

# ROUGH DRAFT

The newsletter of the Phoenix STC Community

June 2006

## Ah, Summer!

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**Note to our readers:** Due to technical difficulties (and the editor's lack of skill with the software), May's *Rough Draft* wasn't available to most readers. Therefore, the editorial staff decided to reprint most of May's content in this issue. Back to the classroom to learn how to do it right!

Where does time go? It seems that just yesterday we were attending the first program meeting of the year, planning for Tech Comm 2005 Conference, and getting our ducks in order for the new program year. Now it's June and we're preparing to acknowledging those members who contributed to our community's success over the year.



*Rough Draft* is the official newsletter of the Society for Technical Communication, Phoenix Chapter community. The newsletter provides news about chapter events, members, and publishes members' opinions about technical communication topics.

### Newsletter Staff:

Karen L. Zorn, Managing Editor  
Clare Turner, Editor In Chief  
Gloria McConnell, Contributing Editor  
Linda Shacklock, Contributing Editor  
Kathy Graden, Contributing Editor  
Chanda Child, Jane Rossignol, and , Reviewers

### Submitting Content

We invite readers to submit articles, columns, photos, and other material on subjects of interest to chapter and Society members. Deadlines for submissions is the 10th of the month prior to publication.

We accept articles submitted as e-mail, HTML, or files in Microsoft Word® or FrameMaker® format. We prefer GIF or JPEG graphics. Please include your e-mail address and your phone number. If you wish to send material by fax, first call the Managing Editor, Karen Zorn, at 408-354-0537.

The *Rough Draft* staff reserves the right to edit articles for clarity and length and to reject submissions judged unfit for publication. We try to review substantive editing of feature articles with the author before publication. Our style guide is Words Into Type.

For many STC members, it's time to plan summer vacations, for the Administrative Council, it's time to plan activities for the next year. If you have ideas for programs, educational opportunities, or other ideas for the community, we'd like to hear! This STC community is about and for the members, we can't provide what you want if you don't tell us! Contact one of the AC members listed on page 2 with your ideas.

In this issue of *Rough Draft*, you'll find the following articles and much more:

- **Creating Simulations and CBT Using Captivate with Neil Perlin**, all the information that you need to know.
- **Key Content, Too Many Pieces**, Bill Albing, STC Carolina Past President takes a look at DITA.
- **XML and Epic Editor: Promise vs. Reality**, Chuck Petch of the Sacramento Chapter assesses the tools and bottom line.

## Congratulations!

It seems like the Phoenix Community cleaned up at the 2006 STC Conference!

- **Tom Barnett** was awarded STC Fellow.
- **Jane Smith** was awarded STC Associate Fellow.
- Our own community was awarded **Community of Distinction** for the program year.
- **Aiessa Moyna's** entry to the Public Relations Competition won a Certificate of Excellence.
- **Rough Draft** won a Certificate of Excellence.

Congratulations to all! It takes many volunteers and dedicated community members to put it all together and make it work.

# Meeting Information

Tuesday, June 13, 2006

## Celebrating our Successes

Every year Phoenix Chapter volunteers generously donate their time to help run the chapter and help other members expand their professional skills through monthly meetings, educational workshops, articles on topics of interest to technical communicators, and judging for writing or art competitions. At our June meeting, we'll close out the 2005-2006 Society year by recognizing our volunteers and celebrating our successes. And, as a special guest, Director Sponsor of Region 5, Ms. Sherry Michaels, has happily agreed to present Rob Moran's Irish Blessing creatively re-engineered towards technical writers. Please join us for an entertaining evening of networking, and celebration.

### Dinner and Reservation Information

**Networking** - 5:30 PM

**Dinner** - 6:00 PM

**Program** - 6:45 PM

**Location:** Radisson Hotel Phoenix Airport North, 427 N. 44th St., Phoenix.

Exit Loop 202 at 44th Street and head south. The hotel is on the east side of 44th Street.

**Entrees:** Baked Snapper Veracruz Style, Chicken Sesame, Stuffed Jumbo Pasta Shells. Meal includes garden salad, rolls, coffee, iced tea, & dessert.

#### Cost:

**Dinner and Program:** \$20 - Members; \$25 - Nonmembers; \$15 - Student members

Pay by check or cash at the door. Pay by credit card with the online registration form only. Includes dinner, tax, tip, and program.

**Note:** \$5 charge for late dinner reservations.

**Program Only (includes dessert):** \$10 for all members, student members and nonmembers

**RSVP:** Please RSVP with your dinner selection no later than noon Thursday, March 9th. Online registration at [www.stc-phoenix.com/onlinereg.htm](http://www.stc-phoenix.com/onlinereg.htm). Instead you may email [stcphoenix@yahoo.com](mailto:stcphoenix@yahoo.com) or call Norm at 480-963-8102 and pay at the door. *No-shows will be billed.*

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### Newsletter Mailing Address

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### Reprinting Articles

By submitting material, you implicitly license this newsletter to use it and other STC publications to reprint it without permission. If you reprint an article from Rough Draft, please credit this newsletter as the source and send the Managing Editor a copy of the reprint or the URL of the Web page where the article was re-published.

### Copyrights

*Rough Draft* design and layout are copyright STC, 2005-2006. Copyrights for all newsletter articles belong to the authors. When you submit an article, please notify the editor if it has been published elsewhere or you plan to submit it to other publications.

### Phoenix Chapter Mission Statement

As a world-class educational and informational forum, we discuss cutting-edge concepts and technology, encourage sharing information among members, and sponsor top-quality seminars and conferences.

We give our members the opportunity to grow professionally and be creative; to develop leadership, management, and other skills; to be recognized for their outstanding skills and service; to be the most sought-after employees in our field; and to attain international status as Society-level leaders.

We provide a fun and friendly, high-energy environment that fosters associations and friendships. We promote the value of technical communication and communication in general.

### Phoenix Community Contacts

**President:** Dana Osborne,  
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**Treasurer:** Karen Forrester,  
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**Immediate Past President:** Lisa Ford,  
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**Programs:** Maggie Haenel,  
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**Membership Manager:** Debra Duane,  
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# Seminars, Workshops, Education Opportunities

## Creating Simulations and CBT Using Captivate with Neil Perlin

Thursday and Friday, June 15 and 16, 2006

8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

University of Phoenix, Tempe Campus

1221 N. College Avenue

Tempe, AZ 85281

Check-in at 8:15 a.m. Bring your own laptop with Captivate loaded (30-day free trial version is OK <http://www.macromedia.com/software/captivate/>) and breakfast or morning coffee. Lunch, snacks, water and soft drinks will be provided.

### Registration deadline is Friday, June 2!

Seating is limited for this concentrated, hands-on, skills-based workshop. Back by popular demand, Neil Perlin returns to Phoenix to facilitate his two-day Captivate workshop. View the course outline at <http://www.hyperword.com/Captivate.htm>.

Phoenix Chapter STC is pleased to offer this workshop, first come first served, for the following per person prices:

- Members of any Arizona STC chapter: \$275.00
- Non-members (limit of 5): \$400.00

Registration fees include lunch, water and soft drinks, the workshop and files from the course.

To register for this workshop, fill out the form at the end of this article, and send it along with a check for payment made payable to STC Phoenix Chapter.

Mail to: Maggie Haenel, 7611 E Catalina Drive, Scottsdale, AZ 85251.

Pay Pal will be available on the chapter web site <http://www.stc-phoenix.com/> for credit card payments.

Don't Delay! Payment and registration form must be received by June 2, 2006.

### About Neil Perlin:

Neil Perlin, owner and principal consultant of Hyper/Word Services, entered technical writing in 1979, began creating online documentation in 1985, and is now an internationally recognized expert in Windows Help and online documentation design and development.

He has been providing online documentation training for 14 years, is a popular speaker at various computer user groups and STC conferences, and is the organizer of the "Beyond the Bleeding Edge" stem at the STC annual conference.

Neil Perlin | Hyper/Word Services | 101 Emily Road | Tewksbury, MA 01876 | [nperlin@concentric.net](mailto:nperlin@concentric.net)

### About Macromedia Captivate

<http://www.macromedia.com/software/captivate/productinfo/overview/>

# Creating Simulations and CBT Using Captivate with Neil Perlin

Thursday and Friday, June 15 and 16, 2006  
8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.  
University of Phoenix, Tempe Campus  
1221 N. College Avenue  
Tempe, AZ 85281

To reserve your seat, payment must be received by Friday, June 2, 2006. Course outline can be viewed at <http://www.hyperword.com/Captivate.htm> .

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Daytime phone: \_\_\_\_\_

City, State, Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail address: \_\_\_\_\_

Registration fee (please check one):

\_\_\_\_ \$275 for Arizona STC chapter members

\_\_\_\_ \$400 for non-Arizona STC members or any non-member

Mail this form with a check made payable to STC Phoenix Chapter to: Maggie Haenel, 7611 E Catalina Drive, Scottsdale, AZ 85251

[mhaenel@docntrain.com](mailto:mhaenel@docntrain.com)

PayPal will be available on the chapter web site <http://www.stc-phoenix.com/> for credit card payments.

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# Editorial Blithers

by Karen L. Zorn

This year was a very active one for the Phoenix community. We not only accomplished our "standard" activities: monthly meetings, participated in CARSEF, PAO, Howling Against Hunger, but we also staged and neatly executed the Tech Comm 2005 Regional conference.

The only way the chapter can offer activities, events, and services to members such as the web site and job bank is through the efforts of dedicated volunteers. The community management--elected officers and committee managers, are all volunteers--our paycheck is your satisfaction.

The upcoming programming year is going to bring about some major changes. Several long time management team members are moving on to other positions in the interna-

tional organization; others are taking a well deserved break from years of different STC jobs; one has accepted an out-of-state job transfer.

So, what does this mean to you? First, it's an opportunity to get involved in the Phoenix STC community. There are a variety of jobs that need to be filled, some take a couple hours a month, others are more demanding. Some jobs may require new skills and are a learning opportunity for you. If you're new to the chapter, getting involved is a way to learn about the chapter, its management, and meet other community members. Second, lack of volunteers may be detrimental to the community's activities.

Make the most of your STC membership. Get involved, volunteer!

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## Help Wanted

Your STC Phoenix chapter needs volunteers in many areas. There are current opportunities as well as ones for the upcoming 2006-07 program year.

Why should you volunteer?

- You can practice or enhance existing skills or learn new ones.
- You'll meet new people and expand your network.
- You'll have fun!

We are currently seeking volunteers in the following areas:

- **Facilities coordinator:** work with meeting venue to coordinate meal plans, attendance, and other details
- **Public Relations manager:** create a public relations plan for the Phoenix community, place notices of meetings and educational opportunities in local business publications and professional organizations
- **Volunteer Manager:** recruit volunteers for positions within the chapter, maintain list of volunteers
- **Publication, Art, and Online (PAO) Competition Liaison,** work with the Kachina chapter and our chapter judges
- **Program committee members:** help plan and organize programs for the upcoming year

- **Education committee members:** help plan and organize seminars and workshops for the upcoming year
- **Web committee members:** assist with the community web site
- **Newsletter contributors:** help keep our members informed with news regarding our profession, community and SIG activities

To volunteer or to get more information: contact Tim Eull or any one of the Administrative Council members.

Have skills in an area not mentioned above?

Not sure of what you want to do or how you can help?

LET US KNOW! We'll find a place for you!



## Basics for Communicating Clearly

by Linda Shacklock

### Possessive Singular Nouns

No matter which letter ends a singular noun, add apostrophe plus s to make the noun possessive.

- one book's cover
- one bus's driver
- one child's jacket
- one company's logo
- one glass's rim
- Mr. Jones's car
- one man's basketball
- Phoenix's mayor

### Possessive Plural Nouns

For a plural noun that does not end in s, add apostrophe plus s to make the noun possessive.

- two children's jackets
- the men's basketball team

For a plural noun that ends in s, add just an apostrophe to make the noun possessive.

- several books' covers
- many buses' new paint
- the companies' logos
- the glasses' colors
- the Joneses' house

Collected "Grammar Central" topics: [Click here](#).

Questions or idea for a column? E-mail [Linda Shacklock](#).

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# CARSEF, The Winners!

by Gloria McConnell

## EXPLORERS (4th - 6th grade)

Third: Ajay Karpur/Kyrene del Pueblo Middle School: "Sweeteners: The Effects on Plant Growth"

Second: Conner Wareing/Pima Elementary: "Non-Verbal Communication through Eye Movements and Gender Influences, or Does Gender Make a Difference?"

First: Jonny Woodbury/Homeschooled: "The Efficient and Powerful Trebuchet: Optimizing the Design of a Trebuchet Catapult Using the Scientific Method and Experiential Design"

## INVESTIGATORS (7th - 8th grade)

Third: Alison Bailey, Tina Cai, Caitlyn DeSola/Pueblo Middle School: "Friction Addiction"

Second: Rebecca Woodbury/Homeschooled: "Which Vegetable Oil has the Most Energy? The Development and Use of a Method for Determining the Energy Content of Vegetable Oils"

First: Brianna Giles and Bailey Rukvina/Pope John XXIII Elementary School: "Can you see... Vitamin C? Determination of the Amount of Ascorbic Acid by a Chemical Process of Titration"

## SENIORS (9th - 12th grade)

Third: James Harris/Thunderbird High School: "Heart Rate Response to Lifting Different Masses"

Second: Veronica Shi and Raza Mushtaq/Corona del Sol High School: "Phosphorus Levels and Growth Rates in African and European Honeybees"

First: Kevan Christensen/Corona del Sol High School: "GIS-based Approach to Hydrology and Landscape Complexity in the San Pedro River Riparian Corridor, Arizona"

## FASCINATING FACTS

The keynote speaker at the CARSEF awards ceremony was a principal engineer from Intel. He provided some very interesting facts...

In the scientific community, the generally accepted age of the earth is 4.5 billion years. To try to understand that number, consider all that has occurred in the last 1350 years of our civilization. That entire span is the equivalent of 1 second of the earth's total age.

The first microprocessor masks were (initially) created manually by cutting a stencil in rubylith (If you are too young to know what rubylith is, see this discussion and picture on Answers.com: <http://www.answers.com/topic/intel>.) The first microprocessor, the 4004, had 2,300 transistors. Today, a 1/2-inch square microprocessor has millions (or was it billions?) of transistors.

The circuitry patterns of a microprocessor are so small that they cannot be seen with even the strongest optical microscopes in the world. These patterns are literally just a few atoms deep.

-If you weren't part of CARSEF this year, make plans for next April. Not only is an interesting experience, the papers range from very poor to excellent, you always learn something. The imagination, scientific exploration, and writing skills of the winners is awesome!

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# Tooling Around

## Dealing with Onscreen Clutter

by Gloria McConnell

Clutter - don't you hate it? Whether it's that stack of papers on the desk, too many tasks in your task list, or an overabundance of app's onscreen, it detracts from reading, writing, planning, organizing, doing.

Let's take a cue from Herr Einstein, who said: "...Out of clutter find simplicity..." Following are some tips to make your onscreen life as a technical communicator less cluttered—and hopefully more efficient.

Note that unless otherwise noted, these tips apply to Windows XP Professional.

### Adobe Acrobat

Toolbars, icons, menus all spell clutter. They can really get in the way when you giving that final once-over to that PDF document, proposal, or brochure before sending it to the printer (or CD maker). Or, perhaps you are ready to relax with an e-book. Planet PDF ("the home of the PDF community") calls this "immersive onscreen reading," and anything other than the online content is a distraction. For the cleanest Acrobat environment, consider these tips from Dan Shea at Planet PDF:

- **Use full-screen mode.** Full-screen mode can be toggled with a keyboard shortcut: CTRL+L on Windows or FUNCTION-L on Mac systems. When full-screen mode is active, you won't see anything other than your document. To move through the document, use the scroll button on your mouse, PAGE UP and PAGE DOWN keys, or auto scrolling (see below); press ESC to leave full-screen mode.
- **Hide toolbars.** For a bit more control on streamlining the Acrobat window, press F8 to hide toolbars. Toggle this key to bring back toolbars when needed.
- **Hide menu bar.** For even more streamlining of the Acrobat window, press F9 to hide the menu bar. Toggle this key to bring back the menu bar when needed.

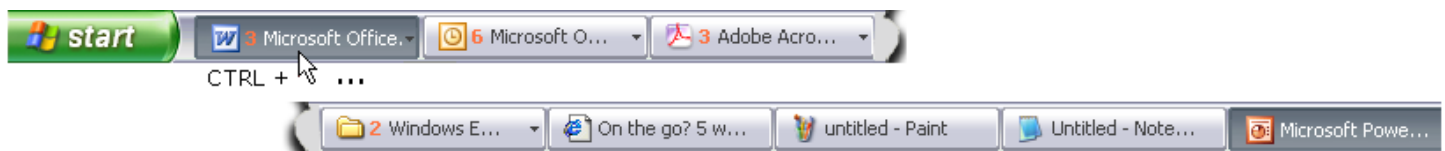
### Microsoft Windows

#### Close All

Ever find yourself in this spot: you have a ka-zillion applications and windows open and you just want to close them all and start over? (Or go home...)

You can quickly shut down all running applications at the same time (at least on Windows XP Professional), without fear of losing work—here's how:

1. Press the CTRL key, then successively click each of the task icons on the taskbar.

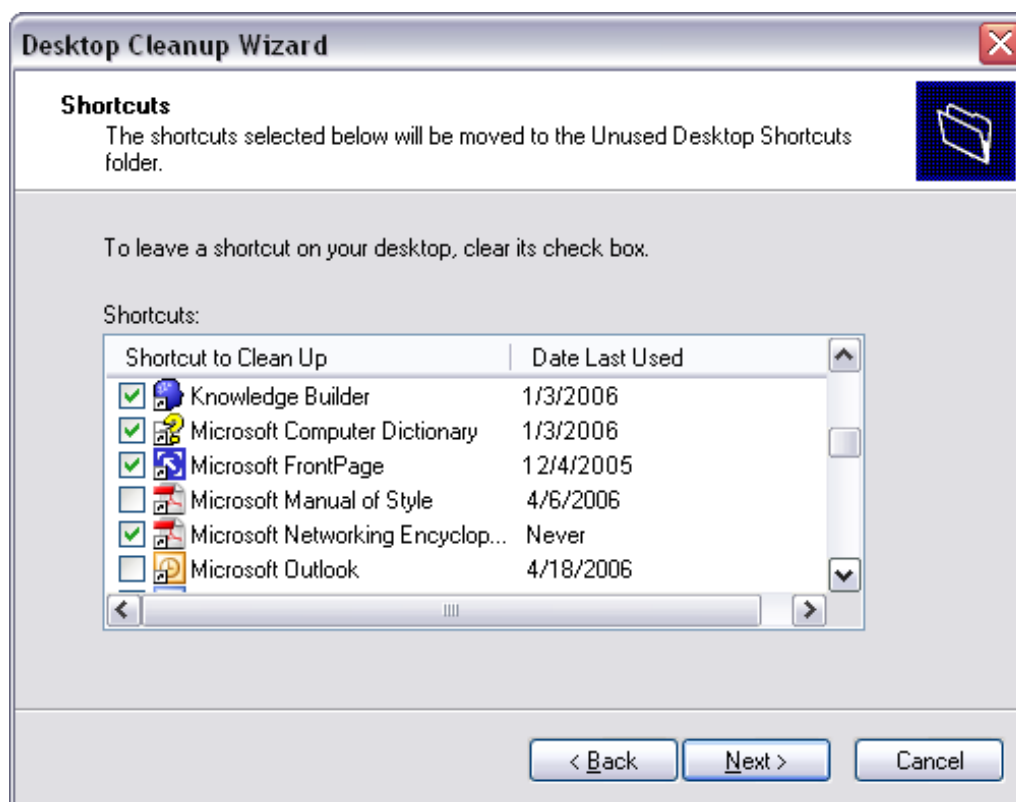


2. Right-click the last task icon, and choose **Close Group**. Windows XP initiates a standard exit procedure for each open application. If any application has unsaved information in an open file, you will be prompted to save the file before it closes. One exception that will interrupt this process: if you have any dialog boxes open in an application, the "Close All" procedure will be interrupted.

## Clean up the Desktop

If you are the type of person who likes to save files to the Desktop for easy access and create shortcuts on the Desktop for easy access, you may one day notice that you have created a cluttered mess instead of a helpful onscreen environment, clean up that Desktop now! To do so:

1. Right-click on the Desktop and choose **Properties**.
2. Click the **Desktop** tab.
3. Click **Customize Desktop**.
4. Click **Clean Desktop Now**. The Desktop Cleanup Wizard begins; it checks for Desktop icons older than 60 days, and allows you to decide whether or not to remove them. (Note that even if you remove them, the icons are moved to a folder, where you can recover them any time. Where is that folder located? On the Desktop, naturally!)
5. Complete the Desktop Cleanup Wizard. Note: This Wizard lists all Desktop icons and pre-selects the older ones. There is no **Clear All** button for these selections and you cannot resize the Wizard, so be prepared to scroll and review all items in your unruly list.

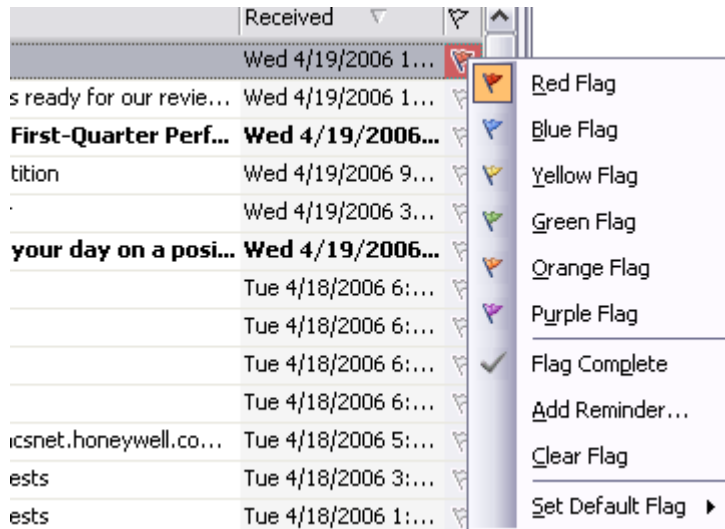


## Microsoft Outlook

Is your Inbox overflowing? Are you asking yourself “Where is that email with the changes from the engineer in Boise?” “What happened to the brochure mark-up from the Sales Department?” “Where’s that email with my mother’s birthday “wish list”?”

Outlook includes many features to can help you tame that email. Read this great article from Microsoft: [7 Ways to Organize Your E-Mail](#).

One Outlook feature that I really like is also discussed in another Microsoft article: [Recruiters save time, stay organized using Outlook Quick Flags](#). Using flags is incredibly easy, and will help you identify email by project, action required, or any other scheme that makes sense. Outlook 2003 (v. 11) has basic flags that will serve most purposes. You can set flags from within an email, or while in your Inbox:



For more info, watch Microsoft's short demo on some of the features: [Demo: Flag it, file it, find it fast in Outlook](#). Outlook 12 has even more features and versatility for flags.

Tasks and Time Management in Outlook: <http://blogs.msdn.com/melissamacbeth/archive/2006/02/17/534491.aspx>.

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# On the Job

## Road Rules for Technical Communicators

by Kathy Graden

Tight airport security. Long lines. Airlines reducing perks for passengers. Travel seems to offer more problems than pleasures these days. But business travelers are especially hard hit by the changes.

Many technical communicators' job responsibilities don't require much business travel. We may fly to another city once in awhile to attend an STC or other technical communication conference, or to participate in a corporate gathering, but that's about it. So, many people don't know the special tips and tactics that salespeople and other frequent travelers have devised to make it easier and less stressful to be en route to somewhere.

This article presents travel de-stressing strategies gleaned from travel experts and frequent-flyer colleagues. I also offer tips that have averted disaster on past business trips.

### Planning & Preparing

The cardinal rule of packing for business trips is: pack only essentials. Airlines used to let travelers ignore baggage weight limits. Now under pressure to boost earnings, those same airlines may charge you as much as \$8 per each extra pound. Here's how to travel lighter:

- Choose black, navy, or gray and pack a wardrobe that coordinates with your chosen color. You'll find that you can build multiple outfits from just a few pieces. For example, suppose that on the plane you wear a red sweater with black pants and black shoes, and you pack a black jacket, gray pants, a white shirt, and a gray shirt or jacket. By mixing and matching those items you can create a more than week's worth of outfits!
- Buy trial-size versions of your favorite toiletries, toss them into a zippered plastic bag, and tuck them into your carry-on bag. The small bottles take up less space and weight. Leave the toiletries bag in your carry-on permanently, and you'll have one less thing to pack next time.
- If you're transporting documents for a business meeting, carry them in electronic format and print them out later. Placing your files on your laptop's hard drive may be OK. But if you're traveling outside the U.S., the presence of files containing proprietary information on your PC may violate laws (U.S. or otherwise) governing the import and export of technical information. For foreign travel, placing such files on a CD-

ROM, memory stick, or similar device and keep the device in a safe, secure place.

- If you have presentation handouts or other items that can't be stored electronically, ship them to your destination in advance.

Before you leave, make some pre-flight dining plans. Many airlines no longer serve food and when they do, only the peanuts are free (maybe!) and the choices and quantities are limited.

Instead of taking your chances with airline food, pack a small lunch (sandwich, crackers, whole-grain snack bars, etc.) or purchase food at the airport and carry it onto the plane. Choose non-greasy, non-spicy foods (no sauerkraut, no chili peppers) to avoid digestive discomfort, especially if you're a nervous flyer. And eat lightly; you can purchase more substantial food once you reach your destination.

### Getting to the Gate

Driving yourself to the airport is the best way to go. Since 9/11, many airports don't allow non-commercial vehicles to drop travelers off at the terminal. Taxi fares can be costly. And though airport shuttles cost less, they have two drawbacks:

- Usually the shuttle driver stops to collect other passengers, so getting to the airport takes more time.
- When you return, if the shuttles are busy you may have to wait at the airport for 30 minutes, 45 minutes, or longer.

Airport parking lots charge steep prices, so I recommend off-airport parking lots. They generally offer reasonable rates, and their shuttles leave for the terminal frequently. (I've never had to wait longer than 10 minutes.) But the biggest benefit comes when you return; within 15 minutes or so after deplaning, you can be in your own car driving home.

Thefts can and do occur at airports' security checkpoints, and the more items you have to place on the conveyor belt, the more trouble you'll have watching them. To stay more secure at the security line, do the following:

- Carry a purse small enough to tuck into a larger bag.
- Don't wear a jacket unless absolutely necessary. Federal security rules require you to remove your jacket,

so it becomes one more item for you to keep an eye on.

- Keep your hands free by wearing an ID wallet on a cord around your neck. An ID wallet also has compartments for cash and credit cards, making them readily available if you need to buy something before you get on the plane.
- If you have more than one item to X-ray, make your laptop PC the last item you place on the conveyor belt. This allows you to pass through X-ray screening at the same time as your PC, so someone going through ahead of you has less opportunity to snatch your (or your employer's) property.

## Ensuring More Pleasant Flights

Airplane cabins pose three big obstacles to comfort: they're crowded, they're noisy, and the air quality tends to be poor. To be more comfortable during your flight, try any of these techniques:

- Always use the restroom shortly before boarding the plane, even if you think you don't need to.
- If you have a long flight, grab a pillow and blanket as soon as you board. (There are never enough for all passengers.)
- The bag containing items you may need during your flight (medication, reading materials, etc.) should be stowed under the seat in front of you.
- iPods, CD or DVD players, and other portable electronic devices with headphones are ideal for shutting out cabin and engine noise. You can also bring along earplugs or noise-canceling headphones if you don't feel like listening to music or watching a movie.
- Bring along a small toy, book, stuffed animal, or puzzle in case you find yourself seated near a squalling or cranky child.
- If you're concerned about catching germs or viruses from the enclosed cabin air, ask your doctor or druggist if it's safe for you to take a bacteria-fighting supplement such as Airborne. Also ask about remedies for motion sickness if you think it may be a problem.
- Although airplanes are pressurized, your ears are still sensitive to the change in altitude and they'll pop. Suck on hard candy or juicy chewing gum to relieve pressure on your ears. Yawning widely also helps.
- If you have a head cold, try anything that has worked to clear it up before you travel. However, if you have an ear infection, consider postponing your trip. An infected ear can be extremely painful on an airplane.

Contact your doctor to see if he or she can help you before you leave.

- If you're able to sleep on the plane, ask to be wakened before you begin descent. The landing is usually harder on your ears and since you swallow less when you sleep, you may wake up on the ground in pain.

## Arriving

After your plane touches down, you'll want to acclimate yourself to your new location as quickly as possible. These tips can help:

- Try to arrive in the evening; it will be easier for you to sleep if you arrive when it's dark. Then, you can start with a new day after some rest.
- Change your watch as soon as you arrive to help convince your body of the new time.
- If you need a car, consider renting one from a company that offers express service. National Car Rental, for example, offers a free Emerald Club membership that you can set up online. You provide some information up front such as the kind of vehicle you'll want, your credit card number, etc. Then when you get to the rental car depot, you simply go to the Emerald Club section, choose a car, present your club membership card to the attendant, and drive away.
- Drink lots of water. Dehydration makes jet lag worse. And alcohol, caffeine, and sugar only worsen the effects of dehydration and jet lag.
- After you're hydrated, use caffeine and a little exercise to help you stay awake if you have a new later bedtime. If you have to adjust to an earlier bedtime, eat something sleep-inducing (such as turkey) for dinner.
- Avoid rich food so your body can concentrate on catching up instead of heavy digesting.
- If you're staying at a hotel, especially if you're unfamiliar with the surrounding area, ask the hotel desk clerks where you can find the nearest shopping plaza, drugstore, food mart, and automatic teller machine. Knowing where these can be handy if you forgot to pack something, a shoelace breaks, or some other minor emergency strikes. The hotel may also be able to provide a pre-printed map or guide to nearby restaurants—and if they don't have a map, the clerks can usually recommend eateries the locals prefer.

Want more travel tips? You can find them through a Google search, but I recommend that you start with [www.independenttraveler.com](http://www.independenttraveler.com), an interactive traveler's exchange and comprehensive online travel guide. Happy traveling!

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# Key Content, Too Many Pieces

by Bill Albing, STC Carolina Past President

Do you ever think about how much time you spend tackling process issues and tools issues? As Greg Rakauskas said at a local STC meeting about wikis, and I'm paraphrasing him, "Even with new online collaborative tools, it is still difficult to get information out of subject matter experts." Even further, there are still too few resources to develop all the content you know is needed for a product, and too little time to meet the deadline with a great quality piece of writing. There are still process issues that are perennial, regardless of the tools we use. As long as we are working with people, there will be clogs in the flow of information. As long as we are working for corporations, the bottom line will be money. With the dependence on computers and information in accessible and digital form, there is still a challenge in getting meaningful information. The tools, as advanced and automated as they are, will not fix all our problems. But we have to work with what we have, and automate as much of the production and maintenance of our content as possible. We must, as the British say, muddle through.

## Too Much About DITA

There is so much buzz about DITA (the IBM-started open standard for topic-based information architecture), that I have to say a word about this new set of tools. Let me start by saying the term is a little inflated in its self importance, but that's part of the branding. DITA simply stands for Darwin Information Typing Architecture. The Darwinian part has nothing to do with the current debate about teaching evolution in school but rather about the ability to customize (specialize) the topic types for your work and still base them on an ancestor topic type from which to inherit all those base settings. It's really about object-oriented inheritance (to borrow the language of the software development industry), but the creators of DITA prefer their own descriptive vocabulary.

The information typing part means that you look at the types of topics, the metatags in XML, the information about your content. And it also implies modularization in as much as the information is categorized into those types. Where IBM used the word "information," many of us use "content," which is more than "data" and not finalized in a "document." Instead of "pages" or "chapters," we use the generic content container "topic" which may or may not get delivered in a printable form. With information typing, there is a place for everything, and everything in its place; a type for each piece of information, and every piece of information in its type. And IBM uses the word "architecture" to describe this grandiose set of procedures because it's not just a DTD, a document type definition; it is a way of looking at the information. It is a *weltanschauung*, if you will.

With all this information architecture mindset, there is so much more to making an authoring environment DITA-ready. That's why FrameMaker and Flare and other tools won't be DITA-compatible overnight. FrameMaker is still just an authoring environment (albeit with a great print engine for making PDFs); it will not manage the modularized content in the way a content management tool will. DITA does not have a corner on the market of modularized and reusable content.

Many of us have been working with our own topic-based DTD and our own set of tools before DITA came along. Having a tool that can output DITA-ready XML alone won't transform the technical writers on your team into content developers or information architects. The approach to working with modularized content and keeping the meta-content as well requires a different working environment.

The move toward content management systems is a move in the right direction, but is not the complete solution. There are no out-of-the-box solutions that work for everyone. Content management alone will not suffice; now we need translation and localization tools and tools that will publish to any number of output devices and media. Will it output to a wiki or a blog or a podcast? Some of us have moved to content management systems and authoring environments that promise to be all in one. But even these, I suspect, have a fair amount of customization involved (or consultant expense) and will not offer as much freedom as the content development team might require. As our projects include ever more requirements for accessibility and localization as content development becomes more collaborative, our work in tailoring the tools never ends.

Having a local conference on DITA may be a start for some people who can afford it, but for most of us, the chance to talk with others about how we are facing our own issues and dealing with processes and picking tools is an ongoing endeavor that involves going to local STC meetings, keeping up with online lists and chats and generally keeping up. DITA is only part of the picture and not the only way of describing the effort of modularizing technical content.

## Grand Solution

Our work is becoming more fragmented. Not only is the content becoming more modularized—the very processes we use are becoming more modularized and the very tools we are using are more numerous and more task specific. To accomplish the software product documentation where I work, we develop some of the content in FrameMaker and some is automatically generated in a tool by Innova-

sys. Then we use Saxon to parse the XML out of FrameMaker and we use another tool to compile the HTML to make a help system. We also use a Web site management tool for fine tuning the HTML if needed, and another tool for checking the validity of the generated XML and another to generate the PDF files.

Some of these tools are free and open source, and some of these tools are expensive. Some of the customizations and the template development are necessary and labor intensive.

Certainly getting it all to work together is an effort. Nothing works right out of the box anymore. But getting the right tools is worth the effort. There is no single environment that does everything immediately, but much more can be automated these days and the capabilities of tools are improving all the time.

As a profession, we have never offered enough financial gain for sophisticated tool vendors to focus only on our needs. We borrow tools from the XML world, where most of the effort is tagging data, not human readable content. We borrow tools for content management, where most of the focus is on external web sites, not large pools of prod-

uct documentation. We borrow page layout tools, but these are mostly for marketing or graphics teams.

Maybe this hints at what will be the grand solution to technical documentation tools. By being more specialized and modularized and all working together, the tools we pick can be assembled to meet our unique requirements. By picking the authoring components we need, the module management tools we need, the publishing and delivery tools specific to our customers, we can tailor a system that will allow us to develop, deliver and maintain our enterprise's content.

I would challenge the folks behind DITA and the vendors from Adobe and Microsoft to Vasont and AuthorIt to Idiom and Rascal, that until individual components can plug and play together, just as our modularized content is moving toward that goal, we will not be satisfied. Those tools have a better chance of surviving in the market if they interoperate. Until then, we will have to deal with too many pieces.

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## XML and Epic Editor: Promise vs. Reality

by Chuck Petch

Web developers and business software programmers make wide use of XML for document and data storage. Its plain text formatting tags and user-defined style sheets permit different layouts for the same data, making XML a highly flexible tool. As its use increases, publications departments may face pressure to produce documentation using XML editors such as ArborText's Epic Editor instead of traditional publishing applications such as FrameMaker. So does it make sense to replace your publishing program with Epic Editor or something similar?

The answer is it depends. Because of recent work with the Epic, I can offer some thoughts about XML and Epic in a publishing environment. I admit to being a newbie with both, so your mileage may vary, but I hope what I've learned so far helps you consider all the angles before implementing an XML and Epic publishing system. Let's take a look at the promise of XML and Epic compared to the reality as I've seen it so far.

### Promise:

XML editors, such as Epic Editor are very full-featured and can do the same job Word or FrameMaker can do.

### Reality:

Many very capable XML editors populate the market. Epic is a particularly full-featured XML editor with virtually all of the features of FrameMaker. Name the feature and it's there—styles, templates, automatic tables of contents, automatic indexing, change bars, conditional text, figure insertion by reference and manipulation, and more. Style tags are clearly visible and easily inserted, and can also be turned off so you can look at an on-screen approximation of your layout. You can replace FrameMaker with Epic and produce mostly the same results...within limits.

I say within limits because Epic is not WYSIWIG (what you see is what you get), so when you manipulate graphics or text within the application, you only see approximately what the output will look like, not an accurate on-screen presentation. Graphics in particular do not look right on screen when scaled by percentage, so you have to print on paper or view a print preview to see if they fit on the page correctly. This reliance on printing to see your output can be both frustrating and time consuming, making Epic much less efficient to use than FrameMaker.

Printing poses a problem too, because the \$900 or so that you pay for Epic does not get you the means to print to paper, preview, or PDF. It's a bit like buying a car with no wheels. If you want to print, you have to shell out several thousand dollars more for a print license. This is nothing less than a scam, and puts Epic out of the price range of most small companies and individual users. Even well-funded corporations may balk at the cost of the print license, and rightly so.

**Promise:**

XML provides a way of easily converting the same content to many different formats to allow easy document sharing between departments.

**Reality:**

This is certainly true, but again, within limits. Unfortunately ArborText, the makers of Epic, have made its XML output non-standard. To use its XML output with another XML editor, you have to edit the raw XML or implement a conversion program. This tends to lock the purchaser into using Epic exclusively, which is undoubtedly ArborText's aim. Nevertheless, assuming all departments in the company use Epic, they can indeed share content and more or less instantly convert that content to a different layout by simply applying a different style sheet within Epic. This makes content truly portable and reusable.

**Promise:**

XML reduces documentation costs and enhances the ability to manage content.

**Reality:**

Depending on the circumstances this statement may be pleasantly true or wildly, laughably false. For large companies with significant resources and a lot of content to share between departments, it is undoubtedly true. Once documents are converted to XML and the whole company

is producing and sharing XML content, the company may save significantly on writing and reformatting costs. For example, content you write for a manual may be easily reused in a different format in a marketing brochure, a sales document, a web site, and a training presentation.

Beware, however, of the possibly substantial cost in time and effort to convert your existing documents to XML. Additionally, XML templates are not as easily and quickly made as Word or FrameMaker templates. XML is a more complex language than HTML and may require an XML expert to expend many hundreds of hours to customize document type definitions and style sheets. If you are content to use off-the-shelf templates, you can keep your development costs to a minimum.

**Conclusion**

So what is a document department to do? Should you make the leap to XML and Epic Editor or not? It really depends on your purpose and the depth of your pockets. If you need to share lots of content with other departments, XML could save you money, and Epic could serve you well as a full-featured XML publishing program. However, beware of the conversion and support costs and the hidden costs to buy all of the Epic Editor components.

For small companies that cannot afford the investment in Epic, a less costly XML editor that has plenty of canned style sheets and produces standard XML outputs may serve just as well. For others who need to share text only occasionally, it may be cheaper still to skip XML altogether and either do manual reformatting or use translation programs to convert between the applications preferred by different departments. As always, your decision should be driven by your needs, not by enthusiasm for the technology.

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