearing your ideas and suggestions.

*Michelle Hallett, President
STC Australia Chapter
president@stc-aus.org.au*

BY-ELECTION RESULT

Ray Archee, PhD, Lecturer in Communication, School of Communication, Design & Media, University of Western Sydney, has been elected to the position made vacant by the resignation of Marcia Bascombe.

NEW SENIOR MEMBERS

The Australia Chapter would like to congratulate the following people who have become senior members of the STC in the past six months:

Rhonda Bracey, August 04
Smita Char, October 04
Bernard Metcalfe, August 04
Rhonda Sclanders, June 04
Kirsty Taylor, November 04

We'd also like to welcome the following new member of the chapter:

Gregory Balcombe (WA)

NEWSLETTER PUBLICATION DATES 2005

February, June, September, November

Please have articles, notices, advertising, etc. to the editor by the 15th of January, May, August, or October. Send to newsletter@stc-aus.org.au

COMPETITION DEADLINES

Early bird entries due **Oct 15**
Final entries due **Nov 15**

Send entries to:

Michelle Hallett
2 Baldwin Close
Blackwall NSW 2256
Contact phone: 0404 892 369

Costs:

Early bird and STC members: \$55
Others: \$65

Full details are on the website,
<http://www.stc-aus.org.au/competitions.htm>

CHAPTER BULLETIN BOARD

For those who haven't already done so, I would urge you to have a look at our bulletin board which is accessible at

<http://www.stc-aus.org.au/bbs/>

HOW TO CONTACT US

To contact a committee member, send e-mail to [position]@stc-aus.org.au and it will be forwarded to the appropriate person. (Exceptions: Use pastpres and vp instead of the full position titles.) For example, to reach the newsletter editor, send a message to newsletter@stc-aus.org.au

SCHOLARSHIP APPLICATIONS AVAILABLE

Each year, STC offers scholarships to full-time graduate and undergraduate students pursuing careers in technical communication. These scholarships are available to students worldwide.

Four awards of \$1,000 each will be granted for academic year 2005–2006. Application deadline is 15 February 2005. Application forms and instructions are available from the STC office:

901 N. Stuart Street, Suite 904
Arlington, VA 22203-1822, USA
+1 -703-522-4114

or from the website,
http://www.stc.org/scholarshipInfo_national.asp

SURVEY OF AUSTRALIAN TECHNICAL COMMUNICATORS 2004

by Jean Hollis Weber

From 30 May through 31 August 2004, I conducted a survey of Australian technical communicators regarding current salaries (or hourly rates) in relation to experience, qualifications and other factors. The survey was open to technical communicators living in Australia. It was advertised on the Internet through the Technical Writers' List, the Australian Technical Writers' List, the STC Australia Chapter, the ASTC NSW, the ASTC Victoria, and various smaller mailing lists in Perth, Brisbane, and elsewhere.

The survey was sponsored by the Society for Technical Communication (STC) Australia Chapter and was conducted using the online service SurveyMonkey at <http://www.surveymonkey.com>.

This article summarises some of the key results. I have not attempted to draw conclusions or do any type of statistical analysis from the data presented. Results are also posted on the website.

A total of 140 people responded. This response was disappointing compared to last year's 206.

Gender

Female	75	54.3%
Male	63	45.7%
No answer	2	

Age groups

29 years or under	16	11.4%
30–39	50	35.7%
40–49	42	30.0%
50 years and over	32	22.9%

Highest level of formal education (any field)

No tertiary qualification	15	11.1%
Diploma/certificate	25	18.5%
Bachelor's degree	44	32.6%
Graduate diploma/certificate	26	19.3%
Master's degree	21	15.6%
Doctorate	4	3.0%
Total respondents	135	

Experience in technical communication

Less than 2 years	7	5.1%
2–5 years	29	21.0%
6–10 years	50	36.2%
11 years or more	52	37.7%
Total respondents	138	

I work primarily in this part of the country

Sydney area	35	25.5%
Other NSW	1	0.7%
ACT	12	8.8%
Melbourne area	46	33.6%
Other Victoria	4	2.9%
Adelaide area	3	2.2%
Other SA	0	—
Perth area	20	14.6%
Other WA	0	—
Tasmania	0	—
NT	0	—
Brisbane/Gold Coast/ Sunshine Coast/other SE Qld	9	6.6%
Other Qld	1	0.7%
Outside Australia	6	4.4%
Total respondents	137	

Work location: I work primarily

Onsite	110	80.3%
At home/own office (includes telecommuting)	9	6.6%
Both/varies	18	13.1%
Total respondents	137	

Primary type of employment

Salaried	82	59.4%
Consultant	4	2.9%
Contract (hourly rate or fixed price; includes freelance work)	43	31.2%
Not in paid employment	9	6.5%
Total respondents	138	

Tertiary qualifications (all that apply)

A technical field (e.g. engineering, programming)	47	40.5%
Technical communication, English or similar	44	37.9%
Other (please specify*)	42	36.2%
Total respondents	116	

* Other qualifications

Business studies	History & politics
Life sciences	Library & information mgt
Education	Business
MBA	Industrial relations
Office administration	Theology
Science	Librarianship
BA	Gemmology
Australian standards	Marketing
Management diploma	Education
Sociology	Philosophy

Ind. Psych. Ergonomics (medical)	B.App.Sci (Scientific Information Services)
English lit, languages, linguistics	BA Communications (Journalism)
Psychology	Cognitive science
Mathematics	Earth science

Training in technical writing (please select all that apply)

On your own	103	75.7%
On-the-job informal mentoring	78	57.4%
On-the-job formal mentoring	33	24.3%
Private tutoring	6	4.4%
Conferences/seminars/workshops	77	56.6%
Tertiary course	36	26.5%
Other (please specify)	8	5.9%
Total respondents	136	

Salary (A\$) before tax

Not applicable	6	7.1%
under \$30K	1	1.2%
\$30K-\$40K	2	2.4%
\$40K-\$50K	7	8.2%
\$50K-\$60K	25	29.4%
\$60K-\$70K	21	24.7%
\$70K-\$80K	13	15.3%
\$80K-\$90K	7	8.2%
\$90K-\$100K	2	2.4%
\$100K +	1	1.2%
Total respondents	85	

Hourly rate

Not applicable	14	20.0%
Less than \$25	0	0
\$25-\$29	4	5.7%
\$30-\$34	2	2.9%
\$35-\$39	0	0
\$40-\$44	5	7.1%
\$45-\$49	7	10.0%
\$50-\$54	8	11.4%
\$55-\$59	17	24.3%
\$60-\$69	7	10.0%
\$70-\$79	2	2.9%
\$80-\$89	3	4.3%
\$90-\$99	0	0
\$100 or more	1	1.4%
Total respondents	70	

How satisfied are you with your current overall compensation?

Very satisfied	9	6.8%
Satisfied	86	64.7%
Dissatisfied	32	24.1%
Very dissatisfied	6	4.5%
Total respondents	133	

How many employees are in your employer's organisation?

1-50	34	27%
51-100	17	13.5%
101-500	23	18.3%
501-1000	16	12.7%
1001 or more	36	28.6%
Total respondents	126	

How many technical communicators are in your employer's organisation?

1	32	25.4%
2	21	16.7%
3-5	24	19.0%
6-10	20	15.9%
> 10	29	23.0%
Total respondents	126	

Working conditions in past year (please select all that apply)

Made redundant/sacked	8	7.4%
Contract terminated or not renewed	17	15.7%
Increased workload due to staff cuts	35	32.4%
Projects cancelled	19	17.6%
Training and/or travel budget cuts	24	22.2%
No (or less than normal) salary increase	42	38.9%
Job offers have increased	24	22.2%
Salary or hourly rate has increased	29	26.9%
Training and/or travel budget increased	4	3.7%
Total respondents	108	

Billable hours worked per week

10 or fewer	4	3.1%
11-20	4	3.1%
21-30	14	11.0%
31-40	57	44.9%
40-50	47	37.0%
over 50	1	0.8%
Total respondents	127	

Non-billable hours worked

10 or fewer	89	74.8%
11–20	20	16.8%
21–30	4	3.4%
31–40	2	1.7%
40–50	3	2.5%
over 50	1	0.8%
Total respondents	119	

**Main areas of work
(please select all that apply)**

Technical writing	122	93.8%
Technical editing/copy editing	84	64.6%
Indexing	35	26.9%
Training	37	28.5%
Documentation consulting	70	53.8%
Website management/development	43	33.1%
Project leading/team leading/ people management	24	18.5%
Quality assurance	38	29.2%
Usability/accessibility testing	34	26.2%
Sales support (first or second level)	8	6.2%
Knowledge management	37	28.5%
Supervising/management	12	9.2%
Other (please specify*)	24	18.5%
Total respondents	130	

* Other areas of work

Content management	Managing translations
Business analysis	Research
Documentation & KM systems analysis	Marketing communications, writing, editing
Creating network diagrams	Process analysis
Curriculum development	Needs analysis
Document control	Questionnaire design
Tech comms support & mentoring	Document automation, templating
Data analysis	Graphic design
Instructional design	Forms design
Copywriting	Build systems for testing

**Professional memberships
(please select all that apply)**

Current member of ASTC	44	68.8%
Current member of STC	26	40.6%
Current member of other professional organisation (please specify*)	17	26.6%
Total respondents	64	

* Other professional associations

Inst.. Engineers, Society of Editors, Standards Australia, Women in Publishing, ACS, ACM, Aus. Inst. Training

Development, NSW Writers Assoc., AMSRA, AIM, The Alliance (AJA Section), ISTC, PRIA, ISPI

**Materials produced
(please select all that apply)**

Paper-based documentation	116	89.2%
Online documentation	107	82.3%
PDF	103	79.2%
HTML Help (Microsoft proprietary)	47	36.2%
HTML-based help	54	41.5%
Web pages/sites	49	37.7%
Multimedia, including video	15	11.5%
API documentation	14	10.8%
Intranet content	57	43.8%
Marketing materials	35	26.9%
Policies and procedures	58	44.6%
Proposals	30	23.1%
Surveys	9	6.9%
Specifications	29	22.3%
Templates and forms	69	53.1%
Tenders	13	10.0%
Training and education materials	70	53.8%
User documentation	105	80.8%
White papers	22	16.9%
Other (please specify*)	10	7.7%
Total respondents	130	

* Other materials produced

Magazines	E-learning courses
Third-party books	RoboDemo tutorials
Flash	Presentations
Internal style guides and process guides	Architecture documentation planning
Analysis/research papers	Graphics

Some data correlations**Age group by gender**

Gender	Age group				
	≤29	30–39	40–49	≥50	
Female	11	32	17	15	75
Male	5	18	25	15	63
	16	50	42	30	138

Experience by age

Age	Experience				
	<2 yr	2–5 yr	6–10 yr	≥11	
≤29	4	7	4	0	15
30–39	3	14	22	10	49
40–49	0	4	14	24	42
≥50	0	4	10	18	32
	7	29	50	52	138

Salary by gender

Gender	Salary										
	N/A	≤\$30K	\$30K– \$40K	\$40K– \$50K	\$50K– \$60K	\$60K– \$70K	\$70K– \$80K	\$80K– \$90K	\$90K– \$100K	≥\$100K	
Female	1	0	1	5	16	13	5	3	1	0	45
Male	5	1	1	2	8	8	8	3	1	1	38
	6	1	2	7	24	21	13	6	2	1	83

Salary by age

Age	Salary										
	N/A	≤\$30K	\$30K– \$40K	\$40K– \$50K	\$50K– \$60K	\$60K– \$70K	\$70K– \$80K	\$80K– \$90K	\$90K– \$100K	≥\$100K	
≤29	0	0	2	2	6	1	0	0	0	0	11
30–39	2	1	0	3	11	8	5	3	1	0	34
40–49	3	0	0	0	4	9	5	1	1	1	24
≥50	1	0	0	2	4	3	3	3	0	0	16
	6	1	2	7	25	21	13	7	2	1	85

Salary by experience

Experience	Salary										
	N/A	≤\$30K	\$30K– \$40K	\$40K– \$50K	\$50K– \$60K	\$60K– \$70K	\$70K– \$80K	\$80K– \$90K	\$90K– \$100K	≥\$100K	
≤2 years	1	0	2	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	5
2–5 years	1	1	0	4	10	5	1	0	0	0	22
6–10 years	4	0	0	2	8	8	5	3	0	0	30
≥11 years	0	0	0	0	6	8	7	4	2	1	28
	6	1	2	7	25	21	13	7	2	1	85

Salary by education

Education	Salary										
	N/A	≤\$30K	\$30K– \$40K	\$40K– \$50K	\$50K– \$60K	\$60K– \$70K	\$70K– \$80K	\$80K– \$90K	\$90K– \$100K	≥\$100K	
No tertiary	1	0	0	0	2	1	1	2	0	0	7
Diploma/ Certificate	2	0	0	2	6	4	3	1	0	0	18
Bachelor's degree	1	1	2	2	9	9	5	2	0	0	31
Grad Dip/ Certificate	0	0	0	2	6	5	1	1	1	0	16
Master's degree	1	0	0	0	2	2	2	1	1	1	10
Doctorate	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	3
	6	1	2	7	25	21	13	7	2	1	85

Education by gender

Gender	Education						
	No tertiary	Diploma/ Certificate	Bachelor's degree	Grad Dip/ Certificate	Master's degree	Doctorate	
Female	6	11	25	16	14	1	73
Male	8	14	19	9	7	3	60
	14	25	44	25	21	4	133

Education by age

Age	Education							
	No tertiary	Diploma/ Certificate	Bachelor's degree	Grad Dip/ Certificate	Master's degree	Doctorate		
≤29	1	3	7	2	1	0	14	
30–39	3	6	23	9	7	1	49	
40–49	4	10	10	9	7	0	40	
≥50	7	6	4	6	6	3	32	
	15	25	44	26	21	4	135	

Hourly rate by experience

Experience	Hourly rate														
	N/A	<\$25	\$25–\$29	\$30–\$34	\$35–\$39	\$40–\$44	\$45–\$49	\$50–\$54	\$55–\$59	\$60–\$69	\$70–\$79	\$80–\$89	\$90–\$99	≥\$100	
≤2 years	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
2–5 years	5	0	0	0	0	1	1	2	2	0	1	0	0	0	12
6–10 years	6	0	3	2	0	2	4	2	5	5	0	1	0	0	30
≥11 years	2	0	0	0	0	2	2	4	10	2	1	2	0	1	26
	14	0	4	2	0	5	7	8	17	7	2	3	0	1	70

Hourly rate by gender

Gender	Hourly rate														
	N/A	<\$25	\$25–\$29	\$30–\$34	\$35–\$39	\$40–\$44	\$45–\$49	\$50–\$54	\$55–\$59	\$60–\$69	\$70–\$79	\$80–\$89	\$90–\$99	≥\$100	
Female	7	0	4	1	0	0	4	5	10	3	1	2	0	0	37
Male	7	0	0	1	0	5	3	3	7	4	1	1	0	1	33
	14	0	4	2	0	5	7	8	17	7	2	3	0	1	70

Hourly rate by age

Age	Hourly rate														
	N/A	<\$25	\$25–\$29	\$30–\$34	\$35–\$39	\$40–\$44	\$45–\$49	\$50–\$54	\$55–\$59	\$60–\$69	\$70–\$79	\$80–\$89	\$90–\$99	≥\$100	
≤29	3	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	5
30–39	5	0	3	1	0	0	1	6	5	1	0	1	0	0	23
40–49	2	0	0	1	0	2	5	1	7	3	1	0	0	1	23
≥50	4	0	0	0	0	3	1	1	5	3	0	2	0	0	19
	14	0	4	2	0	5	7	8	17	7	2	3	0	1	70

Salary by location*

Location	Salary											
	N/A	≤\$30K	\$30K–\$40K	\$40K–\$50K	\$50K–\$60K	\$60K–\$70K	\$70K–\$80K	\$80K–\$90K	\$90K–\$100K	≥\$100K		
Sydney	3	0	0	1	1	9	3	3	1	1	22	
ACT	0	0	0	0	2	2	3	0	0	0	7	
Melbourne	1	0	0	3	9	6	4	3	0	0	26	
Perth	1	0	0	1	5	2	2	1	0	0	12	
Brisbane	0	0	1	2	3	1	0	0	1	0	8	
Overseas	1	1	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	4	
	6	1	1	7	21	21	12	7	2	1	79	

* Locations with very few respondents omitted for privacy reasons

Hourly rate by location*

Location	Hourly rate														20
	N/A	<\$25	\$25 -\$29	\$30 -\$34	\$35 -\$39	\$40 -\$44	\$45 -\$49	\$50 -\$54	\$55 -\$59	\$60 -\$69	\$70 -\$79	\$80 -\$89	\$90 -\$99	≥\$100	
Sydney	5	0	0	0	0	2	4	2	2	2	1	1	0	1	20
ACT	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	2	0	0	0	0	6
Melbourne	5	0	4	0	0	1	1	5	8	1	0	2	0	0	27
Perth	1	0	0	1	0	1	1	1	3	1	1	0	0	0	10
Brisbane	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Overseas	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	2
	13	0	4	2	0	4	6	8	16	7	2	3	0	1	66

* Locations with very few respondents omitted for privacy reasons

Hourly rate by education

Education	Hourly rate														9
	N/A	<\$25	\$25 -\$29	\$30 -\$34	\$35 -\$39	\$40 -\$44	\$45 -\$49	\$50 -\$54	\$55 -\$59	\$60 -\$69	\$70 -\$79	\$80 -\$89	\$90 -\$99	≥\$100	
No tertiary	0	0	0	0	0	2	1	1	1	2	0	2	0	0	9
Diploma/ Certificate	7	0	0	1	0	0	3	2	2	1	0	0	0	0	16
Bachelor's degree	3	0	3	1	0	1	0	3	4	3	0	0	0	0	18
Grad Dip/ Certificate	1	0	0	0	0	1	2	1	5	1	0	0	0	0	11
Master's degree	1	0	1	0	0	1	0	1	4	0	2	1	0	1	12
Doctorate	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	3
	14	0	4	2	0	5	6	8	17	7	2	3	0	1	69

ADVERTISING RATES

We are happy to run advertisements for organisations and activities that are in line with the objectives of the STC. We do not give anyone copies of our mailing list, but we will deliver advertisements on your behalf. We'll also put meeting notices on our website. Contact the newsletter editor or the Webmanager for more details.

Our fees for advertising in a single issue are:

- Full page—\$75
- 1/2 page—\$35
- 1/3 page—\$25
- 1/4 page—\$15

Send enquiries and copy to newsletter@stc-aus.org.au. Deadlines are the 15th of January, May, August and October, but earlier booking of space would be appreciated. We will invoice you for payment upon publication.

The STC is a not-for-profit organisation and does not charge GST on advertising.

We reserve the right to refuse to carry any advertisement.

**STC's 51st Annual Conference**

May 9-12, 2004

Baltimore Convention Center

Join the Society for Technical Communication in Baltimore, Maryland, for STC's 51st Annual Conference, the largest gathering of technical communicators in the world!



For more information, contact the Society office.
703-522-4114 / www.stc.org

STC MEMBERSHIP

Kirsty Taylor, Membership Secretary

As part of the STC's Transformation initiative, the types of membership available are changing. When you renew your STC membership in the coming months, you will be able to choose from three different types of membership – Classic, Limited, or E-Membership. For full-time students, there is also Student Membership.

Any members who have joined STC since March 2004 will receive some amount of credit towards their 2005 membership dues. Existing members cannot renew their membership until November, when you will have to choose your form of membership. When you renew in November, your membership will last until end of December 2005.

Classic Membership

Classic membership is the closest to the current standard membership – the cost is \$USD180/year, including postage, for overseas members. You receive:

- Intercom and Technical Communication as paper copies
- Full access to the STC members-only website
- Membership to one chapter and one Special Interest Group (SIG) or three SIGs

You can join extra SIGS for \$USD5 per SIG or chapters for \$USD10 per chapter.

Limited Membership

Limited membership costs \$USD160/year, including postage. You receive:

- Intercom and Technical Communication as paper copies
- Full access to the STC members-only website

Limited membership does not include any communities (chapters or SIGs), however you can join extra chapters or SIGs for the costs listed above.

E-membership

E-Membership is much the same as Classic membership, but as you can guess from the name, you do not receive paper copies of Intercom or Technical Communication. E-Membership costs \$USD135/year.

As with Classic membership, you can join extra chapters or SIGs if you wish for the costs mentioned previously.

Student Membership

Student Membership costs \$USD50/year, you must be a full-time student, and you have the same benefits as E-Membership.

Why Join the Australia Chapter?

I expect most of you will be thinking already that you can save yourself ten bucks (and US bucks at that!) by not being a member of the Australian chapter ... here's a list of reasons why you should remain affiliated with the Australian chapter:

- \$USD24 per full member and \$USD11 per student member comes back to the chapter from the head office in Virginia. Without members, the Australian chapter will essentially disband (a minimum number of members is required to be a chapter).
- Chapter members save \$AUD10 on their entries to the annual chapter competition.
- Members will receive reduced rates at the STC Region 8 conference in Sydney in 2007 (and if you're affiliated with the chapter, then you can help out with the conference and have your say early in the piece!).
- Chapter members receive this wonderful, quarterly chapter newsletter.
- Members can attend STC-sponsored events in major capital cities (or virtual meetings from anywhere in Australia) in 2005. The committee is already planning and trialling technology for virtual meetings.
- The chapter supports an annual salary survey of technical communicators in Australia, undertaken by Jean Weber. If the chapter doesn't receive income, then we can't help you find out about income information for your profession in your country.

ACCESSABILITY SIG

Please visit the AccessAbility SIG's web site (<http://www.stcsig.org/sn/index.shtml>), join our listserv, and read our online newsletter archives (<http://www.stcsig.org/sn/newsletter.shtml>) and our extensive repository of conference presentations and materials, http://www.stcsig.org/sn/conference_session_mater.shtml

If you are not already a member of the A-SIG, I encourage you to join.

http://www.stc.org/PDF_Files/sigform.pdf

Dan Voss
Immediate Past SIG Manager

MISSION STATEMENT FOR 2002 ONWARDS

Create a shared vision

- Work with our members all over Australia to develop a network that will provide feedback from other regional centers
- Develop a higher profile
- Recruit new members
- Encourage students to become technical communicators

Find other associations we can join with for mutually beneficial activities

- Be active in ASTC activities
- Look for other associations that impinge upon our aims and activities

Actively support technical communication education

- Explore training possibilities and try to find out what is needed
- Help develop an advanced skill set for technical writers
- Actively support higher education for technical communicators

Financial goals

- Set up a student prize and add to it each year with the aim of turning it into a scholarship.
- Design a medallion that can be given to prize winners and the Best of Show winner in the competition
- Continue to support the ASTC annual conference

Actively advance the STC profile

- Broadcast emails
- Speaking at school meetings
- Being an STC ambassador whenever the circumstance arises

STC ANNUAL CONFERENCE NOTES

The Orlando STC chapter has published on their Web site easily readable notes from some of the presentations at the 51st Annual STC Conference.

As well, there's an impressive collection of such notes from several previous years' conferences, plus other organisations' conferences.

<http://www.stc-orlando.org/prodev/51notes/mainmenu.asp>

STC TRANSFORMATION NEWS, ISSUE No. 1

The first issue of *Transformation News* was published on 30 September. For those of you who have not subscribed, here are some excerpts.

"It's my aim to provide you with the most interesting, brief tidbits of information in as timely a fashion as I can manage—more quickly than things can be published in *Intercom*, for example—without being annoyingly frequent.

"As I mentioned in my September *Intercom* article, we're a diverse lot, with many different needs and perceptions of value, so accomplishing my aim is a tall order; please be patient while I dial in just the right mix. (Want a 'brief' about a specific transformation topic? Send me a note at pres@stc.org. I'll address as many requests as I can, while ensuring that you receive the news you need. I can't respond directly to each request, so if you want a personal response by e-mail, send your note to transform@stc.org.)

"**The big announcement** in this issue of the *Transformation News* is that the first version of the long-awaited FAQs is now available on the Web site (www.stc.org/transformation/faqs.asp)! Special thanks for producing and posting these to Paula Berger, Suzanna Laurent, Thea Teich, Ed See, the STC Office, and everyone who asked a question or provided an answer!

"The FAQs are just one of the many transformation information and communication options available to you. Here's what's available today:

- Transformation Web site (articles, presentations, FAQs, etc.)
- Transformation News list
- transform@stc.org (Ask questions, provide feedback, and make suggestions)
- President's column in *Intercom*, addressing different aspects of the transformation each month; now available through the new *Intercom* Online site (September: www.stc.org/intercom/PDFs/2004/20040910_02.pdf)

"What's coming up:

- Live Town Hall meetings (brief transformation updates with lots of time for questions)
- Transformation evangelists in various geographical locations (available for live, personal appearances in those geographies)"

Andrea
STC President
pres@stc.org

WHY GOOD PROJECTS FAIL ANYWAY

Reprinted with permission from CIDM e-newsletter
March 2004

JoAnn Hackos, PhD

CIDM Director

joann.hackos@comtech-serv.com

<http://www.infomanagementcenter.com/index.shtml>

Abstract and review

Nadim F. Matta and Ronald N. Ashkenas, *Harvard Business Review*, September 2003, pp. 109-114.

As many of us already know from experience, big projects fail, despite good intentions and lots of traditional project management record keeping. Matta and Ashkenas recommend a technique they call *rapid-results initiatives* to stave off the seemingly inevitable disappointments and disasters.

Rapid-results initiatives are mini-projects injected into the stream of a large project. Each initiative has a specially assigned team that is asked to achieve a specific result in miniature and do so quickly. These small, challenging projects help teams uncover the missing pieces that plague larger efforts: "Your project contained all the necessary ingredients for success, except when you learned too late that the key subject-matter experts never bought-in to the new processes."

When we set up the typical big project, we assign teams to a variety of tasks that have to be performed in parallel. One team might work on a new process for the information developers so that they can be more responsive to customer needs. Another team may be assigned the development of an information model. Yet, another team may be working on defining the tools requirements. Each of these efforts proceeds on a well-established time line with carefully defined tasks. More often than not, in the case of big projects, each activity requires a lot of time to accomplish. The entire development effort may take months or even years.

The risk that such well-designed activities will lead to failure is great. Matta and Ashkenas report that 2 out of 3 large projects will fail. The problem occurs in the "white space" between the horizontal activities. For the teams working on their own part of the larger project, the missing pieces are almost impossible to detect. Only late in the project life cycle do team members realize that a critical ingredient has been missed. By that time, it may be too late to repair the damage.

The solution is rapid-results initiatives. Small teams are assigned a specific, challenging goal and given 100 days to succeed. The teams undertake an entire project in which the goal is related to and will contribute to an understanding of the goals of the larger initiative.

They take a slice of the problem and execute in whatever way they see fit. Along the way, they often discover the missing integration pieces.

To be successful, rapid-results initiatives must be *results oriented* (reduce translation costs by 50 percent by increasing reuse), *vertical* (take a slice of all the horizontal activities and test them all, including process, content model, and rudimentary tools), and *fast* (finish in 100 days, which creates a challenge but ensures that the initiative isn't large enough to create major damage if it fails).

In the HBR article, the authors cite a World Bank initiative to improve the productivity of small Nicaraguan farmers by 30 percent over 16 years. It's difficult to see results in a 16-year project involving 120,000 farmers. To test the concept, five rapid-results teams were challenged—one had to find a way to increase daily milk production from 600 to 1,600 gallons among 60 farmers in 120 days. To their surprise, they found the problem was not producing the milk but producing milk that was clean enough to meet the hygiene requirements of the distributor. The need for new cleanliness techniques and training was not even on the radar screen of the horizontal team working on training programs.

Big projects put a lot of pressure on all the various team members, but the full burden of success is on the managers. If the project doesn't come together, it's the managers, not the individual team members, who are judged responsible for the failure. The team members were just following through dutifully on their assignments.

By assigning rapid-results initiatives, responsibility shifts to the small teams. They are given a measurable goal and have to achieve it in record time. Despite the challenge, we've noted that most teams are eager to prove themselves and take on the responsibilities with enthusiasm.

Using rapid-results initiatives does not substitute for the horizontal, longterm planning. That work continues. The initiatives simply demonstrate that the new ideas can be successful, despite potential problems. They also prove to the naysayers that the new ideas are not likely to go away.

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Tel. 303-232-7586 Fax. 303-232-0659

TECHNICAL COMMUNICATOR HIGHLIGHT: RHONDA BRACEY



Mostly, I work with companies involved in developing software for the mining and resources industries. I've done online help for software used for managing stockpiles, cost modelling, and occupational health and safety. I love how I get to learn new things all the time, and being a independent contractor means that I get a lot of variety in my work.

I started TW work in the software industry, then had an opportunity to work on a fly-in/fly-out mine/mineral processing site for some 3 months. No software, HATs, GUIs—just good old Word <I use the term 'good' loosely!>. I worked for the Safety and Training department documenting the procedures that plant operators used to do their jobs, based on best (and safe!) practices. For the first time in my life, the stuff I was writing was critical to people's health and safety, and in some cases, writing a procedure incorrectly could have resulted in death or serious injury to the worker. Like many others, this documentation was critical but nobody except the mine/processing plant workers saw it.

One of the 'things' I had to document was the shutdown procedure for an autoclave. For those of you familiar with autoclaves in dentist surgeries, magnify this infinite times! This autoclave was a 30 metres long and 4.5 metres tall steel cylinder. It was lined with titanium because it held tonnes of sulfuric acid slurry (including nickel and cobalt and other minerals) heated to 250C (very hot!), and under 4500 kPa pressure (lots!). This beast took 4 days to shutdown! If the pressure release valves weren't opened according to procedure and in the correct timing sequence, then the whole thing could blow up (think the Hindenburg but with hot sulfuric acid inside...).

My time there was a terrific, and humbling, learning experience as a TW. And one of the best things to come out of it was a whole slew of scenarios I can now use when documenting occupational health and safety software used on mine sites! So it doesn't matter what documentation you do or what industry/specialist area you work in, your work **can** make a difference. (I wrote an article for Solitary Scrivener on my experiences. It's at: <http://stcsig.org/lw/Fall2000.pdf>).

And sometimes I just get the good jobs! Recently, I spent two days a week for a few months at a major diamond jeweller documenting their policies and procedures (they design and make diamond jewellery that they sell in their five stores). Well, the P&P stuff was fairly straightforward, but the best bit was writing their 'Product Knowledge Manual' that was to be used for training all their staff, but especially their sales staff. I learned so much about diamonds, pearls, opals and other precious gems that my husband is getting worried! Unfortunately, I didn't get to handle any of the stones, but I did learn about their history, properties, cut, clarity and the other Cs, so much so that I could reel off the cut of diamonds advertised by another jeweller on local TV ('That's a brilliant, emerald, marquise, princess...' etc.). As I said, my husband is getting worried.

On a project with our state education department, I was involved in one of the biggest things to hit the remote areas of Western Australia since the arrival of the Flying Doctor—the deployment of satellite delivery of teaching to School of the Air kids. I documented some of the more technical stuff, but also the 'how to unpack and put together your new computer and connect it to the satellite' instructions for children and adults who may never have seen or used a computer before.

What I love about my job—the variety of work and the endless opportunities to learn new things.

Rhonda Bracey was a high school teacher-librarian and vice principal for 18 years. She then spent six years working for software companies.

As a result of downsizing, Rhonda was forced to reevaluate her career directions, so nearly three years ago she set up her own independent contracting company, focusing on technical writing, training, editing, and Website development.

Rhonda is Managing Director of CyberText Consulting Pty Ltd, www.cybertext.com.au