



SuperScript

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SuperScript is the official newsletter of the Alberta Community of the Society for Technical Communication and is published 10 times a year. The editors welcome submissions and advertising that will be of interest to our members. If you have an idea for an article or if you have an advertising enquiry, please contact us.



President's Message

I want to start [my final message to you](#) with a huge thank you to the members who contributed to this past year and helped make it a rewarding and successful year. We have just culminated the year with another AGM. It was a small group this year, but enthusiastic as usual, and this is what drives me and others on the council to volunteer so much of our time. Thank you to everyone who helped out at this year's AGM.

Notes on the AGM

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Documentation and Training: The User Experience, the first DocTrain conference to be held on the West Coast, took place April 18-21, 2007 in Vancouver, B.C. STC members Lucille Worone and Michael Trumper attended and share their experiences and thoughts about the conference. [Read more...](#)

Upcoming Events

This year's salary survey is out and the deadline has been extended to the end of June. A link to the survey was e-mailed to all STC Alberta members in May. If you need the link, please

contact membership coordinator, [Deirdre O'Riain](#).

The annual wine and cheese event will be held in September. Watch for details in the next SuperScript.

Call for Submissions

This is a call to all members to submit articles for the July/August edition of SuperScript. Please send any submissions by August 13 to newsletter@stc-alberta.org. Please keep article lengths under about 550 words.

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The Alberta Chapter newsletter, *SuperScript*, is published ten times a year, with double issues in December/January and July/August. *SuperScript* presents feature articles from inside the Chapter and out, program and events calendar, profiles, tips and tricks to improve your skills, and important contact information. [Contact our SuperScript Editors](#), with any comments, stories, technical tips, book reviews, advertisements, or questions. >> [Previous editions](#).

STC Alberta News and Updates — June 2007

President's Message

Ruth Maryniuk, President, STC Alberta

I want to start my final message to you with a huge thank you to the members who contributed this past year and helped make it a rewarding and successful year. We have just culminated the year with another AGM. It was a small group this year, but enthusiastic as usual, and this is what drives me and others on the council to volunteer so much of our time. Thank you to everyone who helped out at this year's AGM.

I especially have to thank those who served on the executive by name for their hard work and dedication to STC.

- Vice President: **Lucille Worone**
- Acting Past President: **Ken Schatzke**
- Treasurer: **Nancy Kirby**
- Website: **Lori Robertson**
- Jobline: **Ian Hawkins**
- Membership: **Jessie Channey**
- Programs & New Heights Coordinator: **Linda Robson**
- Webinar Coordinator: **Laurie Holtby**
- Registration and Hospitality: **Margaux Porth**
- Mentorship: **Sherry Willetts**
- Archives and Public Relations: **Paula Tannahill**
- Edmonton Liaison: **Elaine Elrod**
- Competitions: **Jeanne Gonnason**
- SuperScript: **Kate Christie , Mark Durham, Tracey Stewart and Carmen Wyatt**
- Mount Royal College: **Glenn Ruhl**
- Grant McEwan college: **Lucille Mazo**
- Salary Survey: **Mai-Ann Sprung**

As you can see, it takes a great many volunteers to run an organization. I cannot thank these people enough for all the hours they contributed to the success of this past year. If you meet any of these people at the next STC event, please be sure to thank them for all their hard work.

I hope next year's council receives your encouragement and support to carry on with the regular events and programs as well as some new initiatives. I was so very

encouraged with Lucille's infectious enthusiasm for the next term. I know that I will be there to support her and help out in whatever way I can. There are still some important positions to fill on the next executive. If you have some time and would like to make a difference, please let Lucille know at her new e-mail address: president@stc-alberta.org.

A final thank you goes to **Carmen Wyatt**, our new SuperScript Content Manager. I would like to thank Carmen for taking on this important position. SuperScript is looking for more volunteers to help keep delivering important local information to our members. If you would like to be a part of this team, please let Carmen know at newsletter@stc-alberta.org.

This is not a farewell. I will be back next term in my new role as Past-President and I hope to see you at our first event in September. Have a safe and happy summer.

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Notes on the AGM [\[Edmonton AGM Photos\]](#)

Carmen Wyatt, STC Member

The STC annual general meeting, June 14, began with attendees chatting over cocktails and a buffet, and ended with philosophical musings such as: You know you're a technical communicator when...you've spotted five spelling errors on the menu before you've even thought about what you'd like to eat!

The Edmonton group signed in via wireless internet, and outgoing President Ruth Maryniuk opened the meeting. Ruth recounted Society events in Calgary and Edmonton over the past year. Edmonton held three networking meetings, a mini-golf tournament, an evening at Grant MacEwan College, and the New Heights seminar. In Calgary, members attended five programs, a coffee night at Mount Royal College, pub nights, and the New Heights seminar.

After a three-year hiatus, technical communications competitions were re-instated this year, with awards going to Laurie Holtby, Sherry Wilson McEwen (Calgary), and Angela Wiens, Barry Power, and Karen Weir (Edmonton). The Alberta chapter also awarded two scholarships to Mount Royal College and Grant MacEwan College Technical Communication program students. As well, membership awards were granted to Lori Robertson (New Volunteer of the Year), Nancy Kirby (Dedicated Service), and Linda Robson (President's Award).

Services provided by STC Alberta over the last year include the programs, New Heights, and social nights, the STC Alberta website, the Jobline, SuperScript, two salary surveys (one still ongoing), and the mentorship program. This year Jobline processed 70 openings for 51 companies, an indication of the relatively strong job market we've been enjoying.

Following the year in review, Nancy Kirby presented the Treasurer's report and Ruth presented the Competition and Volunteer Recognition awards. The Election of Officers followed. Lucille Worone was elected President, and Ken Schatzke elected Treasurer. The Secretary and Vice President positions remain open. The new executive council includes:

- President – Lucille Worone
- Treasurer – Ken Schatzke
- Past President – Ruth Maryniuk
- Membership – Deirdre O’Riain
- SuperScript – Carmen Wyatt
- Jobline – Ian Hawkins
- Archives – Paula Tannahill
- Website – Lori Robertson
- Mount Royal College – Glenn Ruhl

Lucille’s first speech as President expressed her aim to increase awareness among the professions to whom we provide services by finding new ways to communicate the benefits of working with technical communicators. She also pledged to continue supporting and strengthening delivery of services and opportunities for members of STC Alberta.

The meeting closed with draws for door prizes, dessert, and more time for conversation. And deep contemplation on the meaning of being a technical communicator -- You know you’re a technical communicator when...

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May Program Notes: Good-bye RoboHelp. Hello structured, reusable, and open-standard: The migration to DITA

Ken d’Albenas, Senior STC Member

Our evening programs at the Allistair Ross Technologies Centre wrapped up in May. Many thanks on behalf of all the members to chief coordinator Linda Robson, the ARTC, the other exec members who helped make the events happen, and especially to all the guest speakers!

Capping off the series was a conference-quality talk by STC Alberta member Karen Lowe, about the paradigm leap her company took in technical documentation for a new product — a leap that turned into a migration from traditional help tools to XML and DITA. With slides and handout, Karen told the stories of the bumpy path and the payoff.

It started with CGI Inc., her employer, developing a Web-delivered enterprise accounting system designed for ultimate usability and a 20-year product lifespan.

Online help had been produced with RoboHelp during the first one and a half years of development, but according to the usability tests, they needed to embed more help and user assistance in the browser-based product — just the help you need, just when you need it.

RoboHelp wasn't really in that game.

Karen discussed how they stepped back for some perspective. They made a list of the pros and cons of their existing help tools.

A big "con" was RoboHelp's uncertain future. "Adobe had purchased Macromedia, and was ominously silent on any upcoming development on RoboHelp," she explained. Would there even be any support for IE7 and Vista?

Another "con" was the limited support for information reuse. She itemized the real issues technical writers face in an agile development environment with a long-term plan. Many were issues of information management.

"After changing our perspective," Karen recounted to her audience, "our finding was: we needed to change our process."

And so began the migration to XML and DITA: Darwin Information Typing Architecture, in which information is analyzed, tagged, reorganized around topics, and reused in multiple ways. ("Darwin" because it's evolving and embodies principles of inheritance and specialization.) It wasn't the only solution they evaluated, and it wasn't pretty, but it stood out from the crowd.

Karen praised the work of the team's information architecture specialist in the migration. "He asked the who, what, when, where, how, and why questions. He defined the big buckets for us, so we could start throwing information into the right buckets."

The result? With 45 programmers to solve the many technical issues, and despite the klunky authoring tools then available, they converted 1,200 topics into a knowledge base in four months.

Karen showed slides of the tools (Eclipse and oXygen), the product, and the help. Input fields labelled clearly and linked to short descriptions. Other context-sensitive help with fuller explanations of fields, screens, and tasks. Links to external references, demo videos, and stand-alone documentation.

Karen concluded by discussing five lessons learned from the migration:

1. More up-front analysis means fewer exceptions and greater reuse — but beware analysis paralysis!
2. Create an information model that includes an approach for reuse.
3. Establish the standards and conventions you need, and then follow them.
4. Get leverage from structure and templates.
5. Although DITA supports specialization, try to minimize it!

She also listed the areas where the cost of the migration has already paid dividends and will continue to in the future — the main one being satisfied long-term customers.

Karen Lowe has made all [50 pages of her presentation available online © CGI Inc \[pdf\]](#).

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April Program Notes: "Who said communication is easy? Not in today's changing workplace!"

Jeanne Gonnason, Senior STC Member

The April 19 presentation by Narmin Ismail-Teja was about inclusive communication. It seemed like an ethereal term with no meaning, until she outlined exclusive communication and the term became clear. We exclude people with our head (noting

a person's gender, age, ethnicity), our heart (using language, eye contact, speech volume, humour), and our hands (using posture, eye contact, body language, jargon, topics). We all know the joke about those who yell when they encounter a person who doesn't understand the language. After all, volume increases comprehension, doesn't it? We cannot do anything about the head items, but we can change the heart and hand items.

Narmin mentioned that we need to look at the package BEFORE we judge, and she used the iceberg analogy – you only see 10 to 15 per cent of a person's identity. Inclusive communication means using common experiences, smiles, questions, plain language, praise, acknowledgements, and other heart and hand methods when we are with others from a different background. I've been in foreign language situations where smiling, gesturing, and nodding **did** solve a problem.

We tend to think of immigrants as people from different backgrounds. Narmin had us do several exercises to point out how all our backgrounds differed – where we lived in Calgary, where we were born, how many times we had moved in life, whether we had children, how many languages we knew – all exclusion triggers. It was amazing the differences among only six of us!

Narmin emphasized that, as communicators, we need to be aware of the history of words, and how the word's history can make the words offensive. "Handicap" comes from cap in hand – definitely a subservient role. "Rule of thumb" comes from the law that you could not beat your wife with a stick thicker than your thumb. And who knew that "golf" comes from **g**entlemen **o**nly, **l**adies **f**orbidden!

Narmin outlined the consciousness continuum:

Unconsciously Competent
 Consciously Competent
 Consciously Incompetent
 Unconsciously Incompetent

Ideally, we need to move UP the continuum so that our intention and impact match when we deal with people. Narmin mentioned that if we do something three times a day for one month, our skill at the task will improve. How many of us do that for sports, hobbies, work? Why not try it for communicating, and become more consciously competent? Use your own ideas and try this for a month:

I will continue...

I will stop...

I will start...

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DocTrain UX Conference Overview: Two Perspectives

Documentation and Training: The User Experience, the first DocTrain conference to be held on the West Coast, took place April 18-21, 2007 in Vancouver, B.C. STC members Lucille Worone and Michael Trumper attended and share what they learned about new technologies and our profession.

As technologies evolve, so must technical communicators

Lucille Worone, STC member

"You cannot step into the same river twice," said the Greek philosopher, Heraclitus. Likewise, the four concurrent streams at the DocTrain conference ensured that no two participants stepped into the same conference! The conference was comprised of two half-day workshop sessions plus two days of over 40 presentations, organized into four streams: tools and technology; content design and access; content development; and content management. Participants were able to choose which sessions they wanted to attend without being limited to a single stream.

While Michael focused his attention on emerging web technologies, I concentrated on learning more about XML and DITA. The short, 75-minute sessions provided enough time to give an overview of a particular aspect of the topic, and a list of resources for further reference. On the other hand, the half-day workshops provided more in-depth coverage. I attended *Task Analysis and Information Modelling for DITA* and *Demystifying DITA: An Introduction to the Darwin Information Typing Architecture*. Although these sessions were not hands-on, the presenters demonstrated how to use various tools to create and publish DITA content.

During the entire four days, the vendor booths in the Technology Showcase demonstrated the products and services of the more than 15 event sponsors, including Adobe, Madcap Flare, The Rockley Group, and Vasont.

Overall, the conference focused more on tools and technologies than techniques. While Michael and I attended mostly different sessions at the conference, the 'take-away' was the same — the need for technical communicators to evolve beyond the status quo and become knowledgeable about emerging technologies, and their potential advantages and risks.

DocTrain is held semi-annually, with the next one scheduled for **October 2007 in Lowell, Massachusetts**. Visit www.doctrain.com for more details.

The user-experience dominated world

Michael Trumper, STC member

"It's the web, stupid." Remember, a few years back when this phrase seemed to be on everyone's lips, until the dotcom bust zipped them up? Well it's back. The Web 2.0, Internet 3, the semantic web, whatever you call it, is the next big thing and you ignore it at your peril. This was 'the' message at the recent DocTrainUX conference held in downtown Vancouver, BC.

To be honest, this was not what I was expecting to take away from this conference. I was hoping for some insight on how to "improve the usefulness of my information products," to paraphrase their marketing material. I know that is pretty vague, but it sounded promising and besides, if things turned out badly, I was still going to be in Vancouver for a weekend and there is no more beautiful city in the world on a warm spring day. So, whereas there were some excellent presentations on more traditional technical communication topics—I attended an excellent workshop on task analysis and information modeling using IBM's Task Modeler—it was the discussion surrounding the impact of the new web technologies that dominated the conference.

The keynote presentation by Salim Ismail, *The Future of XML Publishing: Understanding the Web 2.0 / Internet 3.0*, would set the stage for what would be the most important theme of this conference. He argues that Web 2.0 differs from earlier versions in that it pushes content, rather than pulls viewers, using a syndication

(publish) and subscription model which allows users to personalize their experience of the web. This system is supported at the most basic level by technologies like RSS (Really Simple Syndication), but also by other more powerful technologies like AJAX (Asynchronous JavaScript and XML). In this emerging environment, the services that allow users to personalize their experience and interact with the content have become the business drivers and, sad to say for those of us in the content generating business, content is no longer king.

A good example of how technical communicators stand to benefit from this new user-experience dominated world came in a presentation by Linda Urban and Jose Pastor, *Case Study: Integrating User Assistance into the User Interface*. Both had overseen the development of an embedded user assistance system for a subscription-based web application. Mr. Pastor, the business champion, made a compelling case why user experience is central to the success of subscription-based businesses. Unlike more traditional business applications, in the subscription model, user satisfaction must be high from the moment users first look at the service, or the service will fail. In Pastor's view, the quality of the user assistance in the Web 2.0 world will be a key indicator of success or failure.

These emerging technologies have also enabled and encouraged the growth of user communities in the form of blogs, wikis, podcasts, and such. Robert Rose, in his presentation, *From Chaos to Clarity: How Web 2.0 Delivers on the Promise of Content Control*, showed how you can leverage the knowledge of these communities. By engaging these communities, or creating them if they don't yet exist, you can gain some aspect of control of the conversation and gradually integrate the community knowledge into your own products.

As I mentioned above, DocTrainUX wasn't exactly what I expected, but it was probably exactly what I needed. The practice and scope of technical communication is rapidly evolving and it is easy to become complacent during the course of our jobs. So, just when I thought that I had the old "intertubes" thing figured out, it has blown past me and it's time to catch up again.

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