

# Communicator

The Institute of Scientific and Technical Communicators  
Winter 2004

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# Reaching beyond the horizon

Recently, a thread on the ISTC Discussion Group became rather heated after a member exhorted other members to raise their game. He wanted us to think about the big issues facing people and organisations that create and use information, rather than debate minutiae. While most of us would probably agree that details matter in this business, I think he had a point.

I'll admit that I've fallen into the trap of concentrating too hard on the detail before, proud to spot a few mistakes and improve a layout, rather than carry out a fuller evaluation of whether the most useful information is being presented in the most effective way for its users. It's only when you start talking to others and discovering what they're doing, that you see how much more you could do yourself.

With that in mind, it's time for a confession: in October, I attended my first ISTC Conference. There was a whole range of reasons why I hadn't been before, with apprehension about meeting a lot of people at the top of the list and the cost up there too. I now wonder how I let those things stop me attending a most enjoyable and interesting event.

The theme, 'Expanding our horizons', was explored very effectively by Julian Murfitt in his keynote speech. He made an interesting point: to expand your horizons, you need to know where they are now. As you can see from the photo, his horizon is sometimes rather different from most people's. He reinforced his point with an example: having recently fulfilled a lifelong ambition to fly a Hawk trainer, he's found himself in need of a new personal goal. When we achieve a goal, we need to set ourselves another.

Several times during the weekend, I was humbled by the size and scope of the projects described and reminded of that online discussion. In the weeks since, I've met some authors who are less actively involved in their profession than those at the Oxford Belfry. I've heard entrenched views on topics that are being discussed nationally and internationally, without the speakers even realising that practices are changing.



**Your horizon might be different from someone else's.  
Try Julian Murfitt's for size!**

The whole experience has confirmed to me how easy it is to become isolated in our business. In the hope of showing how varied the Conference programme is, I'd like to give four examples of what made the event interesting for me. Someone else's choices would no doubt be different.

1. Greg Daffern's enthusiastic demonstrations of help tools and techniques. In particular, my hazy understanding of RoboDemo (now Captivate) became a real appreciation of the value of embedding demonstrations in online help.
2. Paul Bakker's thoughtful exploration of the factors that may influence the need for professional indemnity insurance. Having discussed these ideas with other service providers since, they appear to be well accepted.
3. David Bailey and Gordon Ingram's impassioned presentation about using open source systems to provide truly inclusive intranets. It was marvellous to see young communicators so dedicated to making information available in a way that suits its users.
4. Ralph Maciejewski's engrossing talk on preserving our digital heritage, which managed the neat trick of looking back with nostalgia and forward with ambition. As a family historian and amateur historical fiction writer, I've already benefited from digital archives and would hate to see such valuable resources lost.

As well as the formal sessions, breaks and mealtimes proved equally useful. I've been told many times about the valuable networking opportunities at

Conference and so I'm not sure how I can make those arguments any more persuasive. So, I'll be cynical and ask what's in it for you? Well, where else will you have dinner with a selection of company directors and international representatives within your profession? If you ever expect to look for another job or contract, I'd suggest that such personal contacts could be so useful.

In conclusion, I'd like to ask the 90% of ISTC members who do not attend Conference to reconsider their reasons for missing it. The event is already a wonderful opportunity to travel far beyond your present horizon — just think how much better it would be if even half of you non-attendees were there!

You've been asked before to come along to develop your Institute but I'm asking you to come along to develop yourselves. In increasingly competitive commercial environments, with more and more offshoring, can you really afford not to? **C**

**Marian Newell FISTC** is a freelance technical author working in the Thames Valley. She joined the ISTC in 1985. E-mail: [journal.editor@istc.org.uk](mailto:journal.editor@istc.org.uk)

## In this issue

I chose our cover picture to embody the idea of stretching ourselves and our Institute. You'll find this theme recurs throughout the ISTC news. As we put two years of consolidation behind us, it's time to set ambitious goals for the future. The first thing you can do to help us achieve them is to return your renewals promptly, without reminders. Chasing costs time and money better spent elsewhere.

# English Language Project II

Ron Blicq MISTC

In 2003, INTECOM issued the result of a three-year study: *Guidelines for Writing English-Language Technical Documentation for an International Audience*. The study was conducted by 14 technical communicators around the world, whose objective was to research differences in spelling and usage, particularly between British and American practices, and recommend which should be used for English-language documentation that would receive worldwide distribution.

Now I am seeking new people to join the study group, so that we can continue developing and, where necessary, revising the guidelines. The two ISTC members who took part in the previous study group are unable to continue; consequently I am inviting one or two current ISTC members to take part in the second stage. Your role will be to examine the guidelines, propose any changes or new terms you feel they should contain, evaluate proposals from study group members in other countries, and work collaboratively (by e-mail) to determine recommendations.

If you would like to participate, or you need more information, e-mail me at ronblicq@cs.com. (You can see the 2003 Guidelines at [www.intecom.org](http://www.intecom.org).) I will welcome enquiries.

## What's in a name?

Ken Goddard, Associate

I'd like to suggest an idea for improving how we present ourselves to the public. I've long been convinced that no matter how long and loud we shout from behind our formal tongue-tangler — the 'Institute of Scientific and Technical Communicators' (18 syllables) — we'll never attract much of an audience.

How about fronting it with an emblematic term that's quicker, easier and fresher? I'm not advocating replacing our current title — just fronting it, augmenting it — as I believe some trade unions have done, for instance, with their formal names. I've already explored some blind alleys: 'Communicus' (sounds like a disease); 'Communicate' (too general — would include PR and anyhow sounds like our journal), 'CommuniTech' (OK, I suppose, but a bit obvious and uninspired). How about a competition?

## ISTC London Local Area Group

Adrian Toole MISTC

May I appeal to readers in the London area to support this Group, of which I am Chairman. We have been in existence for two years and hold interesting and convivial meetings. For details of forthcoming events, contact me at [adriant@sweetbriar.demon.co.uk](mailto:adriant@sweetbriar.demon.co.uk).

We welcome letters of up to 200 words but reserve the right to edit as required. Write to [journal.editor@istc.org.uk](mailto:journal.editor@istc.org.uk) or PO Box 522, Peterborough, PE2 5WX.

## Stylistic preferences

Thanks to all those who responded to my questions about editing articles for *Communicator*. To quote but a few:

- Alan Fisk said that he wouldn't want *Communicator* to become over-edited, where all articles read as if written by the same person.
- Jon Paul Graham agreed, saying that, while it is important for text to be written in clear and correct English, he likes articles to reveal their authors' idiosyncrasies.
- Malcolm Beaumont distinguished style from tone. He suggested that style is easier to assess than tone, and indicated that he is keen to see articles in an informal style but not in an inappropriate tone.

Overall, the preference seemed to be:

- Continued imposition of a house style to achieve some consistency
- Editing to ensure that language is correct and tolerably concise
- Permitting individual style to shine through, while drawing authors' attention to problematic usages.

## Reader survey

Thanks, too, to those who completed the *Communicator* Survey. As with the Salary Survey, the response rate was disappointing but the feedback from those of you who took the time to fill in the online form will be very useful.

## Conference feedback

Finally, thanks to the Conference delegates who nominated sessions that they thought would make good articles. Two of your nominations appear on pages 14–17 of this issue and more will follow in 2005.

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### Conference update

I would like to use this space to take the opportunity to thank everyone who was involved in organising Conference this year, as well as everyone who came along.

The continued success of our annual Conference depends not only on the hard work of the organisers and the generosity of the speakers, giving us the benefit of their experience as well as their time, but also on the enthusiasm of the delegates and the feedback from them. Every year, I particularly enjoy the chance to meet new members and speak to people whom I haven't seen since the last Conference.

Your feedback is what keeps us on our toes and what makes sure that we keep Conference (and other aspects of the ISTC) going in the right direction.

It has been a recurring comment for the last couple of years that Conference is too expensive and we should consider charging less. However, what most delegates do not seem to realise is that we do not actually make a large amount of money out of Conference. It is not possible to balance income and expenditure perfectly but, for the last three or four years, we've been able to make sure that we didn't make a loss.

That said, I can now announce that Conference 2005 will be held in the Royal Court Hotel, near Coventry, on 23-25 September. The Royal Court Hotel meets the high standards that we have come to expect from our venues and yet we will make substantial savings there. We will, of course, pass on these savings by reducing the rates. To book your place, contact Ann Little on 020 8422 4689 or at [ann@alittlecreation.fsnet.co.uk](mailto:ann@alittlecreation.fsnet.co.uk).

## During his two-year tenure, Iain saved the ISTC from disaster, implementing changes that ensured its stability and success.

### Well-deserved recognition

This year at Conference we made a new award, entitled *The ISTC Award for Services to the ISTC*. The reason for establishing the award is that there are a great many people who have given a lot of time and effort to the ISTC, and received little or no recognition for their outstanding contribution.

The first ever recipient of this award was Iain Wright FISTC. Iain, Management System Editor with BT Exact, joined Council in 1998, when he took over the ISTC website. He is still running the website and now has a team of volunteers working on it with him.

Iain became President in October 2000 and served until September 2002. The ISTC had been on a financial downturn for a few years and, in 2001, Iain had to implement an intensive review of our finances and make some tough decisions; these undoubtedly saved the ISTC from financial ruin. As a result of this near-disaster, Iain fashioned the ISTC into an organisation that could grow into a successful Institute in years to come.

During Iain's term of office, many changes for the better came about. The new-look *Communicator* was launched, the ISTC Newsletter became a regular online publication, the ISTC's new handbook *Professional Communication and Information Design* was published, and an online Discussion Group was established for all members.

Iain was also instrumental in introducing a brand policy for the ISTC, and the Business Affiliate scheme, which has been a great success. He took us into the European Union in 2001, when the ISTC became a founder member of TCeurope, and we have taken part in many European projects since then.


During his two-year tenure, Iain saved the ISTC from disaster, implementing changes that ensured its stability and success. Thank you, Iain.

### Prizes all round

As I mentioned before, feedback from Conference delegates is essential if we are to continue to improve Conference and the Institute. This year, we gave a feedback form to every delegate with the incentive that all forms would be

put into a hat, one would be drawn out, and the lucky owner of that form would win one year's free membership. Congratulations go to our very own *Communicator* Editor, Marian Newell, as she won the prize. Thanks to everyone who took the time to fill in their forms.

This year, raffle prizes were very kindly donated by many supporters and a lot of raffle tickets were sold. As a result of the generosity of donors and participants, it gives me great pleasure to announce that funding is now available for one free place at Conference 2005. The place will be given to a deserving individual, who otherwise would not be able to attend. Potential candidates include students, retired members, temporarily unemployed members or anyone else who is suitably deserving.

If you would like the place, or if you would like to nominate someone else, please submit the applicant's name, membership status and a brief explanation of why you or they should be given the place. You can contact the Conference Committee by post at the ISTC office address or by e-mail at [Conference@istc.org.uk](mailto:Conference@istc.org.uk). 

**Gavin Ireland MISTC** is a sole technical author in a software development company. He produces printed, PDF and online documentation.  
E-mail: [president@istc.org.uk](mailto:president@istc.org.uk)

## CONFERENCE

### Why don't YOU come?

**Location?  
Price?  
Programme?  
Timing?**

**If you don't tell us,  
we can't change it!**

**[president@istc.org.uk](mailto:president@istc.org.uk)**



# Ambitious plans for 2005

The 174<sup>th</sup> Council meeting in November was the first since the AGM at Conference. There was a full agenda, with much of the discussion centred on the perennial problem of marketing the ISTC and increasing the number of members. At the last count, there were only 941 individual members on the books. At its height, the Institute had closer to 1500. Regaining that level must be our top priority.

## Finance on a firm footing

Thanks to our Treasurer, Peter Fountain, the ISTC's financial position is relatively healthy. Members will be pleased to hear that there will not be an increase in subscriptions for 2005.

Advertising sales for both journal and newsletter exceeded targets. Thanks to the support of sponsors and exhibitors, Conference made a modest profit. Without taking into account this source of income, the event breaks even. Next year, the venue will be near Coventry and the good news is that the member weekend rate will be £95 less than this year. Once again, there is an early booking discount so don't delay.

## Marketing initiatives underway

We had an interesting presentation from a member who runs a firm specialising in marketing science. He had some interesting ideas to put forward and we shall consider those carefully, especially the cost/benefit implications. Paul Ballard, who heads the Marketing Steering Group, is already working on ideas for improving the presentation of the ISTC to the world, particularly our image to potential members.

## ISTC service award renamed

It is sad to have to report the death of two longstanding members of the Institute, Mike Austin and John Crossley. John's contribution to education was recognised with the Horace Hockley Award in 2002. In researching an obituary for Mike (see overleaf), our President was greatly impressed by the exceptional service Mike had given to the ISTC. Having just instituted a new award for services to the ISTC, Council agreed unanimously that this should become known as *The Mike Austin Award for Services to the ISTC*. It will not be made regularly, only when Council thinks it is deserved.

## New courses in the pipeline

There has been renewed activity on education. John Young has been talking to the University of Portsmouth, which is proposing to introduce Masters courses in technical communication (see panel). John pointed out that now Coventry has withdrawn their BA course there is no longer a first degree available in technical communication. He also commented on how difficult it is to get information out of educational institutions about their courses. As an aside, the list of courses on the website is now out of date and, until further notice, the site will show only the names and addresses of institutions.

## Newsletter Editor confirmed

Sophie Watson has now taken over from David Cooper as Editor of the ISTC Newsletter. Her main concern is finding articles for future issues. You can all do your bit by letting her have short articles, comments, funny bits or anything else that takes your fancy — provided that it's loosely connected with technical communication. See page 50 for a profile of Sophie.

## International back on agenda

Over the last year, Council has not encouraged any international activity although, thanks to the sterling work of Alan Fisk and David Cooper, we have been able to maintain a presence in Europe. The ISTC is now in a position to allocate some monies to this area. The main event on the horizon is FORUM 2007, to be held in Amsterdam. Council is considering in what way the ISTC can become involved.

## Website poised for growth

There has been some feedback about difficulties in using the website and Iain Wright, with his team of five volunteers, has this under review. As a site grows, it can become difficult to navigate. Iain will be pleased to receive your ideas on the future format of the website and any difficulties you have. An effective website is, of course, an essential part of our marketing strategy and must give both members and other visitors what they want — do we know what you want? **C**

**Les Best FISTC**

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## Developments in education

There were two presentations on Education at Conference, one on new Masters courses in the UK by Ken Goddard and the other on tekomp certification scheme in Germany. The ISTC Education Steering Group is looking at how it can support and extend educational opportunities for UK technical communicators. For now, here is a brief overview of what's going on.

### *Masters courses at the University of Portsmouth*

The university plans to run an MA in Technical Communication from 2005, and an MSc in Scientific and Technical Communication from 2006. Details are yet to be finalised but Ken indicated that the MA (headed by Ian Kemble) will be aimed at candidates with little experience in technical communication and without a scientific or technical background. The MSc (headed by Roy Lightfoot) will be designed for candidates with more scientific or technical expertise. He suggested that the MA will suit presentation-oriented technical communicators, while the MSc will be better for those more oriented towards content.

The university is looking for experienced practitioners interested in contributing to course design, content and possibly delivery. We'll pass on news as we get it but, meanwhile, you can contact Ken for more information at [ken@grammar-technical.co.uk](mailto:ken@grammar-technical.co.uk).

### *Professional certification in technical communication*

This year, tekomp succeeded in something that the ISTC has wanted to do for some time: it launched a competencies-based certification scheme for technical communicators. The situation is slightly different in Germany, as there are no direct equivalents of our City & Guilds 5360 modules and degree courses. However, a professional accreditation by the leading body in a discipline would complement the education and training already available, offering more choice to practitioners seeking formal recognition of their skills.

Council is currently assessing the tekomp experience and considering the options open to the ISTC in this area. Meanwhile, for more information on the tekomp scheme, visit [www.tekomp.de](http://www.tekomp.de) and, under **Documents for Download**, click **Certification**.

# A fine heritage ...

## Mike Austin DLC FISTC

Mike Austin, a distinguished technical author and a former vice-president of the ISTC, passed away in September 2004.

During a career that began as a Spitfire pilot, Mike worked as Publications and Publicity Officer of HML Engineering, Technical Author with the de Havilland Engine Company, Peabody Ltd and several technical publications agencies. Mike was also the author of two books relating to driving instruction and road safety, one of which received high praise from the Minister of Transport. Mike also had many articles published on a wide range of subjects.

Within the ISTC, Mike will be best remembered for the ISTC handbook, which has been popular amongst practitioners and academics for nearly 20 years. To quote a former Council member, Dr John Kirkman, 'I doubt if the Handbook would have come into being if Mike had not set it in motion and followed through with all the negotiations with publishers'.

Mike joined the ISTC Council in May 1975 and attended almost every Council meeting and AGM until he retired from Council in May 1987 and, in those days, Council met every two months. On joining Council, Mike immediately took the role of Press and Public Relations Officer. The next ten years saw the ISTC represented at many relevant events and articles published in both trade journals and the national press.

In 1981, Mike suggested investigating whether the ISTC should become a publisher. By 1985, the first issue of *The ISTC Handbook of Technical Writing and Technical Publication Techniques* was published. Only last year, our follow-up publication, *Professional Communication and Information Design* was made available around the world through digital printing.

Also in 1981, Mike began looking into 'competitions for various classes of technical communication'. The ISTC documentation awards are still going strong and are presented annually at Conference.

For someone like myself, who spoke to Mike only once, it is obvious from a quick look at the minutes of Council meetings during his time that he played

an important and active role in most, if not all, discussions that came before Council. Many of the projects that he was involved in, including those he initiated, are still going strong almost 30 years later.

Mike's death will be a great loss to those who knew him personally and to those of us who know his work and his reputation. **C**

**Gavin Ireland MISTC**, President

**Council had already decided to award Mike Austin an Honorary Fellowship of the ISTC when he passed away. In honour of all he did for the Institute, the new ISTC Award for Services to the ISTC is renamed *The Mike Austin Award for Services to the ISTC*.**

## John Crossley MCIM MISTC LGGI

John, an ISTC Council member until two years ago, passed away in October 2004. His College of Technical Authorship had been helping students to pass the City & Guilds 5360 qualifications for more than a decade. His exemplary service to our profession as an educator was recognised in 2002, when he was selected for the Horace Hockley Award.

John's career began in 1943, when he became an apprentice with the Avro aircraft company and worked on Anson trainers, Lancaster and Lincoln bombers, York freighters, civilian Tudor airliners and, eventually, the Vulcan bomber. This was a second choice for him — he really wanted to join the RAF but was rejected because of poor eyesight.

After his apprenticeship, he tried to use his Aircraft Maintenance Engineer's Licence to see the world. However, after seeing little but aerodromes and discovering that he suffered from hay fever, he soon returned to the aircraft manufacturing



**Mike Austin (1927–2004)**



**John Crossley (1927–2004)**

industry — 'away from all that grass', as his doctor put it.

John's adaptability was tested to the limits, as his career passed through general engineering and marketing, punctuated by six redundancies over the years. Each time, he bounced back, studying a new skill and then finding ways to make a living from it.

When he decided to establish a distance-learning college for technical communication students, he took the Diploma in Distance Education to base it on 'a proper foundation', to quote him. More recently, he achieved ISO 9001 registration and became a preferred supplier for the MoD's Career Transition Partnership.

I first came to know John through a different distance-learning college, when he tutored me for the Chartered Institute of Marketing's Certificate in Marketing. His comments were so thorough and helpful that, some time later when I was trying to develop a portfolio of freelance work, I contacted him and asked if I might tutor students for his College. In the years since, John was never anything but kind, courteous and encouraging.

I shall miss our regular correspondence and the shared satisfaction we felt each time a student passed his or her exams and began work as a technical communicator. He taught me that it is never too late to try something new and I hope I still enjoy my work as much in 30 years' time as he did. My thoughts are with his wife, Hilda, and brothers, Alan and Derek. **C**

**Marian Newell FISTC**, Editor



## ... and a bright future

### Horace Hockley Award

Your Council was delighted to present this award to a man who has devoted many years to raising standards in our business — yes, *Communicator's* very own standards correspondent, **Richard Hodgkinson**.

Richard led us through a career that began in graphic design and evolved into international documentation standards. His role as Principle UK Expert (PUKE!) on ISO/IEC JTC 1/SC 7/WG 2 took him around the world and culminated in his recent appointment as Convenor of that Group. It was this work that led Council to select him for the Horace Hockley Award. As a body striving to raise standards in technical communication, it is right for the ISTC to acknowledge the hard work of those who help to set the standards against which members' work is measured.

Richard's articles in *Communicator* have played a part in building links between technical communication bodies, with both TCANZ and the STC asking to reprint them.

All that aside, the thing that sticks in my mind is that Richard has designed over 10,000 icons. I'm not sure I even knew there were that many icons. Wow!

### Services to the ISTC

Our President quite rightly campaigned for this new award to be introduced to recognise the invaluable contribution made to the ISTC by Past President, **Iain Wright**. Without Iain, there would be no ISTC, given that he led us through the financial crisis of 2002.

Iain is so quiet and unassuming that it's easy to forget how much time and effort he has put into keeping the Institute on track. It was marvellous to see his hard work acknowledged with this award.

### Documentation Awards

Although the entry this year was small and awards were made in only two categories, judges remarked on the stand-out quality of some submissions. Consequently, the winners should be very proud of their achievement.

#### *Class 1a: sponsor AST*

This was won by **Dards Computing & Communication** for the *RMSflowsim User Guide*. Jane Dards MISTC collected the award. The runner up was **Orbis Technology**. David Bailey MISTC collected the award.

#### *Class 2b: sponsor Mekon*

This was won by **Plain Words** for an entry written by Dr Stephen King. Janet Basdell FISTC collected the award. There was no runner-up.



**Richard Hodgkinson**  
2004 Horace Hockley Award winner

To find out more about the winning organisations, visit:

- [www.dards.co.uk](http://www.dards.co.uk)
- [www.orbisuk.com](http://www.orbisuk.com)
- [www.plainwords.co.uk](http://www.plainwords.co.uk)

A full report on the Documentation Awards featured in the November 2004 Newsletter ([www.istc.org.uk/downloads/istcNov2004.pdf](http://www.istc.org.uk/downloads/istcNov2004.pdf)). **C**

### Marian Newell FISTC

[journal.editor@istc.org.uk](mailto:journal.editor@istc.org.uk)

## ISTC Documentation Awards 2005

- |                  |                                  |
|------------------|----------------------------------|
| <b>Class 1</b>   | <b>PRINTED DELIVERY</b>          |
| <b>Class 1a:</b> | <b>Technical information</b>     |
| <b>Class 1b:</b> | <b>Non-technical information</b> |
| <b>Class 2</b>   | <b>ONLINE DELIVERY</b>           |
| <b>Class 2a:</b> | <b>Technical information</b>     |
| <b>Class 2b:</b> | <b>Non-technical information</b> |

**Put your business's name on this page next year!**

**Information:** [www.istc.org.uk/pages/awards.php](http://www.istc.org.uk/pages/awards.php)

**Contact:** [awards@istc.org.uk](mailto:awards@istc.org.uk)

**Closing date:** 1 August 2005

### Raffle prize donors

The ISTC would like to thank all those who donated prizes for the raffle. The generosity of donors and ticket-buyers will fund a Conference place for a deserving member in 2005.

- 3di Information Solutions
- A Little Creation
- Carol Hewitt
- ITR International Translation Resources
- Lloyd International
- Motorola
- Oxford Belfry
- Pace Micro Technology
- Plain Figures
- Society of Indexers

# Rethinking the Salary and Benefits Survey

This year's Salary and Benefits Survey was completed by only 61 members (6.2% of the membership) — for the first time, fewer people completed the survey form than went to Conference.

Very little meaningful data can be extracted from such a small sample. Given that there were fewer responses than last year's all-time low, and many members expressed concern about the reliability of conclusions drawn from such a low response then, this report cannot present reliable salary data and will instead discuss the way forward.

For illustrative purposes only, Table 1 shows the average salary compared with the last few surveys. Figures 1 to 3 show the figures graphically. It is unlikely that this data will be useful to either individuals or organisations,

and caution must be exercised when considering its reliability. The average salary is, as has always been the case, the total of the salaries stated in the survey divided by the number of people who stated a salary.

Each of us has become more specialised and very few people have the same combination of role, output, industry, and location. This manifests itself in the ever-increasing range of answers that people have been cramming into their responses. The diversity makes comparisons difficult.

Clearly, there is insufficient time to complete, and then compile, a survey that contains multiple combinations

of roles, outputs, industries and locations, each combination with its own rate per hour or salary per year — let alone the associated benefits!

Even with annual remuneration, there are varying levels of bonuses, overtime payments, dividends and working hours. These all conspire to prevent the accurate presentation of an individual's annual package. Benefits also vary year on year. Reporting the most up-to-date information for the last 12 months for each person is the best that can be achieved. This year, in an attempt to provide rates for a smaller number of variations (and thus a reasonable amount of contributing data), the online form was designed to restrict people to just one **main** role, output,

| Year | Responses | Percentage | Average salary (£) |
|------|-----------|------------|--------------------|
| 1997 | 101       | 7.9        | 26,230             |
| 1998 | 265       | 20.0       | 27,113             |
| 1999 | 246       | 18.0       | 27,414             |
| 2000 | 271       | 19.4       | 29,573             |
| 2002 | 153       | 11.1       | 28,932             |
| 2003 | 84        | 8.6        | 30,920             |
| 2004 | 61        | 6.2        | 29,129             |

**Table 1. Summary data for 1997 to 2004**

industry and location. This proved to be fatal, generating too few responses from which to draw comparative results.

Given the low number of responses, we have reached the point where it is not possible to offer the range of comparisons provided in the past.

Next year's survey will, therefore, be very different from previous ones. The online form will be retained but most of the questions will be deleted. Only those that relate to most people most of the time will remain. We would like your comments as to which questions should be in the survey. As a starting point, the following questions may be asked:

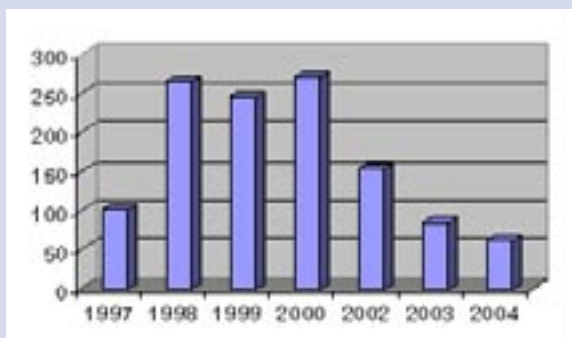
- What is your membership grade?
- What is your highest academic qualification?
- Have you received any training in the last 12 months?
- Do you pay for your training out of your taxed income?
- Do you use FISTC or MISTC after your name (if entitled)?
- What is your annual salary?
- What is your hourly rate?
- What other benefits do you receive (selected with yes/no boxes)?

Sadly, this will result in a smaller selection of results, covering a wider group of non-specialist people and will not cater for the rich variety of work that we all perform.

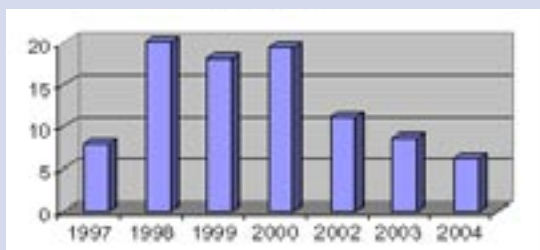
So, it's over to you. What do you think? What would make you complete the survey? What would make the results more useful to you? We are asked by various people to provide this information but was cannot do it without the support of you, the members. **C**

**Peter Fountain FISTC LCGI**

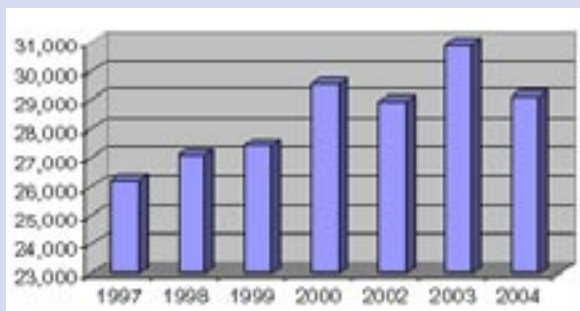
E-mail: [treasurer@istc.org.uk](mailto:treasurer@istc.org.uk)



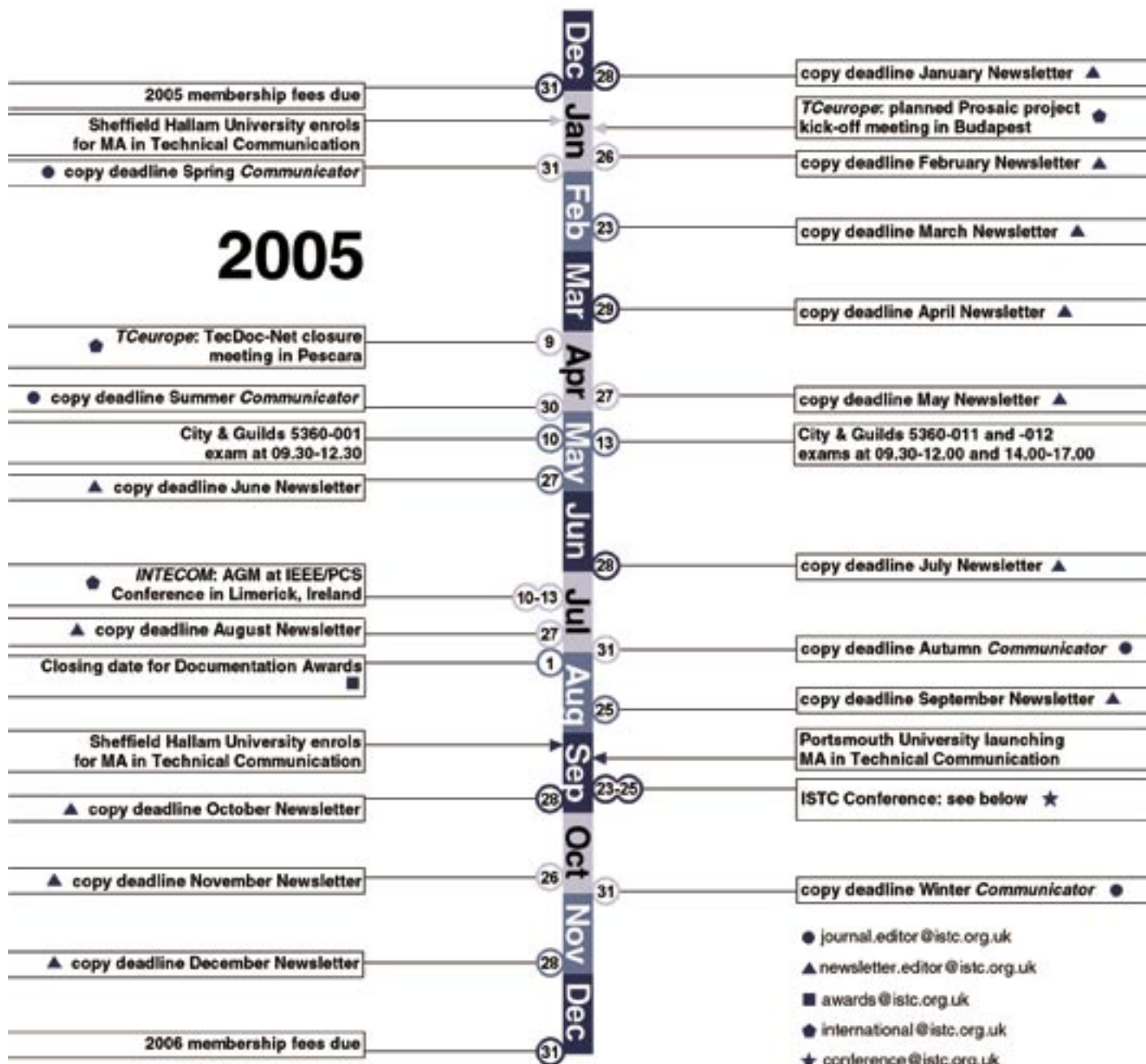
**Figure 1. Number of responses received**



**Figure 2. Percentage of members responding**



**Figure 3. Average salaries in 1997-2004**



## 2005 ISTC Conference

### 23-25 September 2005

The Royal Court Hotel, Tamworth Road,  
Keresley, Coventry, CV7 8JG

**10%**  
early-bird  
discount\*



For bookings or further  
information telephone Ann Little:

**020 8422 4689**

or e-mail her at:

**ann@alittlecreation.fsnet.co.uk**

\* Book before 30 June 2005



# ISTC Discussion Group

[http://groups.yahoo.com/group/ISTC\\_Discussion](http://groups.yahoo.com/group/ISTC_Discussion)

## Job seeking and vacancies

One issue dominating discussion has been that of finding employment. Recommended sources were:

- [www.abraxas.com](http://www.abraxas.com)
- [www.jobserve.co.uk](http://www.jobserve.co.uk)
- [www.monarchrecruitment.com](http://www.monarchrecruitment.com)
- [www.reed.co.uk](http://www.reed.co.uk)

## ISTC membership

Membership has proved beneficial for professional development through employment opportunities, answering questions and Conference. It was suggested that local meetings should be set up outside London.

## Useful book

*Mastering Communication* by Nicky Stanton (Palgrave Macmillan, ISBN 1-4039-1709-4) was recommended as an invaluable reference.

## Methods of writing online Help

It was suggested that JavaScript (or a similar script language) should be used in HTML files to retrieve the values in the variable fields. This should link Help files so that they 'read' the application's database and display the field names configured by the end user.

## Business analysts

A good website for explaining the work of a business analyst is <http://www-106.ibm.com/developerworks/rational/library/1853.html>

## Enlarging print

Using a printer that can scale documents enables A5 booklets to be converted to A4 to enlarge text for people with visual impairments. The Epson Photo System 700 series supports this type of enlargement, and is relatively cheap compared with buying software to print two outputs from the same source file.

## Needs of a specific audience

A query arose about accommodating the needs of people with dyslexia in user manuals. This came from a Masters student planning a dissertation on the subject. Members suggested that ignorance and budgetary constraints were the main reasons for shortcomings

in this area. One suggested that a dissertation on 'What can be done in the technical manual to support those with reading difficulties without increasing the cost' would be of tremendous value to the industry.

## Imperial-metric conversion

An example was cited where the cause of a failure in a spacecraft was attributed to engineers using imperial measurements, whereas the scientists had designed the project using metric units. This practice caused concern, although SI units (Système International d'Unités) are now fully established in Europe.

## Understanding the ISBN format


A member asked whether there is a standard format for ISBN numbers. The most authoritative source appears to be the International ISBN Agency. The structure of an ISBN number is given at [www.isbn-international.org/en/userman/chapter4.html](http://www.isbn-international.org/en/userman/chapter4.html)

Other sites on this topic include <http://thorpe.com.au/isbn/index.htm> and [www.Whitaker.co.uk/faq.htm#3](http://www.Whitaker.co.uk/faq.htm#3)

## Technical authors in China

If you have experience of living and working in China, please contact Mick Davidson at [davidsonmick@yahoo.com](mailto:davidsonmick@yahoo.com). He would like to know about it.

## Changing languages in Word

Changing between variants of English in Microsoft® Word can lead to problems. A member explained that there's quite a complex interaction between the regional language and keyboard settings for Windows (when Word was installed, and as currently set) and the language settings and detection options in Word. An explanation of the issues and instructions to fix the problems is at <http://homepage.swissonline.ch/cindymeister/LangFmt.htm> 

**Jo Wilson BEd(Hons) PgCTA**

E-mail: [SilverQueen66898@aol.com](mailto:SilverQueen66898@aol.com)

# ISTC

The Institute of Scientific and Technical Communicators is the UK's leading body for people engaged in technical communication. It provides a forum for members to exchange views and represents the profession in dealings with other professional bodies and with the government.

The ISTC was formed in 1972 from the Presentation of Technical Information Group (est 1948), the Technical Publications Association (est 1953, later the Institution of Technical Authors and Illustrators) and the Institute of Technical Publicity and Publications (est 1963).

To join the ISTC or upgrade your membership, contact Carol Hewitt on 01733 390141 or at [istc@istc.org.uk](mailto:istc@istc.org.uk) or PO Box 522, Peterborough, PE2 5WX.

## Council members

### President

Gavin Ireland

[president@istc.org.uk](mailto:president@istc.org.uk)

### Treasurer

Peter Fountain

[treasurer@istc.org.uk](mailto:treasurer@istc.org.uk)

### Website

Iain Wright

[web@istc.org.uk](mailto:web@istc.org.uk)

Simon Butler

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### Journal

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Julian Murfitt

[julian.murfitt@mekon.com](mailto:julian.murfitt@mekon.com)

### Education

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### Membership

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Trevor Tuddenham

01707 331066

### Marketing

Paul Ballard

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### International

Alan Fisk

[international@istc.org.uk](mailto:international@istc.org.uk)

David Cooper

Contact through [istc@istc.org.uk](mailto:istc@istc.org.uk)

### Other members

Les Best

[lpbest@bestpubs.e7even.com](mailto:lpbest@bestpubs.e7even.com)

John Nicholson

[john.nicholson@rolls-royce.com](mailto:john.nicholson@rolls-royce.com)

## Company Secretary

Carol Hewitt

## Member news

### New members

#### Member

|                   |                 |
|-------------------|-----------------|
| Chris Abeyesinghe | Norwich         |
| Fiona Abrahami    | Oakworth        |
| Clare Coney       | Staines         |
| Jennifer Dillon   | Fermoy, Ireland |
| Antoni Dzumaga    | Kidderminster   |
| Chris Harrison    | St Helens       |
| David Jordan      | Salisbury       |
| Richard Lee       | Bristol         |
| David Malkin      | Glasgow         |
| David Plant       | Thetford        |
| Dr John Wilson    | France          |

#### Associate

|                |         |
|----------------|---------|
| Helen Symmonds | Banbury |
| Michael Warr   | Gosport |

#### Student

|                       |                    |
|-----------------------|--------------------|
| Alan Bradshaw         | Carterton          |
| Hilary Coote          | Reading            |
| Hugh O'Neill          | Ware               |
| Kathryn Nixon         | Brockworth         |
| Jacqueline Rhodes     | London             |
| Kathryn Valdal-Fourie | Courbevoie, France |

### Transfers

#### Fellow

|               |         |
|---------------|---------|
| David Herbert | Dereham |
|---------------|---------|

#### Member

|               |           |
|---------------|-----------|
| Ann Thompson  | Royston   |
| Susan Western | Cambridge |

#### Associate

|                |            |
|----------------|------------|
| Thomas McNally | Portsmouth |
|----------------|------------|

### Business Affiliates

#### Grade 1

Star Technology Solutions  
www.star-ts.com

### IASIG member wins award

Congratulations to IASIG member, Jane Dards, on winning an ISTC Documentation Award in Class 1a (Printed documentation about specified items of equipment, systems or software). Jane says, 'Working as an independent author, it is easy to become isolated from others working in the same profession, and my membership of the IASIG has been a lifeline in providing essential contact.'

## Independent Authors SIG

[http://groups.yahoo.com/group/ISTC\\_IASIG](http://groups.yahoo.com/group/ISTC_IASIG)

Postings on the Group have picked up over the last few months, with a wide variety of topics being discussed. Ten percent of the postings were for jobs; most were from agencies but there was an appreciable number for direct work.

### Cold calling

An interesting thread involved cold calls to potential clients. A member wrote, 'I was interested to see an article that says that, from June 2004, it is illegal to make unsolicited marketing or sales calls to businesses that have registered with the Corporate Telephone Preference Service (CTPS). I wondered if everyone knew about this, and how people are now coping with finding new business.'

One member replied, 'For any direct mail or cold-calling activity, I strongly recommend [www.marketingfile.com](http://www.marketingfile.com), an excellent mailing and prospecting list supplier. Their lists are checked against registers held by both TPS (Telephone Preference Service) and FPS (Fax Preference Service), which means that only those companies that have not opted out are listed.'

Another member replied, 'You can send unsolicited commercial mail through the post to any business —there aren't, as far as I know, any regulations that limit this.'

The general view was that cold calls are counter-productive. Experience had shown that most targets strongly resent cold calls and so such calls are likely to generate only ill will.

Mike Unwalla kindly directed readers to his website at [www.techscribe.co.uk](http://www.techscribe.co.uk), where there is a page entitled 'Promoting your freelance technical writing business'.

Another member advised creating a document containing a couple of 'case studies'. He said that was generally well received and provided a reason to send a brochure to some companies.

### IASIG stand at Conference

A stand is made available free of charge for IASIG members but a disappointing number of members used this facility. It is a good chance to market your skills and network with fellow freelancers, and possible new clients. Even if you

cannot attend Conference, you can send brochures to be placed on the stand. It's an excellent opportunity; don't let it go to waste!

### Small business tax

There are fresh tax concerns for IASIG member who act through limited companies, following recent changes in the Government's tax policy towards small businesses. There is so much concern that small business trade groups are acting together in a new body, called Genesis. Included in it are the Federation of Small Business, the Forum of Private Business and the Private Contractors Group.

Genesis is concerned about problems created when the Government does not take into account the interests of small businesses when formulating policy. They say that this Government believes that taxation is an appropriate vehicle for achieving social change. However, the result is so complex it is not fair. All the representatives agreed that small businesses needed 'greater simplicity and certainty' from the Government's tax policy.

In the test case reported in the last issue, the Special Commissioners ruled that the role of a contractor's spouse in the company was not active enough to warrant an income from it, barring the couple from using the non-working spouse's income tax allowances. The decision affects hundred of thousands of family-run businesses, which may face large tax bills. Accountants have said that husbands and wives could owe £9000 a year, backdated for six years. There was no warning of this change and it is the backdating that is causing most concern.

There is still confusion over the final decision, as there were two Special Commissioners at the hearing. One ruled in favour of the contractor and one in favour of the Inland Revenue. The senior Commissioner ruled for the Revenue, so that decision prevailed. There may yet be an appeal, so the outcome is still undecided. **C**

**Michael Plant MISTC**

E-mail: [mplant@trenethick.com](mailto:mplant@trenethick.com)

# INTECOM: a global service to technical communicators

The international organisation, its activities and future plans, as outlined by **Margery Watson** at Conference 2004.

INTECOM (the International Council for Technical Communication), of which ISTC is a founding member, serves an important role in bringing together technical communicators from around the world. Through INTECOM, they share ideas, generate new initiatives in technical communication, and provide a global support and service network.

The members of INTECOM are associations like the ISTC, not individual technical communicators. On our website at [www.intecom.org](http://www.intecom.org), you will find information on our activities and members, along with numerous resources for technical communicators worldwide.

Founded in 1972 in Sweden, INTECOM has grown to a membership of 15 organisations based in UK, Europe, Scandinavia, North America and the Southern Hemisphere. Member delegates meet annually in a hosting country, in association with the host member's conference. So far, meetings have been held in Germany, Sweden, Norway, the UK, France, Australia, Denmark, the Netherlands, Switzerland and the US.

## Annual meetings and Forum

At the annual meetings, we report on activities within our own organisations, discuss progress on INTECOM projects currently underway, share information and ideas on matters raised for discussion, and set goals for the following year. Every three to five years, INTECOM holds a Forum. This is an international conference managed by INTECOM in association with a group of member societies, drawing delegates from around the world. The last Forum was held in Milan in 2003, and the next will be held in the Netherlands in 2007.

## INTECOM Board

The INTECOM Board, elected every two years at the Annual General Meeting, is made up of the President, Vice President, Secretary General and Publicity Officer, assisted by the

Immediate Past President. Between annual meetings, the business of INTECOM is conducted by the Board, the members of which keep in constant e-mail contact, both with each other and with delegates. In this last year, we have been particularly busy with enquiries from potential new INTECOM members interested in our activities.

## Members around the world

Our members in the Southern Hemisphere are TCANZ — the Technical Communicators Association of New Zealand — and ASTC (Victoria) — the Australian Society of Technical Communicators based in the state of Victoria. These two organisations have recently begun working together on a joint venture with the ASTC (NSW), based in Sydney, and the Australian Branch of STC, to produce a quarterly journal, *Southern Communicator*.

European members of INTECOM are CRT in France (represented by Marie-Louise Flacke, our Vice President), tekcom in Germany, TECOM Schweiz in Switzerland, and STIC in the Netherlands. This year's annual meeting is being hosted by tekcom in Wiesbaden.

Scandinavia has been strongly represented on INTECOM by FTI in Sweden, STD in Finland (STD) and NFTI in Norway. FTI held its 40 anniversary this year and has recently developed new branches in Gothenburg and Karlstad. Johan Nasstrom, the FTI delegate, is our Publicity Officer and Tove Ostberg, the NFTI delegate, has been Secretary General for nine years. The long service of these two Board members is greatly appreciated. We are hoping that an association will be formed in Denmark. Currently in that country, Dantekom operates largely as an online discussion group.

Russia is represented by the Popov Society but, unfortunately, travel difficulties have prevented their delegate from attending recent meetings. There are four INTECOM member societies across the Atlantic.



**Margery Watson**  
President of INTECOM

Canada is represented by SQRP in Quebec, which is primarily French-language. Most Canadian technical communicators belong to STC and/or the IEEE Professional Communication Society, which are both based in the US. Another international organisation that is based in the US and is represented on INTECOM is ACM/SIGDOC.

## Assistance for new groups

During the past year, we have been actively encouraging technical communicators to form new groups in various parts of the world. We had an enquiry from an IT College in Estonia that is setting up a technical communication course. The German body, tekcom, has been assisting in the development of new societies in Poland and Italy.

In the Southern Hemisphere, we are hoping to assist technical communicators in South Africa and Brazil to form associations and become members of INTECOM. To date, we have had e-mail contact with interested people and will continue to support their endeavours.

The ISTC has also been actively involved in promoting a grouping of technical communicators in Ireland. Next year's annual INTECOM meeting is to be held in Limerick on 14 July, in association with the IEEE/PCS conference



that takes place there on 10-13 July 2005. This will bring together the members of our profession in Ireland and encourage the development of a new national organisation there.

We've also had several e-mails from interested groups in India, and more recently the Middle East. We aim to encourage the recognition of technical communication as an important part of the IT industry in those parts of the world where rapid development is taking place. Shortly, I will be visiting Croatia, where I hope to find out more about the state of technical communication in that country.

## ...a new proposal for an exchange programme to assist technical communicators to travel under the INTECOM banner. The idea is that member organisations sponsor individual 'ambassadors' on visits to other INTECOM member organisations.

Through the INTECOM website, we assist new groups of technical communicators by providing suggestions on organisational structure and a constitution. As they build on their activities, we also provide useful resources for events such as conferences and workshops.

### Support for members

INTECOM supports its member organisations through the network of delegates and by supporting activities in the various countries. This international cooperation is of great value in communicating ideas and innovations, as well as sharing common experiences and issues that we face in our profession.

### Projects

Recent INTECOM projects have been aimed at increasing an understanding of our global community. The International Language Project, chaired by Ron Blicq, has resulted in the very useful *Guidelines for Writing English-Language Technical Documentation for an International Audience*. There are currently several member organisations working on the issues of certification for technical communicators. Sharing ideas and initiatives in this area is particularly important, as we produce more and more documentation that will be used by an international audience.

### Resources for individuals

Besides supporting member organisations, INTECOM supports individuals through its website, which includes extensive links to resources. It is pleasing to note that the benefits of this facility were demonstrated recently when we heard of students in Florida using the links when their own resources were wiped out by the recent hurricanes in that region. Please contact Marie-Louise Flacke, our Vice President, at [marie\\_flacke@wanadoo.fr](mailto:marie_flacke@wanadoo.fr) if you find a particularly useful website for technical communicators.

### Future activities

In May this year, at the Plenary in Brisbane, we applied for Category C Liaison Status to the ISO/IEC JTC1/SC7 Software and System Engineering. Our particular interest is in Working Group 2 — Software and System Documentation. Already, ISTC member Richard Hodgkinson chairs the group, and it seems logical to have INTECOM represented too. We await confirmation that our application has been accepted, and plan to have a representative at the next Plenary in Helsinki in May 2005.

At the next annual meeting, we will be discussing a new proposal for an exchange programme to assist technical communicators to travel under the INTECOM banner. The idea is that member organisations sponsor individual 'ambassadors' on visits to other INTECOM member organisations. The travelling ambassador attends events held by their hosts, at which they deliver an address or paper, and write an article for the host society's publication. On returning home, each ambassador reports on his or her experiences and writes an article for their own organisation's publication.

### Funding

INTECOM is run by enthusiastic and committed volunteers, who give freely of their time and resources. Delegates are generally given some help with

funding for travel and accommodation by their organisations. INTECOM has an income of about €3000 annually, from membership subscriptions. This must cover administration expenses, maintenance of the website and any costs associated with projects. However, it can be said that, generally, INTECOM is supported by the time and effort of the individual delegates who are prepared to make a personal contribution to the organisation.

### How can you and your organisation contribute and benefit?

We encourage you to make use of the resources we provide. We also welcome your input. Share information and ideas through the INTECOM website, contribute ideas through your delegate and host visiting technical communicators at your local meetings. You can also invite speakers and delegates from other countries to your events and conferences.

If you go abroad, make sure you contact the INTECOM delegate in the country you are visiting — you have friends and colleagues wherever there is a member organisation. **C**

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As well as being President of INTECOM, **Margery Watson** is also President and a founding member of the Technical Communicators Association of New Zealand (TCANZ). She is a technical communicator of 19 years' experience with a focus on software user documentation.  
E-mail: [margery.watson@docs-online.co.nz](mailto:margery.watson@docs-online.co.nz)

# Disks 'n' docs

After showing that extinction isn't just for the dinosaurs, **Ralph Maciejewski** explains how our digital heritage can be saved.



Ten years ago, these items were in daily use. Now they are lying in landfill sites, taking your data with them.

## What's the problem?

Making backup copies of your precious documents to disk, CD or even DVD should be second nature. However, will anyone be able to retrieve or reuse those documents in 5, 10 or 20 years time? The answer is a worrying 'Maybe'.

The dream of the 1990s was the paperless office. Unfortunately, the dream is becoming a nightmare.

Let's go back to, say, January 1990. Imagine you have just completed a major documentation project. In addition to the printed manual, you have made a complete backup of all the source files onto floppy disk. You may have even said to yourself, 'I might need those files some day'.

Move forward to January 2004. You need to retrieve and update the manual that you produced all those years ago. No problem, you may think, since you have a backup.

However, the old computer that you used to create the manual is long gone. So is the diskette drive that you used to write your precious text and graphics onto those expensive, high-quality 5.25" floppy disks. And, more than likely, the operating system and even the application software

used to create the manual are no longer available or even supported.

Worse still, if you were unfortunate enough to save those document files to a tape, the chances are that the drive is no longer supported by the latest operating systems. Even if it is, can you read the tapes? And, if you do manage to read them, will your current software be able to recreate and format the manual in the same way as the original? It's most unlikely.

In the last ten years, we have witnessed the death and extinction of MS-DOS and both Windows 3.0 and 3.1. Windows 95, 98, ME and NT are in their last death throes. Windows 2000 and even Windows XP are ageing and constantly being patched up. The next-generation Windows system is waiting in the wings to take over. More versions are expected to follow during the next ten years. And heaven help the no-hoper who created a manual using Ventura Publisher 2.1, which ran under the GEM environment that was then in competition with Windows.

Luckily, if you have a paper copy of the manual, you need only scan and

OCR the pages. Once the text has been recovered, you can import it into your current content creation program. You can then save and archive the files to disk, CD or DVD. Who knows, you may even be able to read the files in ten years' time.

Seriously though, 'Born Digital' content — text, graphics and now audio and video — created using a computer is fragile. The hardware and software is forever either changing or being made obsolete by newer, faster devices. Even the media used to store the documents is fragile. A small imperfection, for example, in the wrong part of a CD can make it unreadable. And even the computer chips that are used in the computer have a limited lifespan.

## Do we care?

All this may often be no more than a small headache for a technical author but, for archivists all over the world, it is becoming a crisis. In fact, our digital heritage is in grave danger of being lost forever. It has been said that the chances of throwing a book into a cupboard and being able to read it 50

years later are better than saving files onto a disk in the hope that you will be able to read them at some future date.

There are many horror stories. A good example is the BBC's Domesday Project created in 1986 with the help of hundreds of contributions from schools and institutions from around the UK at a cost of millions of pounds. Only 14 years later, the 12" disks used to store the data were obsolete, as was the BBC computer and disk drive used to read them. Only in 2004, after many months of painstaking work and reverse engineering, was the BBC able to recreate the original project. The original Domesday book of 1086, however, is still in good health.

### Is it all bad news?

No, there is some hope. One thing that computers are very good at is searching and replication. Many valuable, paper-based documents are acquired by individuals (book collectors) or institutions (libraries) and stored in little-visited recesses. This does not happen with digital documents. With the right procedures in place, digital documents can be maintained and refreshed, as formats and hardware change over time.

Even better is the news that many, if not all, of the major national libraries are undertaking the transfer of their paper-based collections to digital formats. This will allow more users to have access to digital copies of old and precious documents, the originals of which can then be safely stored and archived for posterity.

The UK Government is a leader in this area and is now undertaking the digitisation of all its records. This is a truly enormous task.

Documents are not the only items being digitised. You can now view the public art collections of the world from the comfort of your PC — amazing!

### How can this digital heritage be preserved?

Producing hard-copy versions of digital documents may seem to be a good solution, until you realise that the Flash-based help or PowerPoint presentation of 15 years ago cannot be viewed as was originally intended.

You could rely on maintaining museums of computers, which would be used to recreate and display

the archived digital documents. However, computer chips themselves have limited physical lifetimes. The integrated circuits decay due to processes such as metal migration (the traces that define circuit connections on the chips migrate through the substrate over time) and dopant diffusion (the atoms that make semiconductors operate diffuse away over time). Even if obsolete computers were stored carefully, maintained religiously and never used, ageing processes like these would eventually render them inoperative. Using them routinely to access obsolete digital documents would undoubtedly accelerate their demise.



**Remember these disks? All, with the exception of the 3.5" disk, have disappeared forever.**

### What is the solution?

There is no definitive answer but one solution is use emulation to create an operating system under which the application used to create the original digital document can be run. The BBC Domesday project does just this.

For example, using emulation software such as Virtual PC, you can have guest operating systems run on a host operating system, such as Windows XP. In this way, you can run say, Windows 3.0 or 3.1 — or even GEM — in its own PC environment, along with the required software packages. So, the Ventura Publisher no-hoper can now run version 2.1 to restore and republish those long-lost documents.


However, don't be fooled. Emulation is not the end of the matter. You still have the problem of maintaining the media, which is just as fragile as the digital data it contains. A continual process of transferring digital data from one generation of digital storage media to another — known as refreshing — has to be implemented. In addition, the metadata describing the

digital content must also be managed. As yet, no clear standards have yet been implemented or recommended.

Until now, I have considered only typical documents composed of text and graphics of various types. The issues relating to our digital heritage are even more serious for databases. The UK Government would like to create a database to hold all our medical, tax and other records. However, when database designs or paradigms change, as has happened with the shift from relational to object-orientated databases, data can be (and usually is) lost. Electronic banking is all well and good, but what if your bank records are deleted? How do you confirm your identity? Are you just a 10-digit number in some computer record that is no longer required?

### What next?

A lot of work needs to be done to save our digital heritage for future generations. Recognising this, governments around the world are authorising the resources needed to ensure that their populations do not disappear into the digital quicksand before their very eyes.

So, the message is: keep a paper copy (preferably on acid-free paper) and religiously refresh those digital archives every few years, especially those digital photos of the growing family. I can foresee good business opportunities in recovering digital data but, meanwhile, happy archiving! 

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# A testing time

**Nick Robson** launches a series of articles on ways in which the role of the technical author is being extended.

Since January 2000, I have been working as a software technical author for the Operations department of De La Rue Identity Systems (IDS) in Basingstoke.

IDS is a self-contained unit within De La Rue and, within it, the Operations department locally comprises an operations director, four project managers, six software engineers, two software architects and one technical author (me). Worldwide, there are a further 16 personnel.

My main task is to write user guides for the IDS software product, MIDIS (Multiple Identity Document Issuing System). This is a PC-based networked system used by government organisations to produce passports, identity cards, driving licenses, or indeed any type of secure document.

The product consists of a set of core modules that rarely change, and a series of 'bolt-on' modules that are tailored to each customer's requirements.

As many of the MIDIS customers don't have English as their first language, the user guides have to be written in a straightforward uncomplicated style, with lots of screen captures to guide the users through the tasks.

## Back to basics

A fundamental part of this type of work consists of sitting down at a workstation and actually using the product, and it was early on during these sessions that I started to make informal notes on some of the things I had spotted during this information-gathering part of the documentation task. These things tended to be relatively minor, such as typos, muddled screen layouts, and inconsistency in the overall look and feel of the product, but occasionally I would find something more serious that would provoke a major system error.

At first, as there was no formal method of reporting such things, I would only mention them casually to the software engineers, who didn't exactly fall over themselves with enthusiasm at this 'outsider' commenting on their work. However, I persevered, and as time went by and these findings began to accumulate, I decided to make more of an effort to get them fed back into the product.

I raised my concern at a status meeting on one particular project and was invited to send in my comments on potential problems as I found them, with the promise that they would be looked at. This I did, submitting the comments as e-mails to the two main software architects.

Although their reaction was somewhat muted, I still felt that overall it was positive enough to encourage me to continue.

In time, my comments became formalised into 'observations'. I chose this term for reasons of diplomacy; I felt that if I had simply called these items 'errors' then I would have got the architects' backs up from the off. After all, there was always the chance that I could have misunderstood how the product was intended to work.

Today, it has become an accepted part of the software development cycle for me to produce this list of observations for each customer release of the product.

Once software development has got to the point where the software engineer is confident that the system is ready for formal testing, which is done by an external test house, I am brought in to do what we now call first user or preliminary testing. The idea is for me to ascertain whether the software is actually ready for formal testing. The preliminary testing takes me between one and two days to complete, at the end of which I provide the project manager with a simple yes or no answer.

Once formal testing is complete, and the software has been amended as necessary, the system is made available for me to prepare the user documentation.

## Modus operandi

To keep things as simple as possible, I compile the list of observations as a landscape table in Word (Table 1).

I colour code each observation according to the severity I place on it; green for 'nice to have' (for example, cosmetic), amber for 'ought to be done' (for example, a typo) and red for 'must be done' (for example, a missing

software module). An absence of colour coding means that the observation has been processed.

At the end of each working day, I print out the list of observations accumulated during the day, then e-mail or print out copies for the software engineer and the project manager.

Generally by mid-morning of the next day, the software engineer returns the list to me, indicating thereon which observations have been rejected (and the reasons why), which observations have been acted upon now, and which observations will be acted upon before the final build of the system. The software engineer may also re-categorise my severity coding.

It is worth mentioning that none of my preliminary testing precludes the use of the external test house to perform the formal test on the product; the two types of testing are seen to be complementary (although the same errors may be found by both parties).

To help streamline the process, my next step will be to convert the Word table into a simple Access database, and store it in a shared area on our computer network. Then, at the end of each working day, all I will need to do is send the participants an e-mail to remind them to respond to it.

## For and against

As with any new venture, this has had its problems, but the benefits so far outweigh the disadvantages by more than two to one.

### For

1. I am seen to be an integral part of the software development team (but see item 1 in the next section).
2. I am asked for my opinion on usability ahead of the software design being finalised.
3. The system is in a better condition when the time comes for me to document it.
4. The software engineers have a better understanding of the role of the technical author.
5. My technical authoring skills have been sharpened.

6. Management, I believe, has cut product development costs as a result of such input.
7. Management is aware that I can do more than just this arcane technical writing thing.

### Against

1. I am seen by some to be too much a part of the software development team; am I as objective about my task as I was before?
2. Under some circumstances, a scheduling clash for example, I have less time to do my real job, namely documentation.
3. It is easy to become distracted by the inner workings of the product; software engineers are only too keen to impart detailed knowledge of the bits and pieces.

### Past, present and future

The extension of the basic technical authoring task into system testing has been timely, as over the last several years, like many other organisations, De La Rue IDS has undergone a restructuring, resulting in reductions in staffing levels. Those people who remain have had to pick up quickly the workload of the departed; they have to be seen to be flexible and adaptable, extending their conventional roles as necessary. However, in my case, I had sort of pre-empted this (if more by luck than judgement).

Today, the workload associated with the extended technical authoring

role is about right, with the working relationships well established with the current project teams.

As I indicated at the start of this article, I am the sole technical author in De La Rue IDS, which means that I probably have more control over how the job is done than most. This means that, if in the future more work comes in than I can readily handle from the technical authoring aspect, I can arrange for other technical authors to be taken on. I would, of course, ensure at the interview stage that the applicant is made aware of the extra requirements that will be placed on them.

### Question time

- **With hindsight, would I have done this any differently?** Possibly not, though much depends on the personalities of the people involved. Had I tried to raise the profile of my observations earlier, I may not have achieved the excellent working relationship with the software team that exists today.
- **Would I encourage other technical authors to extend their roles in this way?** Yes, I would, because it gives them a better understanding of the product they are documenting. It also increases their value to their employers, whether they work as employees or subcontractors.
- **Would I swap technical authoring for a full-time career as a system tester?** Probably not, if the choice were entirely mine, but there again

I might in the short term as an expediency. I enjoy the system testing as a complement to the technical authoring and, yes, I remain objective about the latter.

### In conclusion: is it worth it?

The answer is a definite 'yes':

- The product is much better for such input; the software engineers often now head some of my observations off at the pass at the system design stage.
- We have incorporated the process into our departmental ISO 9001:2000 procedures, wherein it has become formalised under the title of Preliminary Testing: *a Preliminary Test of not more than two days' duration must be performed on the product before the external test house is engaged.*
- The software engineers are now obliged to answer all observations before the software development stage can be closed.
- On the scheduling front, allowance is now made for this activity at the project bid stage, and if the bid is successful, in the project scheduling itself.
- Work-wise, I am fully occupied. **C**

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| Date raised | Function         | Area/Window           | Observation details   | Date fixed | Comments                           |
|-------------|------------------|-----------------------|---|------------|------------------------------------|
| 14-10-04    | Data Capture     | Preview tab           | ICAO dates: need to put French version of month first.  | 15-10-04   |                                    |
| 14-10-04    | Data Capture     | Date of Expiry        | This field accepts alpha characters.  |            |                                    |
| 14-10-04    | Data Capture     | Document menu         | Change "Re-issue" to "Reissue" to match the corresponding dialog caption.   |            | To be fixed in core MIDIS. Ref PB  |
| 14-10-04    | Data Capture     | Document Number field | Reduce the length of this to better suit the document number values.  | Not done   |                                    |
| 14-10-04    | Data Capture     | Child Details tab     | The field label is "Family Name" (as on the Personal Details tab), but the error message displayed when the family name is omitted refers to "Surname". | Not done   | To be fixed in core MIDIS. Ref PB  |
| 14-10-04    | Print Server     | Home                  | What is the purpose of the "Laminator" box?   |            | Deleted.                           |
| 14-10-04    | Document Manager | Full Document Details | Refers to "Surname"; should be "Family Name".   | Not done   | To be fixed in core MIDIS. Ref PB  |
| 14-10-04    | Document Manager | Production States     | Need tailoring for this system.   |            |                                    |
| 14-10-04    | Document Manager | Search list           | To make for neater presentation, normalise the day and month values in the Date of Birth column to two places.  |            | To be added to core MIDIS. Ref PB. |
| 14-10-04    | Document Manager | Full Document Details | Add a heading above the list "Document History Log".  | 15-10-04   | To be added to core MIDIS. Ref PB. |

**Table 1. Arcadia Passport System (ARC1234): Observations**

Key

|  |              |  |                   |
|--|--------------|--|-------------------|
|  | Answered     |  | Ought to be fixed |
|  | Nice to have |  | Must be fixed     |

# Does usability have to be so complicated?

Document usability can be quite daunting. **Jody Byrne** explains that getting started is easier than you might think.

Usability is, without doubt, an essential part of what a technical communicator does. Indeed, as was mentioned in the last issue of *Communicator*, there is a desire among technical communicators to embrace this concept. But although many communicators appreciate its importance, many don't realise that taking those first steps is not as difficult as they think.

Let's look at the definition of usability given in ISO 9241-11:

*The extent to which a product can be used by specified users to achieve specified goals with effectiveness, efficiency, and satisfaction in a specified context.*

On this basis, we can see that if we want to regard a document as usable, readers need to be able to understand it with relative ease, they should be able to accurately follow the instructions they are given and they should be happy with the document and the work they carry out using it. Ultimately, usability involves engineering or producing a document in such a way that it complements human cognitive abilities, compensates for their shortcomings and doesn't leave them overly traumatised afterwards.

## The problem with usability

Unfortunately, as anyone who has read any of the literature on usability and human factors will confirm, getting to grips with usability can seem pretty daunting to say the least, especially when we have to take on board the contributions made by cognitive psychologists, learning theorists, software developers, interface designers, writers and so on.

Part of the problem with usability is that it is invariably bound up with development and evaluation processes. Then there are the costs and time involved in conducting usability studies and evaluations. What's more, it is often difficult to apply it to documentation when so much of the existing literature refers to software interfaces. In fact, it sometimes seems that usability is more trouble than it's worth for the average technical communicator.

## *It's not all task analysis*

But usability doesn't need to be all task analyses, prototypes, statistics and empirical testing. Of course, to fully master usability you need to understand the role of cognitive psychology and human factors in usability, and conduct task analyses during the design phase of a project to see how best to apply this knowledge. You will also need to know how to conduct usability evaluations that will provide statistically reliable data. But this isn't essential to start off with.

When you first start exploring usability, it helps to stick with what you know best until you get up to speed with the more detailed stuff. One of the simplest ways for technical communicators to improve the usability of a document is to use carefully selected linguistic strategies; writing techniques that we use every day. In other words, the way we write a document can improve its usability in ways that go far beyond mere readability, which is, after all, only a measure of how easy the text is to *read* and not of how easy the information is to *use*.

...we can see that a number of these stages are going to pose problems for readers.

## Focus on the documentation

When we produce technical documents, particularly instructional texts, we are essentially creating a *device* that will help users learn how to use a product. Now we may need to perform some form of task analysis (TA) on the software to determine what content to include in our document, but we don't need to conduct a TA to determine how to 'build' our device. We don't need to conduct a detailed TA of the process of reading in order to write a usable text. And this is where many people find usability problematic when it comes to documentation.

Unlike using software products, reading is a reasonably standardised process governed by human cognitive and learning processes; these processes are essentially the same for most people. What's more, over the decades reading has been studied and documented to such an extent that there is no need to analyse the process ourselves.

In her incredibly useful book, Coe (1996:134-5) explains that reading consists of the following stages:

1. Perceiving visual data
2. Recognising words or learning new ones
3. Understanding the relationship of words to the entire passage
4. Relating the information to a body of knowledge
5. Encoding the information
6. Retrieving the information
7. Communicating the information

If we try to relate these stages to what the literature tells us about human cognition (see, for example, Gavin 1998, Coe 1996, Preece *et al* 1994 and Dix *et al* 1997) we can see that a number of these stages are going to pose problems for readers.

## Short-term memory

Short-term memory (STM) is one of the most important components of the human cognitive system, and ironically, it is, perhaps, the one that most restricts our ability to use documentation.

To start with, because STM is limited in its capacity to  $7 \pm 2$  pieces of information (Miller 1956), there is a limit to the amount of textual information we can reasonably expect readers to cope with at any given time. To further limit the capabilities of STM, information stored here generally only lasts for 20-30 seconds (Downton 1991:24).

So how do we tackle this? By keeping our sentences short. Accepted wisdom maintains that sentences should not exceed 20 words or so. Similarly, the  $7 \pm 2$  pieces of information stored in STM are lost as new information is added. If we keep the most important



## There are numerous ways in which we can use fairly simple and self-contained strategies to improve the usability of a document.

information — the payload — towards the end of the sentence we lessen the burden on readers' memory and help them remember information more easily while they make sense of the text.

Without burying ourselves in time-consuming task analyses and expensive laboratory studies, we have used two simple ideas with which we are all familiar to adapt a document to a reader's cognitive ability. This is basic usability engineering. There are numerous ways in which we can use fairly simple and self-contained strategies to improve the usability of a document. The following are just a few of them.

### Some other strategies

#### *Use consistent terminology*

Sometimes it's tempting to throw in a synonym or two to refer to the same thing. The problem with this is that readers will often wonder whether the two synonyms refer to different things or to the same thing. This *polysemy* merely serves to confuse the reader and places even greater cognitive burdens on them as they problem-solve to see whether the *Print icon* is the same as the *Print button*. Eliminating polysemy reduces interference and confusion for readers. By using words with the same meanings consistently, we help readers learn by taking advantage of the human propensity to form habits.

#### *Use logical sentence structures*

If we use simple, logical sentence structures we can reduce the amount of problem solving needed to understand what it is we are trying to say. As a result, we reduce the amount of cognitive effort and consequently the amount of fatigue felt by readers. What's more, we also lessen the risk of the text being misunderstood — after all, problem solving isn't always terribly reliable.

#### *Introduce sections and paragraphs*

This aids the learning process. As readers progress through a user guide or even when they dip into a user guide to read a chapter, it is important to tell them what they will find in a particular

chapter or large section. This helps them to decide whether the particular section is what they are looking for. Overviews can also help readers absorb, understand and learn information more easily because they mentally prime readers for what they are about to learn and make them more able to remember this information. This phenomenon was proven in an interesting study carried out in 1981 by Foss *et al.*

#### *Use graphics wherever possible*

This lets you take advantage of image memory. This type of long-term memory is more durable and reliable than any other type of memory (Coe 1996:77). When we store information, either in the form of an image or accompanied by an image, we can recall it more readily than information that does not have image associations.

### Conclusion

You may have noticed that much of the advice in the preceding paragraphs bears a remarkable similarity to what we generally regard as common practice in technical writing. This is no coincidence and the reason is that technical writing and usability share the same basic goals — to make 'products' easier to use. Indeed, most of the principles of good technical writing are rooted in the same psychological theories as usability (see Dumas and Redish 1999:52-53). It follows, therefore, that judicious use of writing strategies can help us improve the ease with which people can use our documents. Of course, writing represents just one facet of usability engineering but it is one that can be implemented by the vast majority of us without the need for additional training or costly investment in staff and resources. **C**

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# A Visio kit for the salesforce

**Viv Mitchell** offers practical tips on using digital photographs to make your own Visio stencils for use in a range of documents.

## Deciding to use stencils

The company I work for, Redwood Technologies, makes intelligent equipment for the telecomms industry. This equipment handles services such as mass calling (Who Wants to be a Millionaire?), automated telephone banking and unified messaging. It is housed in standard 19" industrial chassis, which can be rack-mounted. To illustrate the operating and maintenance manuals, I soon learned how to use a digital camera to take pictures of the kit, and a graphics tool to manipulate the images. I was using Macromedia Fireworks® 4, but any basic image editor would do everything you need.

One of our large customers wanted a picture of the equipment they were ordering, showing how the different chassis were arranged in the racks. With photographs of the front of each model of chassis, and other equipment

such as the rack-mounted monitor and keyboard tray, I was able to put together a photomontage for them. This involved adjusting each chassis image to the same width, with the correct proportions for the different heights, and slotting them into a photo of the enclosure.

I decided to take the task one step further. Our salespeople don't have the time to bother with image manipulation tools but they do have Microsoft Visio®. Visio is a diagramming tool, which provides palettes of images (known as stencils), which can be dragged onto the page, connected together, labelled and so on. Successive Visio versions have an ever-wider range of stencils provided, allowing you to make anything from plumbing diagrams to garden plans. At Redwood we usually use Visio to create network diagrams to show customers how their new equipment will fit into their telephone, LAN and IP networks.

What I discovered quite by accident (no doubt it's in the manual but I didn't think to look for it), was that you can make your own stencils with any image you like. Consequently, I decided to make a photomontage kit on a Visio stencil so that the salespeople could create for themselves a picture of any rack arrangement for any customer at any time. All they would have to do is move images from the stencil on to the image of the rack.

## Creating the images

First, I had to collect the images and make the appropriate adjustments. Bearing in mind that 80% of the work takes 20% of the time, and these images will be barely more than icons when done, I didn't worry too much



**Figure 1. Redwood's telecomms equipment**

about quality as long as they were recognisable.

Once I had the photos, I used the image editor to:

- Adjust the lighting with the **Brightness/Contrast** control (you may have another favourite method).
- Make sure the image is straight. In Fireworks 4 I found that **Modify>Transform> Numerical Transform>Rotate** allowed me to get it level, and **Modify>Transform>Distort** to pull it into shape. I then filled any slightly ragged edges with dark pixels.
- Crop the image to take out all background. (If an image is not rectangular, you can use the polygon lasso or magic wand to go round the irregular edges and then make the background transparent.)

I then had to decide on the scale I was going to use. The unit of height for standard chassis is the 'U', which is 1.75 inches. As the chassis and other rack-mounted equipment are all a whole number of U, it made sense to make a U a nice round number of pixels and it turned out that a scale of 1U to 10 pixels was ideal. A 4U chassis would then be 40 pixels high. So, using **Modify>Image Size** with the **Constrain Proportions** checkbox turned on, I set the image to 40 pixels high. That happened to make the width of the

## Tips for taking the pictures

- Use a tripod, and take trouble to get the alignment right. You can adjust the image afterwards but it's fiddly.
- Take lots of different shots. The same shot will look exactly the same however many times you take it.
- The lighting is seldom ideal but try to maximise the light behind you. If possible, work with a window behind the camera. You can improvise: once I propped a piece of cardboard on the windowsill because the sun was casting a shadow in the wrong place.
- If possible, take the item outside on a dry cloudy day and, again, take lots of different shots.
- Switch **off** the flash. A picture of a metallic object taken indoors will be washed out by the flash. You can adjust brightness and contrast later.
- Check that the colour of your clothing is not reflected in the image. If it is, move to one side or use a remote control to take the photo.
- Put everything back the way you found it — so that your colleagues will let you come back in the future.

image 109 pixels, which meant that all the other images would have to be set to 109 pixels wide. I saved the image as a GIF (for the sake of file size).

I then repeated the adjustment procedure for the other chassis images. To adjust the size this time I used **Modify>Image Size** with the **Constrain Proportions** checkbox turned off, set the width to 109 pixels and the height to the number of U times ten.

I did the rear view of each chassis too, so the customer could see the rear of the rack as well as the front.

Finally, I took a picture of the rack from as far away as I could (to avoid barrel distortion), with the door off. I used the same shot for the back, flipped horizontally.

This rack is supposed to accommodate 47U of equipment, so I superimposed a grey rectangle on the image of the rack, 107 pixels wide (to allow one pixel of overhang either side) and 470 pixels high, and adjusted the size of the rack to fit around the rectangle.

Now I had my images: one for each piece of equipment front and rear, and one for the rack, front and rear. The next step was to make the Visio stencil.

## Creating the stencils

In Visio 2002 Professional, I opened a blank document and created a new stencil with **File>Stencils>New Stencil**. I brought the images on to the page using **Insert>Picture>From File**, then

dragged each image on to the green stencil area one by one and gave them each a suitable descriptive name (Figure 2).

To make life even easier, I added further items to the stencil, consisting of the same images but with an integral label. This I did by simply adding the labels to the images on the page, selecting image and label together and pulling the group on to the green area as before calling it (for example) 'DNX-400 labelled'.

To save the new stencil, you can right-click on the top bar of the stencil window and **Save As**. Visio will save it as a .vss file and put it with its other stencils, in a deeply buried location ('Solutions') that you would never find just by browsing. It is, therefore, a

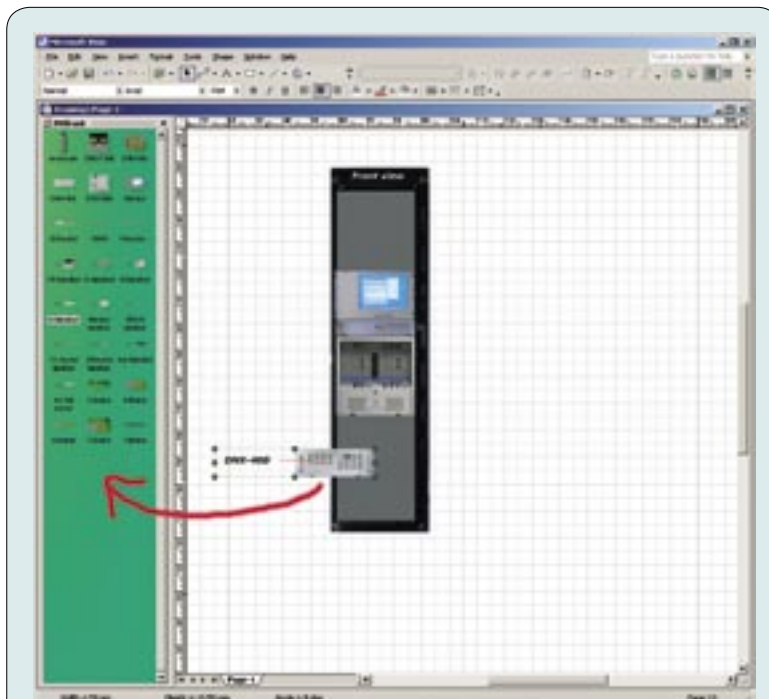


Figure 2. Drag the image to the green stencil area

good idea to **Save As** again to copy it somewhere accessible to your users. Next time you open Visio, your new stencil will appear in the **File>Stencils** list, but your users will have to add it to their own copy of Visio before they can use it. My favourite way to do this is to go to **File>Stencils>Open Stencil** and drag the file to the open 'Solutions' window.

The result won't win any prizes for clear, sharp photography, for several reasons. Firstly, it is, after all, only a diagram and at this scale it still shows the rack and its contents well enough, especially given the 80/20 rule. But, most important of all, the resulting proposal is likely to be e-mailed to prospective clients, so file size is a high priority. 'Good enough' at a manageable file size is far better than 'perfect' bouncing off the client's firewall. In any case, the Redwood salesforce is delighted with it.

As it turns out, Visio 2003 now has a ready-made stencil for rack equipment, with everything snapping neatly into place on an adjustable rack, but it still doesn't do the sales job as well as real photos. I have recently used the techniques described in this article to create another kit, on a larger scale, for the individual telephony cards in a chassis. **C**

**Viv Mitchell** is upgrading from Associate to Member after working at Redwood for three years and learning the tools of the trade by making mistakes.  
E-mail: [vjm@redwoodtech.com](mailto:vjm@redwoodtech.com)

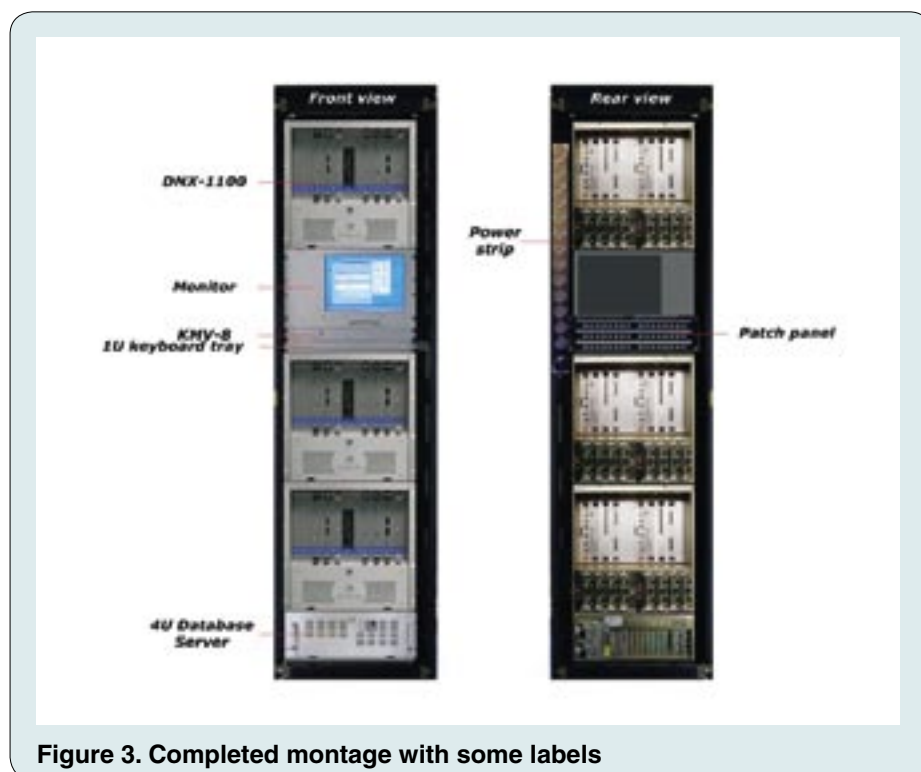


Figure 3. Completed montage with some labels



# Autodesk Inventor Series 9

The software that makes 2D and 3D meet: **Brian White** describes how this design package improved design and drawing output in record time.

Autodesk, through its AutoCAD product, is already a household name in most drawing offices, even those using drawing software from other manufacturers. However, for readers unfamiliar with this type of product, a brief review of the software and its development history follows.

### The Autodesk family

Autodesk developed its Inventor 3D Solid Modelling software from the firm foundations of a comprehensive 2D drawing family. This family comprised the basic drawing package, AutoCAD, and many optional, add-on variables to produce a market-specific unit.

Examples of these add-ons are:

- Land Desktop for infrastructure design and civil engineering
- Architectural Desktop and Building Systems for the building industry
- Autodesk Map for cartography.

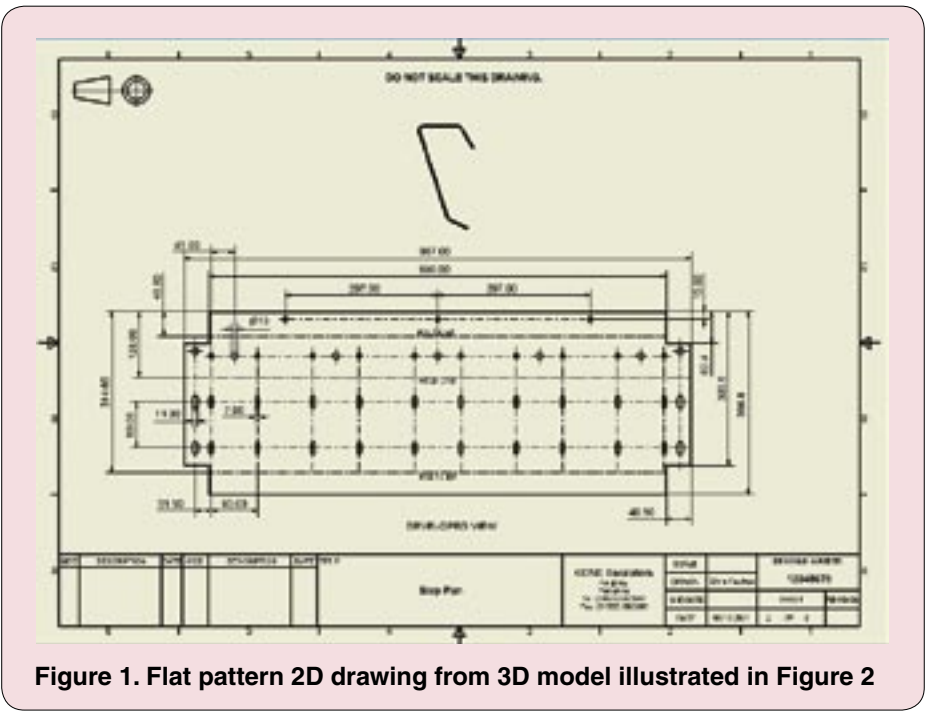
Added to these are entry-level or light-user products such as AutoCAD LT and QuickCAD.

From these 2D beginnings evolved Mechanical Desktop and Inventor for manufacturing design, along with specialist visualisation packages for the likes of the film industry, such as 3D Studio Max from Autodesk Discreet. (see page 26 of the Spring 2004 *Communicator* to find out how Rolls-Royce used this product to enhance its 3D models.)

### Where 2D becomes 3D

The brief overview of the Autodesk family of products serves to demonstrate the rich 2D ancestry of Autodesk Inventor. It is this ancestry that provided the powerful and reliable 2D engine that enables Inventor to take details from an existing 2D drawing and painlessly transform it into a 3D model. Inventor can import 2D drawings from most popular drawing packages without any problems.

Similarly, it is the same 2D engine that allows Inventor to perform the reverse task of converting a 3D model part, constructed from sheet material, back to a flat pattern for cutting and



drilling prior to forming the component (Figure 1).

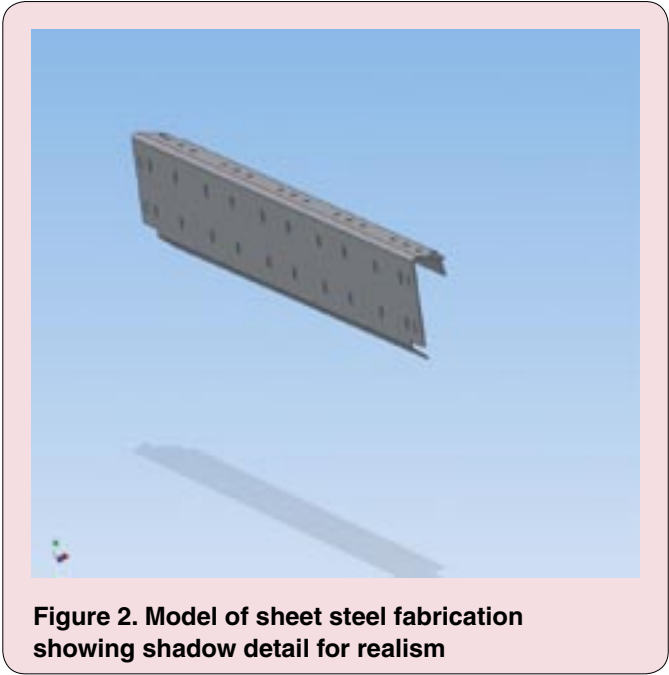
Good quality rendered 3D views with the added realism of shadow detail (as shown in Figure 2) can be saved from within Inventor as graphics files (for example, JPEG or BMP). These images can be of great benefit to technical authors, providing easily obtainable photorealistic images for use in the product documentation as demonstrated in this article.

### Starting with Inventor

Moving from normal 2D drawing software to Inventor will present the user with an unfamiliar but easy-to-learn browser/icon-driven interface and some new tools and toolbars (Figure 3). However, users with prior experience of AutoCAD Mechanical will immediately recognise the

interface and toolbar set and should experience no difficulty with the transition to the 3D environment. Such is the ease of use that, in our experience, even AutoCAD users with no 3D solid modelling experience were able to use Inventor after only a couple of weeks hands-on experience.

For anyone considering Inventor as new software, taking the opportunity



to utilise the free Autodesk Design Process Review is time well spent. This process involves the draughtsmen and managers having a short interview with members of Autodesk. Skilled Autodesk representatives then interrogate the information and, within a few days, provide the users and their management with a graphical process map of their company processes, together with recommendations as to how Inventor can offer improvements in both reduced time for design and manufacture, and improved communication with clients through illustration.

In the box as part of the Inventor suite of tools is Autodesk Mechanical. This program performs ordinary 2D work and also interacts with Inventor for detailing the 3D model parts whilst highlighting changes within the model at the same time. Also included is Autodesk Vault, a file and lifecycle management system specifically designed to manage the large number of files produced by Inventor as the

ten workstations is required, the Enterprise Edition of Microsoft SQL Server must be installed.

Drawing from our own experience — pardon the pun — we recommend that Vault is implemented at the same time as Inventor because of the difficulties of retaining the links within the model if the file locations are changed. Vault also optimises the amount of processing power required on large models by allowing components to be accessed without the need for the whole assembly model to be opened.

Like most graphics-heavy software programs, Inventor needs high-powered PCs and special graphics cards. Trying to economise on bottom- to mid-range PCs will only result in an upgrade being required in a very short space of time.

### Modelling with Inventor

Modelling with Inventor is, in comparison to early solid modelling in AutoCAD and its equivalents, simplicity itself.

ordinates form the shape. This small hurdle is soon cleared as the ease of use quickly becomes apparent and the model is formed, fully rendered and simulated in the material of choice as clearly demonstrated in Figure 4.

Inventor has a comprehensive, built-in custom library of standard parts that makes the addition of time-consuming, repetitive components such as nuts, bolts and washers almost instantaneous. Recesses for items such as cap screws are automatically applied and correctly toleranced, enabling the designer to develop and check assemblies without the time penalties usually associated with this type of work. Holes and slots can be shown through one or more components or, in the case of blind holes, the depth can be specified. Tapped holes are no longer a problem: key in the thread size and depth options, and Inventor does the rest, either singly or in groups.

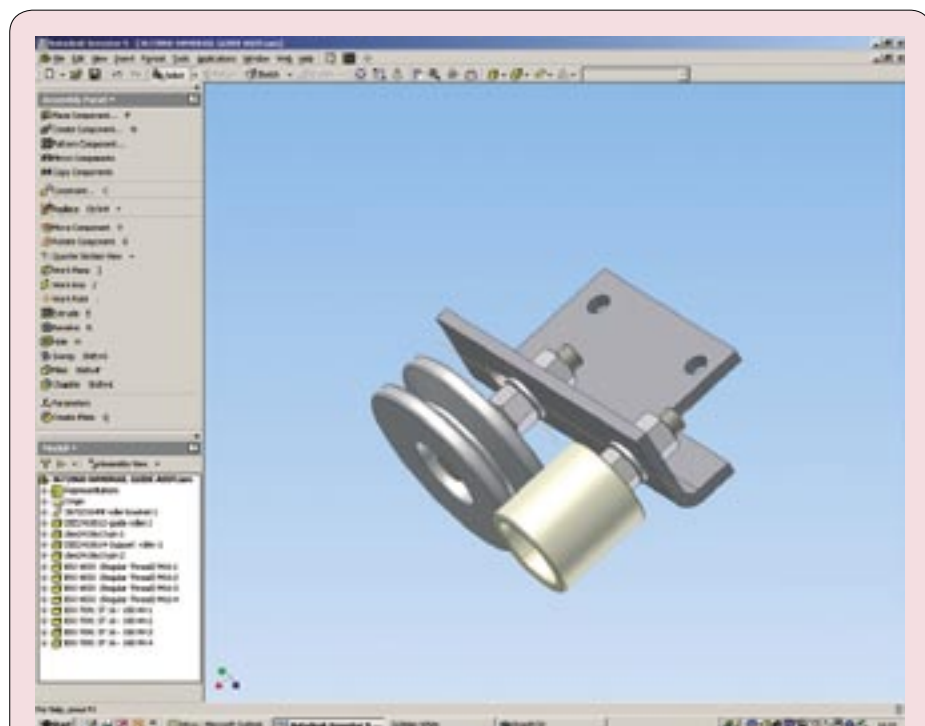
Unlike 2D drafting, Inventor cannot be 'cheated'. If the component does not fit or is not constrained correctly, Inventor highlights the error and forces the draughtsman to take corrective action.

As the model is built, all parts are tracked so that, when it comes to detailing the drawing and producing the Bill of Materials (BOM), a few clicks of the mouse sees the model's components seamlessly transformed into a 2D drawing with the BOM numbered and all quantities inserted.

The 2D drawing can be refined on a PC without Inventor, providing it has AutoCAD Mechanical installed. Any changes made to the 3D model will be automatically fed back to the 2D drawing, where notification is given to the user that the model has changed. Providing the link between the Inventor model and the 2D drawing has not been broken (that is, saved to another location on a network), an 'update all' option is available to change instantly the drawing and all references and dimensions to the new detail.

Inventor greatly improved its 3D to 2D transition by introducing the drawing styles palette. This now provides line types, layers and colours to be carried within the 2D drawing, a feature previously only enjoyed by 2D-specific programs.

Inventor has the ability to produce fully associative parts. This feature modifies items associated with a



**Figure 3. The Inventor user interface, showing the browser panel to the left of the modelling area**

3D model grows, while at the same time keeping track of any change of revision status. The Vault uses Microsoft SQL Server to communicate between multiple workstations; a basic version of this software is included on the Vault disk. If the network uses a cluster server, or simultaneous communication between more than

Models are all parametric, created from a translucent face called a sketch plane with the parameters for the shape added after it is drawn as a rough outline or 2D drawing. Initially, this requires a change in thinking for the draughtsman, who is probably more used to keying in the relevant dimensions first and letting the co-

changed part automatically, saving the designer many hours of altering components made incorrect by a knock-on effect.

Much refined in this version of Inventor is a process called 'Flexible Assembly', which allows for multiple instances of the same sub-assembly within the top-level model. Flexible modelling, to a lesser degree, was available in earlier versions but carried considerable restrictions that affected, among other things, the totals of an automatically created BOM. Now the sub-assemblies carry their own identities enabling them to be used in multiple instances with their own constraints and functionality. The BOM now shows correct representation.

Once the flexible assembly has been introduced to the model, the positioning can be finalised using 'Positional Representation'. This process allows the designer to create multiple static instances of the sub-assembly, each of which can be used to show a different positional state of the assembly. These varied positional states can be stored for reference at any time during the production of the model.

Like all solid modelling software, Inventor enables components and sub-assemblies to be copied and mirrored to produce both handed and non-handed versions of the item. Inventor takes this a stage further by offering the ability to modify the copied or mirrored items, and then to create their own identities and constraints.

### Analysing the model

Having produced the components for the model, Inventor offers a simplified finite element analysis (FEA) tool to allow the designer a quick point-and-shoot stress analysis of the desired component. The designer then has an instant and economical assessment of the suitability of the design, which gives the opportunity for structured changes to be made, based on the analysis results, prior to passing the model for

full analysis. This saves both time and money in the process.

To enable more detailed analysis of the model, Inventor interfaces seamlessly with full FEA software such as Nastran, Abaqus and Cosmos. The stress analyst will import the model, component or sub-assembly into the FEA program from Inventor and feed the results back to the designer.

In addition to the FEA interface for stress analysis, Inventor has an excellent and simple motion analysis tool that enables moving components to be checked for interference and correct operation before being passed on for detailing and production. This can be taken further by passing the assembly to an appropriate FEA package, where more detailed motion and interference analysis can be carried out, with the anticipated forces or safety margins applied. The final analysis of the model may then be saved as an AVI movie from the specialist FEA software for demonstration to the client, along with the results of the analysis.



**Figure 4. Inventor model showing the construction of an escalator truss with partially completed passenger-side balustrade in place**

### In conclusion

Autodesk Inventor provides an easy-to-learn and cost-effective answer to 3D solid modelling, without losing sight of the fact that there is always a requirement for 2D manufacturing drawings. It is a rare pleasure to find software that successfully combines the need for more than one discipline and manages to perform all with no apparent trade-off in quality. **C**

**Brian White MISTC** is the technical author for KONE Escalators in Keighley, West Yorkshire, working on London Underground and Airport projects. Brian is also systems administrator for the Inventor and Nastran PCs. E-mail: [brian.white@kone.com](mailto:brian.white@kone.com)  
Thanks to KONE's Autodesk reseller for their assistance with this article: **Trionics Limited**, AHED Business Centre, Dewsbury Road, Ossett, West Yorkshire, WF5 9ND.  
Tel: 01924 266262 Fax: 01924 267921



>> WHY



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## Why Autodesk Inventor Series?

Other options had **high running costs**, were **difficult to master** resulting in a long transition requiring expensive training, or had high annual subscription charges.

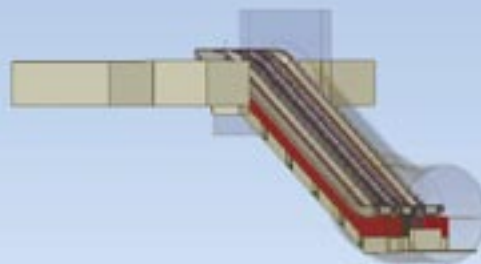
## Why Trionics?

One of the *outstanding attributes* of **Trionics** is their **direct approach** and **honesty**; they supported us throughout the implementation period and beyond.

*Our verdict* on the buying experience from **Trionics** is **110% for Teamwork, Support and Training**. We went looking for a reseller and found reliable business friends and trusted advisors.

*"The benefits of **Inventor** quickly became evident, **delivering massive gains in design reviews and customer liaison.**"*

Brian White - Kone  
Technical Author



## Results

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# Seven golden rules of online Help design

Leaving the tools to one side, **Matthew Ellison** proposes seven guiding principles on which to base a better Help system.

Back in 1995, the brief for designers of online Help was quite clear-cut. Windows was the overwhelmingly predominant computing platform for business and home applications, and there was a single standard Help format: WinHelp 4. Microsoft published design guidelines for creating WinHelp systems, and most organisations chose to follow them. As a trainer in online Help techniques, the most common question I received from students around that time was 'How can I make my own Help look exactly like the Help for Microsoft Word?'.

Almost ten years later, the situation is not nearly so cut-and-dried. The web is rapidly becoming an established platform for delivering server-based applications, and other operating systems such as Linux are on the rise. The current Microsoft Help format (HTML Help 1.4) does not provide a solution

for this new generation of web-based and cross-platform applications, and so organisations have turned instead to a wide range of other formats for user assistance. These formats include:

- Turnkey browser-based systems (such as WebHelp and WebWorks Help)
- Sun's JavaHelp
- Customised embedded user assistance, where the Help forms part of the user interface itself.

Since each of these Help formats has its own particular layout and presentation style, it would seem on the face of it that a set of global design guidelines is no longer appropriate or workable. However, if you cut through the technological jargon and hype, the overall objectives of online Help are the same as they ever were: to answer users' questions and to support the completion of users' tasks. Coupled with these unchanging goals are

certain fundamental design principles, or 'golden rules', that can be applied whatever format of Help you are creating.

The following sections summarise briefly the top seven design rules that guide me in my own online Help development.

## Rule 1: Don't force users to move between topics to solve a problem

One of the most common mistakes in online Help design is to structure the information in the same way as you would for sequential reading.

considerations such as maintenance and translation costs. However, with today's increasingly sophisticated content management systems, it is becoming possible to write small chunks of content once and have them show up as normal text within multiple Help topics.

Even if you haven't adopted content management, there are a number of information-layering techniques that you can use to reduce the need to navigate between topics. These include pop-ups, expanding glossary definitions (which can be stored in a single file) and Dynamic HTML drop-downs (as shown in Figure 1).

### Add a digital signature to a file or macro project

You digitally sign a file or a macro project by using a digital certificate.

1. If you don't already have a digital certificate, you must obtain one.
  - ▶ How?
2. Do one of the following:
  - ▶ Sign a file
  - ▶ Sign a macro project

**Figure 1. Topic containing links to expanding glossary definitions and DHTML drop-downs**

## Rule 2: Only index the main theme of each Help topic

In my view, until natural language search really comes of age, the index is the most useful device for accessing specific information within an extended Help system. I have heard Shane

With the trend towards generating online user assistance from the same source as printed documentation, this is becoming an even more significant issue. The fact is that, unless users are feeling at an extremely loose end, they don't read Help systems from start to finish: they dip in, selecting individual topics as and when they need them. This means that, as you write any given Help topic, you need to guard against taking prior knowledge for granted.

I think that users are best served by including within a single topic all the information they need to answer their question or solve their problem, even if that means duplicating information that appears in other topics. This saves users the time and trouble of navigating between topics to piece together the full solution, and enables them to return back to productive work more quickly. I realise that this strategy sometimes needs to be tempered by practical

MacRoberts, Help Program Manager at Microsoft, quote the fact that full-text search is more frequently used; however, I think this is probably due in part to the poor quality of many of today's indexes. (Have you noticed that the Help for Microsoft Office has not had a true index since version 2000?)

Although it is a good idea to include as many useful entries as you can in an index, it is still possible to 'over-index'. The most common mistake is to index terms within a topic without actually considering whether the topic provides useful further information about that term. This can result in users being frustrated by following false leads. Remember that one of the key goals of online Help is to answer users' questions. As you index each topic, it is a good idea to think of all the questions for which the topic provides the answer and to use the words and phrases from those questions.

You might even consider basing your index keywords on only the title of the topic, since that provides a sharper focus. However, don't misinterpret this as a licence to use only the wording of the titles themselves as index entries; my own usability tests have shown this to be worse than having no index at all. It is, therefore, essential to consider synonyms, phrase inversions, and other terms associated with the topic titles.

### Rule 3: Don't require users to make a conscious decision to access Help

As authors of user assistance, it is sometimes easy to fall into the trap of assuming that our users are far more interested in the Help that we provide than is actually the case. We fondly imagine them seeking out the Help option and patiently browsing through our carefully crafted topics in their quest for knowledge. However, the hard reality is that many users have low expectations of Help and will do all they can to avoid using it. For that reason, they are unlikely to be tempted by a 'question mark' icon or a button labelled 'Help' since neither of these provides any direct evidence of the relevance or usefulness of the assistance that is available.

I prefer that links to online Help from the application user interface should be:

- Appealing
- Clear in terms of the information afforded
- In tune with the needs of users.

The link to user assistance shown in Figure 2 (and highlighted by me with an ellipse) is highly intuitive and, because it echoes the question that users are likely to have in their minds, it provides a compelling incentive for selecting it. What is at issue here is not the design of the Help itself, but the design of the link *into* the Help. You can potentially use this technique for displaying any Help format, including a traditional HTML Help window.

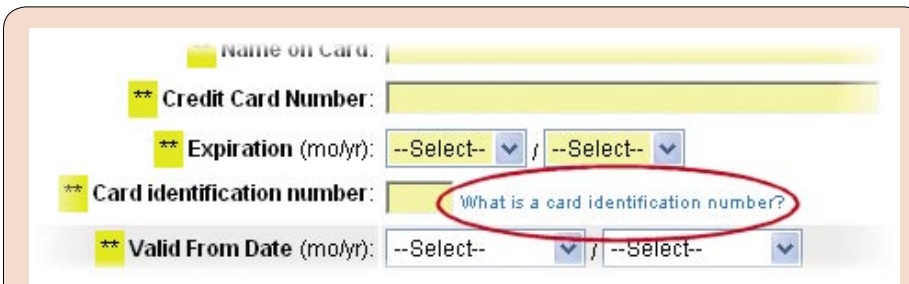


Figure 2. Intuitive and descriptive link to online Help

### Rule 4: Only include images when they add value

It is possible to overdo the use of graphics (especially screenshots) within online Help. I sometimes hear their inclusion justified by the fact that 'users like pictures' or 'graphics make the Help look more friendly'. Including images for no other reasons than these can lead to unnecessary additional maintenance costs, and can sometimes even be counter-productive. The fact is that users like pictures only when they are conveying useful information.

In general, online Help should contain far fewer screenshots than does paper-based documentation, if only because the user can often see the real screen side-by-side with the Help window — it makes sense for the Help to complement the application user interface, not duplicate it.

A problem with large images is that, due to the relatively small size of most Help windows, scrolling is required to view the images in their entirety. This means that, when the topic is first displayed, important information can sometimes be hidden out of view below the image.

The topic in Figure 3 shows the effective use of two small images that enable users to compare side-by-side the two contrasting ways of displaying a set of options.

### Rule 5: Write topics that answer users' questions

This sounds obvious. However, it is a common mistake for developers to write Help that is based on their own knowledge

and understanding of an application, rather than on the questions and problems that users are likely to have.

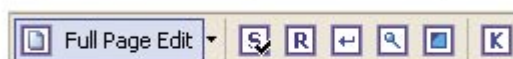
I recommend writing a separate topic that addresses each potential question, and organising the Help table of contents by question types (such as 'how do I complete a task?', or 'what is this dialog box for?') rather than by the structure of the application.

### Rule 6: Don't be a slave to consistency

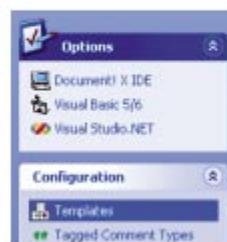
As writers and editors, we sometimes allow ourselves to be inappropriately pre-occupied with consistency. How many times have you found yourself documenting a totally self-explanatory procedure (such as filling in a name and address) just for the sake of completeness? The important thing is to be guided only by the needs of

#### Editors

**Compact View in the Content Editor:** Tick this box to use a Content Type toolbar instead of a [Page Menu](#) in the [Content File Editor](#). The Content Type toolbar uses less screen space.



Content Type Toolbar



Page Menu

Figure 3. Example of small images that add value



| #   | Account <a href="#">Which?</a> | Amount | Description ? | Customer <a href="#">Why?</a> | Billable?                | Tax?                     |
|-----|--------------------------------|--------|---------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| X 1 |                                |        |               |                               | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| X 2 |                                |        |               |                               | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

[More Lines](#)
[Clear All Lines](#)
[Recalculate](#)
[Save](#)
[Make Recurring](#)
[Cancel](#)

Figure 4. Example of user assistance provided only where required

the user as you decide which Help information to include and how to present it. The web-based application shown in Figure 4 provides a good example of this approach — all the column headings in this screen have links to context-sensitive Help except the Amount column, which is self-explanatory and does not require Help.

### Rule 7: Don't be tempted to provide too much information

With the laudable intention of favouring the user with as much assistance as possible, we can sometimes run the risk of information overload. In general, the overriding dictum for online Help is 'less is best'. So, after finishing the research phase of your next Help project, be ruthless as you plan your content: focus on the questions that users will ask, and vigorously prune out anything that users don't need to know. **C**

### Useful resources

#### Books

*Designing and Writing Online Documentation*

by William Horton

ISBN 0-471-30635-5

*Minimalism Beyond the Nurnberg Funnel*

by John M Carroll (Editor)

ISBN 026203249X

*Hot Text: Web Writing that Works*

by Jonathan and Lisa Price

ISBN 0735711518

*The Microsoft Manual of Style for Technical Publications*

Published by Microsoft Press

ISBN 1572318902

*Indexing: A Nuts-and-Bolts Guide for Technical Writers*

by Kurt Ament

ISBN 0815514816

#### Websites

*WritersUA User Assistance Resource Directory*

[www.winwriters.com/resource.htm](http://www.winwriters.com/resource.htm)

An up-to-date collection of tools, web resources, books, training providers, reviews, and articles relating to software user assistance.

*Usable Help*

[www.g2meyer.com/usablehelp/about.html](http://www.g2meyer.com/usablehelp/about.html)

Articles about the usability aspects of documentation and help systems for software and consumer products.

*MSHelpWiki*

[www.mshelpwiki.com](http://www.mshelpwiki.com)

A source of the latest news and information from Microsoft Help MVPs (Most Valuable Professionals).

*Yahoo! Groups Help Authoring Tools & Techniques (HATT) mailing list*

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/HATT/> (free subscription required)

A forum for online Help authors to share questions, views and information.

**Matthew Ellison** is an independent consultant and trainer specialising in online Help design and technologies. He has 18 years' experience of working in software user assistance, and is a respected speaker at conferences and events in Europe and the USA. E-mail: [matthew@ellisonconsulting.co.uk](mailto:matthew@ellisonconsulting.co.uk).

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# Doc-To-Help Professional 7.2

Justin Darley puts the latest version of this well-established help tool through its paces.

When I was asked to review the latest version of Doc-To-Help for *Communicator*, I was enthusiastic about the opportunity. My background is very much in the field of Help authoring and I have, over time, used several of the leading tools. I had not, however, used Doc-To-Help. This inexperience with the product has of course coloured my view of the software and influenced this review. I believe significant improvements have been made since the last version but I am clearly unable to comment on these. Consequently, this review focuses on my expectations of a Help tool based on my previous experiences, and I hope to show how Doc-To-Help matches up to these.

**Note:** Doc-To-Help 7 from ComponentOne is the fourth release since the product was acquired from WexTech in 2001.

## Basic Help features

Let me start with what I liked about Doc-To-Help and a tour of the main features of a basic Help system:

- Table of Contents
- Index
- Graphics
- Links and popups
- *See Also* links.

In general, I found Doc-To-Help performs well if you use it according to its own built-in assumptions. In other words, so long as you stay within the standard Doc-To-Help ways of doing things, it is a good — sometimes very good — single-sourcing tool.

### *Table of Contents (TOC)*

Doc-To-Help uses Microsoft® Word as its editor. You use Word styles to build up a set of topics and to structure them into a hierarchy. Headings in the Word documents signal the beginning of a topic and are used to define the structure of the eventual TOC. Heading 1 topics become top-level entries in the TOC, Heading 2 topics are shown at the second level and so on.

### *Indexes*

Indexing is neatly handled and can be configured using Word index fields or through a drag and drop interface in Doc-To-Help.

### *Graphics*

Graphics are managed simply by using Word's **Insert>Picture** functionality. Unfortunately, Doc-To-Help seems to offer no way to implement alternative text, which is a serious accessibility shortcoming. Version 7.2 does offer an image map editor, but this editor is only available in the Professional version of the tool (twice the price of the standard version) and is limited to square hotspots.

### *Links and popups*

Links and popups can be added manually (I'll deal with automatic links later) in two ways. The first way, using Word cross-references or Doc-To-Help margin notes, is neatly transformed between online and paper outputs: cross-references are converted to links and (a particularly neat feature) margin notes are converted to popups. From a single-sourcing point of view, this leaves you with functioning links and popups online, and cross-references and margin notes in paper outputs.

The second way, using a link button, is less complex but is not transformed into a usable paper equivalent.

### *See Also links*

Creating *See Also* links, at first, seems unnecessarily complicated. It involves creating a group keyword, creating and configuring a style, and using the group keyword as the text for the link. However, this complication becomes more understandable when you realise that, having set up all of these, creating further links is simply a matter of applying the style to appropriately worded text.

This style-based method of creating links leads me on to the next section, in which I will look at some of Doc-To-Help's more powerful advanced features.

## Advanced features

So far I have outlined a good, reasonably easy-to-use, single-sourcing tool. When you depart from the basics, Doc-To-Help is in fact both more and less than this. It is a very powerful, but at times cussedly hard-to-use single-sourcing tool.

Styles in Doc-To-Help are multi-featured and impressive. Each style has a range of properties that, rather than controlling appearance, actually control functionality. To name a few examples, you can cause styles to:

- Create *See Also* links (see above)
- Run scripts
- Automatically create links
- Add page numbers
- Add index entries
- Automate and fine tune links to glossary entries.

Unfortunately, it is often extremely difficult to work out how to do these things. For example, it is possible to create links that are automatically created for every instance of a particular style. These links will also include the page number in paper outputs but omit it in online outputs. This is great stuff, but it took me over an hour to work out that this was possible and how to do it.

Working with a Word document created by Doc-To-Help and using default styles makes life a lot easier. Doc-To-Help provides an excellent toolbar (Figure 1) that, as well as providing quick access to Doc-To-Help features, makes Word easier to use.

Departing from Doc-To-Help defaults, however, will make your work far more complicated. One of my major challenges was adding new documents to a project. Adding the documents to the **project** is fairly self-explanatory, but the content of the new documents is not necessarily automatically added to the **outputs** you are creating. If the styles in the document do not already exist in your project, you need to import them. Once these styles are imported, Doc-To-Help is able to add the new document to the structure of your outputs. There is nothing particularly wrong with this process, and it is not in itself particularly difficult, but the problem



Figure 1. Doc-To-Help's highly usable toolbar

lies in trying to discover that you need to import the styles at all.

Finally, for advanced features, there is a conditional text feature. While again a little complex, this enables you to filter content by output type, by specific output or by user-customisable attributes.

Doc-To-Help deserves praise for its powerful features: you can do some very clever things. I was particularly impressed, for example, by its ability to convert glossary items to popups. However, if other users are to be spared the headaches I've had, some further work is needed on making it more usable.

### Installation problems

On two occasions, Doc-To-Help has failed on my machine and I have had to contact support. On both occasions, ComponentOne support was very good indeed but the solution did require me to uninstall the software, clean my machine manually, download some upgrades and re-install. My laptop setup is probably unusual (I have several Help tools installed and an unusual Word configuration); this may go some way to explaining these problems. To complicate matters further, I also changed laptops while writing this review and, without that, would probably have needed to re-install only once.

### Conclusion

In my experience, complex interfaces are a problem common to powerful tools. Doc-To-Help has some impressive features and is highly customisable. As is often the case, this power seems to lead to a fairly steep learning curve. As someone who can usually figure out new tools relatively quickly, I did find Doc-To-Help quite difficult to learn. I would certainly recommend that newcomers to the product invest in some training.

In addition to the general usability problems described, I was disappointed

to find that Doc-To-Help does not include drop-down or expanding text effects (a powerful layering technique) or the ability to put background images on a style. HTML outputs also neglect to use standard HTML lists.

On a more positive note, I was genuinely impressed with some of Doc-To-Help's more powerful features. As well as those already mentioned, Doc-To-Help Professional comes with a built-in natural language search facility to interpret complete sentences typed in by a user (although this does not allow synonyms to be defined). There is also a Modular TOC utility that enables users who open sub-projects in a modular Help system to show the combined Table of Contents for the whole system; this is unique among the Help Authoring Tools I have used.

Finally, Doc-To-Help Professional comes complete with Documenter for .NET. This tool claims to automate .NET object model documentation from compiled assemblies and XML comment files. Unfortunately, I can't comment on the effectiveness of this tool but, from a brief look at other reviews, it definitely seems worthy of further investigation (see panel). **C**

**Justin Darley** is a Technical Director of Cherryleaf, which is an information design, training and consultancy company that can help you create, develop, manage and maintain your documentation including online Help, corporate information and other IT-related documents.

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### Documenter for .NET

This feature of Doc-To-Help Professional is intended for .NET users and software developers who want to save time by automating their .NET object model documentation. This is particularly appropriate for generating internal company documentation.

ComponentOne claims that Documenter for .NET quickly creates MSDN-style documentation from compiled assemblies and XML comment files, producing complete and well-formatted documents for class libraries. It lists the following features for the product:

#### Visual Studio .NET-style Help

You can use Doc-To-Help Professional with the Visual Studio Help Integration Kit (VSHIK) to develop content that integrates with the Help system in Visual Studio .NET.

#### Context String Editor

You can define context ID strings for Visual Studio® .NET-style Help and connect them to Help topics.

#### Scripting

You can use Microsoft Visual Basic® scripts to customise the behaviour of individual styles at compile time.

There is a review of Doc-To-Help that includes Documenter for .NET at [www.devsource.ziffdavis.com](http://www.devsource.ziffdavis.com) (type Doc-To-Help into the SEARCH box). The reviewer found the result 'quite impressive', with an important but not surprising caveat: 'Like any other automated documentation tool, the Documenter only adds the information that it can get from the assembly (class name and member information) and from the XML comments file.'

### Over to you

*Communicator* would be very interested to hear from any readers who are using this feature. Does it work and how well? Send your experiences to the Editor at [journal.editor@istc.org.uk](mailto:journal.editor@istc.org.uk).



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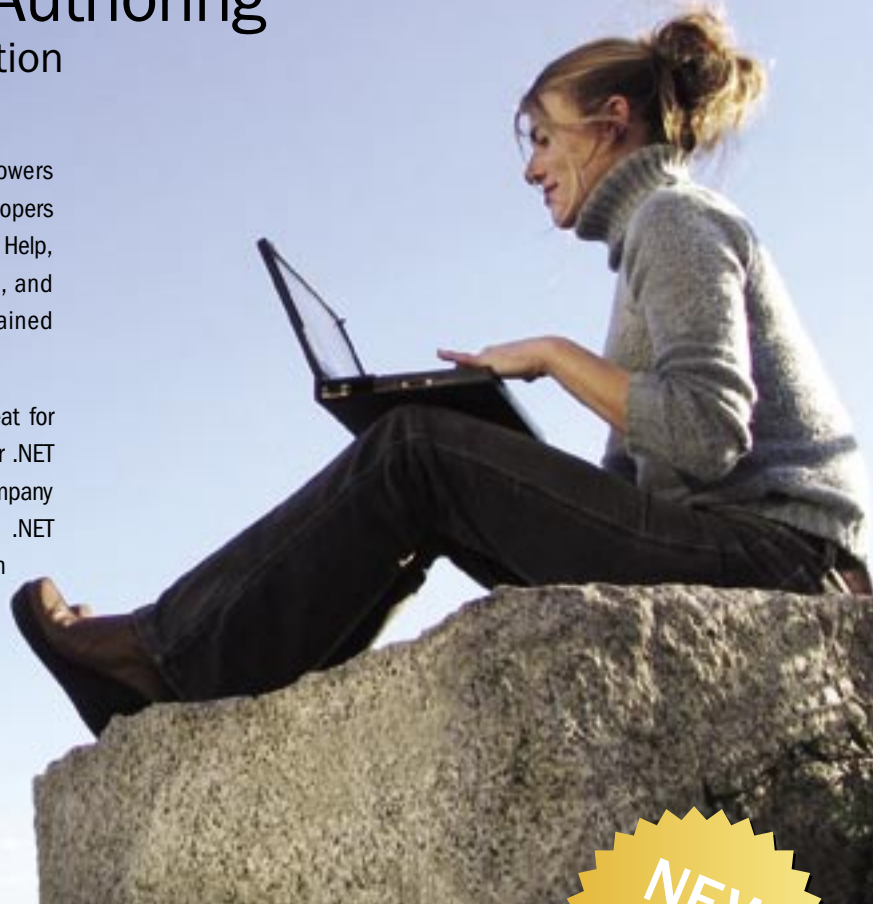
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# AECMA Simplified English

AECMA SE is used in the aircraft industry. **Mike Unwalla** gives an overview of this documentation specification.

The European Association of Aerospace Industries (formerly AECMA, now ASD) has produced a specification for aircraft documentation. This specification is known as *AECMA Simplified English* (SE). It deals with the language and writing style of the documentation.

AECMA SE is used around the world for documentation that is written to the ATA 2200 (civil aircraft) specification and to the S1000D (military vehicles) specification. (Lewis Marshall explained S1000D in the autumn 2004 issue of *Communicator*. This defines the layout and format of technical documentation. AECMA SE is required as part of S1000D.)

- AECMA SE provides a set of writing rules and a dictionary of words and their meanings. It has:
- A limited number of words
  - A limited number of clearly defined meanings for each word
  - A limited number of parts of speech for each word
  - A set of rules for writing text.

### Limited number of words

In everyday English, different words may have a similar meaning. For example, consider the sentence *Locate the pin in the aperture*.

Some synonyms for the verb *locate* are *fit*, *mount*, *position*, *place*, *put*, *set* and *situate*. Which one should a writer use? AECMA SE specifies that you should use the word *put* when you mean, 'to cause something to move or to be in a position'.

Similarly, you cannot use the word *deactivate*. Instead, you are recommended to use one of these: *stop*, *disconnect*, *isolate*. The majority of the AECMA SE guide consists of a dictionary of keywords. The list of keywords contains both words that are approved (such as *put*) and words that are not approved (such as *deactivate*).

For each approved keyword, the dictionary specifies the part of speech for which it can be used. The meaning of the word is shown, along with an example of correct use. For each keyword that is not approved, the dictionary suggests alternative words, along with an example of correct use of the alternative. Approved keywords and examples are in capitals, as shown in Figure 1.

### One word, one meaning

In everyday English, a single word can have many different meanings. Usually,

we can understand the meaning from the context. For example, a noun may have more than one meaning:

- The drive is faulty (*drive* is some component of a machine).
- The drive is boring (*drive* refers to the act of travelling in a car).

One word might have different interpretations. For example, the sentence *Replace the filter* could mean either of the following:

- Put back the filter that you took out.
- Install a new filter.

For each word that you are allowed to use, AECMA SE specifies the meaning of that word. Generally, one word has just one meaning.

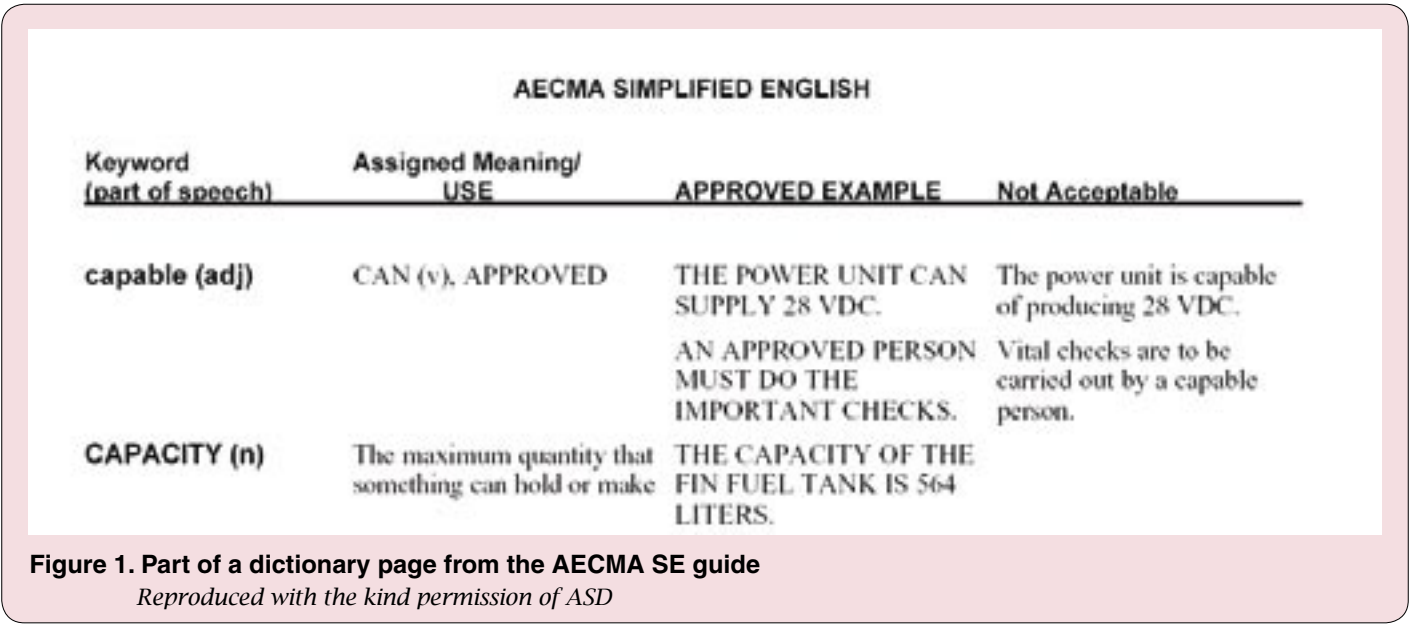
For product-specific terms, such as the name of a part, AECMA SE recommends that you build a dictionary of terminology (a glossary of terms). Use only the permitted terms in your writing.

### Parts of speech

In English, one word is often used in different ways. For example, the word *oil* can be used both as a noun and as a verb:

- The oil is contaminated.
- Oil the bearings liberally.

For each word, AECMA SE specifies how you can use the word. For example,



you are allowed to use the word *oil* as a noun, but you are not allowed to use it as a verb.

## Rules for writing text

There are many ways of categorising information. AECMA SE uses:

- **Description.** This provides an explanation, some information, or a statement about something.
- **Procedure.** This tells someone how to perform a task.

AECMA SE has a set of rules that specify how to write text. However, it is not designed to teach people how to write English. It states that the user should have a good writing ability and it assumes that the writer is familiar with the basics of traditional English grammar.

Many of the rules are best-practice guidelines that most technical communicators should be following anyway. For example:

- Use short sentences. (The recommended maximum is 20 words in a procedural sentence and 25 words in a descriptive sentence.)
- Avoid the passive voice.
- Be as specific as possible.

On the other hand, there are some very specific rules:

- Use the conjunction *that* after subordinate clauses that use verbs such as *make sure* and *show*. For example, write *Make sure that the valve is open*. Do not write *Make sure the valve is open*.
- Introduce a list item with a dash (hyphen).

- Do not use clusters of more than three nouns. For example, instead of *Runway light connection resistance calibration* write *Calibration of the resistance on a runway light connection*.

AECMA SE generally does not deal with formatting issues such as the typeface or its size, the width of margins, and the format for cross-references.


## Discussion

For many years, I have been in favour of controlling the language that I use in my documentation. Working with the AECMA SE guide has strengthened that belief.

However, it is not a universal solution. There are some rules with which I disagree. For instance, AECMA SE states that the present perfect tense should not be used. As an example, the sentence *We have received reports that the engines are defective* would not be allowed. Rather, it could be phrased *We received reports that the engines are defective*. There is, however, a slight difference in meaning between the present perfect version and the simple past version of the sentences.

The English language can certainly be ambiguous. A sentence may follow all the rules of grammar and all the rules of AECMA SE, and still it could be ambiguous. Following the rules blindly is not sufficient—writers must use their intelligence.

The AECMA SE guide has been available since 1986; the most recent version was published in January 2004. It costs £131 from InfoVision Systems Ltd, the official distributor in the UK ([www.infovision.co.uk](http://www.infovision.co.uk))

In April 2004 the AECMA organisation merged with other organisations to form ASD, the AeroSpace and Defence Industries Association of Europe ([www.asd-europe.org](http://www.asd-europe.org)). AECMA SE is being renamed *ASD Simplified Technical English Specification ASD-STE100*. For more information, visit: [www.simplifiedenglish-aecma.org/Simplified\\_English.htm](http://www.simplifiedenglish-aecma.org/Simplified_English.htm) 

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# The writing process: evaluation

In the last of his series of articles, **Damien Braniff** looks at the final stage of the writing process — evaluating what you've written.

## Introduction

In the course of this series of articles, we've looked at how to gather the information we need, plan our approach, produce our documentation and hand it over to the client. So, what happens next?

Too often, we pat ourselves on the backs — another project done and dusted — and move on to the next job. In doing so, we ignore or, at the very least, pay scant attention to the final stage of the writing process: the evaluation stage.

Do we talk to others involved to see how it went? Do we actively seek feedback from our customers? Do we check how well the figures proposed for timescales, budgets and so on match the actual figures achieved?

Unless the project went disastrously wrong, the answer to these questions is often a resounding 'No'. So, what should we be doing?

We need to evaluate each project, large or small, to see how the writing process, and hence the documentation, can be improved. Benefits to be gained from such an evaluation include:

1. Seeing what worked well or not so well, and incorporating any changes into the next project.
2. Demonstrating to our customers that we are continually trying to improve the service we provide.
3. If the project hasn't gone well, showing our customers what went wrong, **plus** what we intend to do about it, and so tempting them to use our services again.
4. Improving estimates we produce for later projects, and so increasing our chances of getting the job and making a profit!

## Evaluation

In the 70s and 80s, efforts were made to define clear measures of quality and value that could define the success of a project (Bandes, 1986). However, many people thought that evaluation was so complex and involved so many variables that it was impossible for it to produce relevant results.

This view has changed over the years and now two basic evaluations can be carried out:

### 1. User satisfaction

Does the documentation work?

### 2. Client satisfaction

This looks at the relationship with the customer and raises the question, 'Is the customer happy?'

The first point is all about usability testing, proving the documentation. It should be noted that usability testing is situational, and so the answers that it provides may change as the product develops. For example, early tests may yield different results from those carried out during beta testing of the product. For this reason, it **must** be an ongoing process.

The second point is probably more important in a commercial context, as it tries to measure benefits to the client (the person or organisation that pays for the work). These may include increased revenue and reduced costs (Redish &

## Publications project

This is essentially looking at how the project was run — was it well planned and executed? Project planning is a huge area that I cannot explore in an article of this type but there are some factors that we can look at, irrespective of the size of the project:

- Were all the agreed milestones met?
- Did the final documentation meet the initial specifications?
- Were the estimated schedules right?
- Was the same team retained for the whole project?
- Was any usability testing performed?
- Was sufficient time left for translation and other localisation activities?

If the answer to any of these was 'No', we must ask 'Why?'

From the answers, we can compile a picture of what worked and what didn't work on the project. We can then use that information to improve our performance on our next project.

**Do we talk to others involved to see how it went?**  
**Do we actively seek feedback from our customers?**  
**Do we check how well the figures proposed for timescales, budgets and so on matched the actual figures achieved?**

Ramey, 1995). Carliner (1997) suggests that the clearest indicator of client satisfaction is the client's willingness to provide repeat work or recommend a supplier to others, which is what we are all aiming for!

## Project Review

Hackos (1994) suggests that four distinct aspects of a project can be evaluated:

- **Publications project:** how the project was run
- **Publications process:** how usability and customer satisfaction were ensured.
- **Publications team:** how the writers and editors performed
- **Project's future:** how the project catered for updates.

For example, it may have taken longer than estimated for the client to check the translation; we can allow for this in similar future situations. Tabulating estimated and actual values for timings and costs provides a concise overview of how the project went.

## Publications process

This considers the quality of the documentation and evaluates how well the documentation works. There are several ways in which this can be done, for example:

- Conducting surveys, by post or telephone, to get feedback from real users.
- Monitoring the number of calls received by sales, customer service and technical support staff.

The feedback received will give an indication of how good or bad the documentation is. Negative feedback may indicate that the documentation needs to be updated, in which case we must decide on the severity of the problem — must it be corrected now or can it wait until the next release? Whatever the problem may be, it is the **cause** that must be determined. Was it due to:

- Late changes in the product?
- Poor communication within the project team?
- Poor audience or task analysis?

Once we know the cause, we can factor it into the next project so that the same problem is less likely to happen again.

### **Publications team**

This is about how the team (irrespective of its size) worked together and how its members fitted into the project as a whole. The evaluation should address questions such as:

- Did the writers work well together and support each other when needed?
- Were all the writers productive? This is not a just a matter of comparing the number of pages produced each day but also takes into account what each writer is doing, the material available to each writer and so on.
- Did the writers all get on well with the engineers, programmers and other contacts?

**Note:** While the time taken to write a page may provide a rough guide to productivity, the amount of time spent on editing is often a better guide.

In some cases, especially if the project went badly, evaluating the publication team can be seen as a way of allocating blame. However, it should be promoted as a way to improve the overall quality of the documentation. Project teams that gel tend to meet their deadlines and quality commitments.

It is not only the writers that need to be evaluated. The performance of the manager(s) must also be examined:

- Was the project well managed, with all required resources made available?
- Were the writers protected, with the manager acting as a buffer between departments when required?
- Was a good team spirit engendered among the writers?

## Negative feedback may indicate that the documentation needs to be updated, in which case we must decide on the severity of the problem — must it be corrected now or can it wait until the next release?

Answers to such questions provide an overview of the team dynamic, showing where its members worked well together and highlighting any problems that may have arisen. Again, this can be taken into account when forming a team for later projects.

### **Project's future**

When a project is completed and the documentation handed over, it is very rarely the end of the matter. Almost invariably, there will be a series of updates and enhancements. New features will probably be added and there may be several incarnations of the product before it is eventually withdrawn. How smoothly this maintenance phase progresses is determined by how well the original project was run.

It's important to make time at the end of the project to complete the administration activities that will enable others to support the product and to use the documentation as the basis for future products.

### **Client satisfaction**

The project review should cover user satisfaction but client satisfaction is much harder to evaluate because it depends largely on what the client expects. It may be that the client sees the documentation merely as an adjunct to the product and is content with it being present, looking okay and having no factual errors.

As technical communicators, our goal should be (to quote one quality guru) not to satisfy clients but to delight them. The best way to do that is to give them value for money by showing a good return on their investment. This requires us to provide:

- Increased benefits (for example, additional sales or increased productivity)
- Reduced costs (for example, fewer calls to technical support or lower training costs).

These are measurable benefits. The higher the savings we can generate, the

better the documentation will be from a client's perspective.

We can also take into account:

- The amount of positive feedback we receive from the client on the documentation
- How important the documentation is in the customer's decision to buy the product.

### **Summary**

Evaluation is an essential part of the writing process that is all too often relegated to a minor role as we rush on to new and better things. This must not happen — it's too important for that, whether we are working for a large company or as a sole trader. We need to evaluate to improve and to provide the added value that, in the long run, will bring us more work. **C**

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# Finding FrameMaker's features

Flexible tools can offer bewildering choices. **Jane Dards** launches a new FrameMaker series with tips for pulling pictures into your publications.

Adobe's FrameMaker (FM) is a powerful desktop publishing package that, in my opinion, is fairly intuitive to use and gives sensible responses to commands. However, like most software applications, it has its little quirks and holes, and it can take a bit of digging to find out how to make best use of its features.

Having gained some experience of FM, both while working with inherited documents and designing from scratch, I hope to pass on some useful tips to other jobbing authors. This first article considers an area where there are many choices and also a few oddities: that of including imported graphics in your documents.

### Importing a graphic

The standard option I use for adding a graphic at a selected location is File>Import>File (although there are other methods using object linking). For some formats, such as JPEG, FM will prompt you to use a filter; GIF files are imported without filtering.

### Copy or reference?

You can either copy the graphic into the document or import by reference. Both methods have their benefits and drawbacks (Table 1). Some tips for working with referenced graphics are:

- To check the name of the referenced graphic file (if any), right-click on the graphic and select 'Object Properties'.
- To convert a referenced file to an embedded (copied) file, select the graphic then use File>Import>File,

'Copy Into Document', and 'Replace'. If you are using Windows and want to convert all the files in a document, you have to do this for each one — macros are only supported in the UNIX version of FM.

- If you are using referenced files with frequent updates and new versions of graphics, you can end up with an images directory that includes lots of redundant files. Sadly, FM does not include an option equivalent to the Publication Copy in Ventura, so if you want to distribute the FM files together with their referenced files you need to check which ones are actually used. You can generate a list of these using the Special>List of>References option, and selecting 'Imported Graphics' for the 'Include References'.

### Sizing

When you import a graphic you are prompted to specify the image scaling by selecting the image resolution in dpi, which is one FM option I have always found rather non-intuitive. The thing to remember here is that your selection does not change the amount of information stored in your imported image: if you saved an image at 300 dpi and set it to 150 dpi when you import, it still has the same number of 'dots' but they are spread over more 'inches' to make a bigger picture. This means that you can change the dpi setting as much and as often as you like without degrading the image (unlike resizing in a graphics package such as Paint

Shop Pro): just right-click the image and select 'Object Properties' then 'Set dpi'.

If you want your image to be a specific size, you can select the dpi that gives the nearest size (indicated next to each dpi option), and then drag the graphic to the required size; to maintain the aspect ratio, hold down the Shift key as you drag the corner. However, the *FrameMaker User Guide* recommends that, for best results, you set the image dpi to an exact multiple of the resolution of the output device (screen or printer) on which it will be viewed. Having said that, I can't say that I've noticed much difference in the output quality as a result of interactive resizing.

You can also resize a graphic using the Graphic>Scale option, and either scaling by a specified percentage or entering a width and height. I feel that the latter would be more useful if there was an option to retain the aspect ratio and then just specify one dimension. Again, this option does not degrade the image: you can scale down to 1% and then scale up again without affecting the image quality.

On import, the alternative to selecting the resolution is the 'Fit in Selected Rectangle' option, but this only seems to work if you are replacing an existing image with a new one: otherwise it places a small image within the graphic frame or rectangle, but doesn't 'fit' it.

Table 1. Options for importing graphic files

| Import method       | Benefits  | Drawbacks  |
|---------------------|---|--|
| Import by reference | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ Smaller FM file size</li><li>■ Image in FM document is updated automatically and immediately when graphic file is changed</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ If the graphic file is replaced, you must ensure that the new filename is the same as the old one</li><li>■ The graphic frame stays the same size, even if the new/edited file is a different size or aspect ratio, which may not be what you want</li><li>■ Graphics can be lost if you move the FM source files: references are relative, so you need to move the folder containing the graphics files too</li></ul> |
| Copy into document  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ Can distribute FM files without the risk of losing graphics</li></ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ Larger FM file size</li><li>■ Need to re-import file if graphic changes</li></ul>  |



## Local positioning options

An imported graphic is automatically placed in a centred frame with a small border around it, anchored at the cursor position, and positioned 'Below Current Line'. The frame is also set as 'Cropped' to stop it extending beyond the text column. You can change the settings by selecting the frame and using **Special>Anchored Frame** options: the effects of some of these settings are shown in Figure 1. Some tips for working with imported graphics are:

- To shrink-wrap the anchored frame around a graphic, press **Esc m p**. This also makes it an 'inline' graphic (anchor position 'At Insertion Point'), but this setting can be changed afterwards if required.
- You can adjust the vertical position of an inline graphic by either dragging the frame or by using the 'Distance above Baseline' setting from **Special>Anchored Frame**.
- 'Run into Paragraph' positioning with left alignment is useful for icons and graphic dropped caps. It can also be used for graphics positioned in the side head space (more of which in a later article).

- You can show or hide the frame anchors (and other markers) using **Esc v t**.

## Space around a graphic

Unless you are using special local positioning options, you can provide space around a graphic by making the anchored frame larger than the graphic.

## To shrink-wrap the anchored frame around a graphic, press **Esc m p**

You can position the graphic within the frame in several ways:

- Interactively
- Right clicking, selecting 'Object Properties' and using the size and offset options for exact settings
- Using a **Graphics>Align** option to align the graphic to a centre or side of the frame.

You will get different spacing between the text and the graphic frame depending on whether you anchor the frame in a text paragraph or in an empty paragraph. In the latter case, you can set the paragraph style to a specific spacing and, if necessary, a very small

font size, to obtain consistent spacing above your graphics.

## Captioning a graphic

FM has the interesting 'feature' that it does not include an option to add a caption to a graphic frame. If you need to do so, the workarounds are:

- Put the caption in a separate paragraph
- Put the caption in a text frame within the anchored frame
- Put the graphic into a single-celled table, and use the table title as the caption.

### *Caption as separate paragraph*

If you use a separate paragraph to caption a graphic, you need to make sure that the two remain together:

- For a caption above the graphic, anchor the graphic in the caption paragraph
- For a caption below the graphic, set the paragraph containing the graphic frame anchor as 'Keep With: Next Pgf'. Depending on your page design, aligning the caption paragraph can be a problem. For example, if you centre your graphics, and the graphics are of variable widths, it is difficult to align the caption with the left border of the graphic.

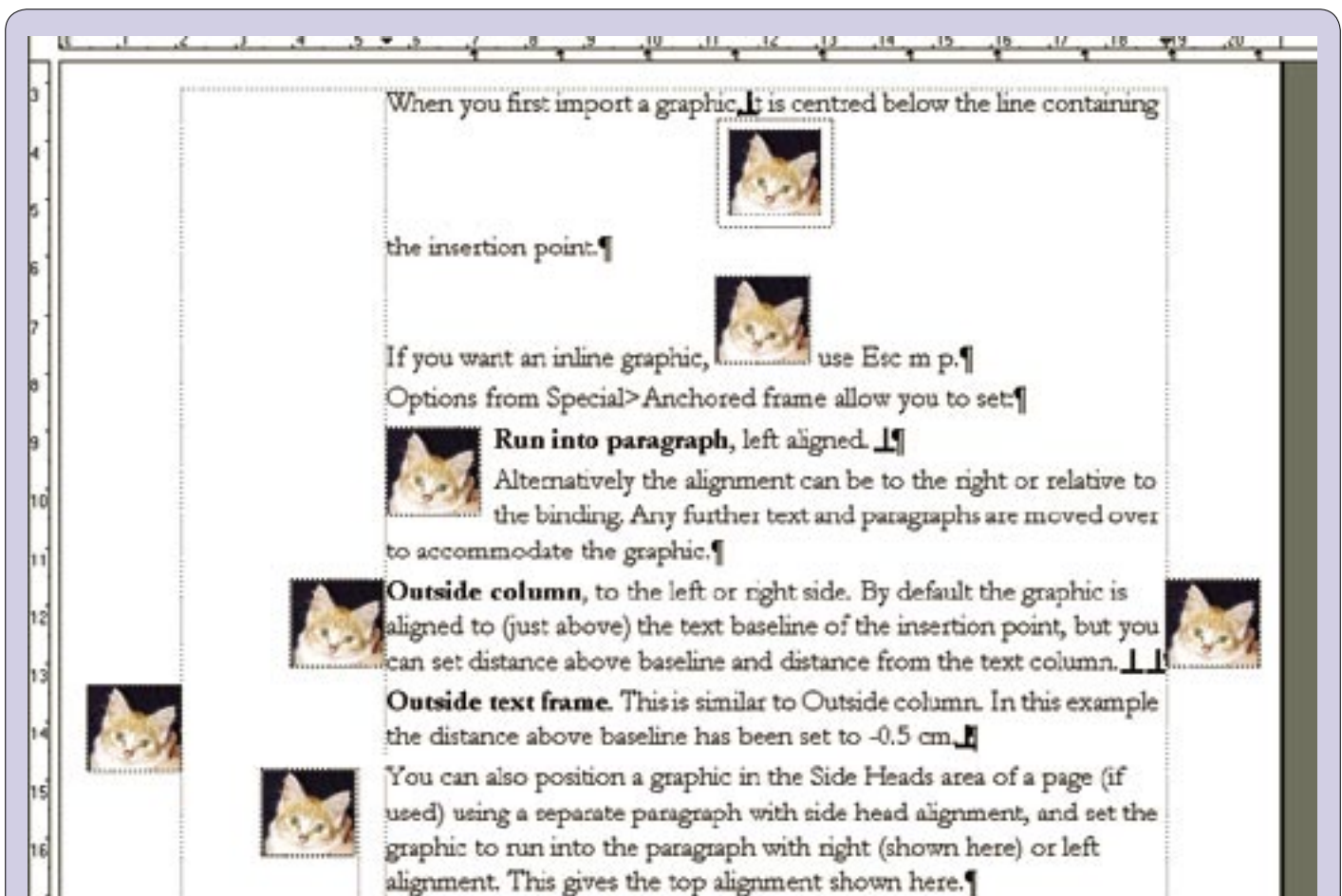


Figure 1. Options for local positioning of imported graphics

### Caption within anchored frame

You can add a text frame within the anchored frame, type your caption into the text frame, and apply the appropriate paragraph style. Even though the text is in a separate flow, any figure numbering will increment correctly and you can still cross-reference to it.

To add the text frame, increase the size of the anchored frame to make room next to the graphic and then use 'Place a Text Frame' from the Tools Palette. Make sure the text frame is inside the selected anchored frame or it won't move with the graphic. Click away from the text frame to deselect it, then you can click inside it to enter text. Ctrl-click to reselect the frame (making sure nothing else is already selected) and position it as required: you can use the same options as for a graphic (see *Space around a graphic* above).

### Table title as caption

If you put the graphic into a single-celled table, you can set the table title either above or below the graphic. The appearance of the caption (title) is set using the standard paragraph formatting options, and the left alignment will be relative to the table rather than to the page or column.

To avoid a lot of space between the top and left of the graphic and the top and left of the table cell, either:

- Set the anchored frame to 'At Insertion Point'. In the Table Designer (Ctrl-t with a table selected) Basic folder, set the default top and left cell margins to zero.

- Set the anchored frame to 'Below Current Line', and 'Left' alignment. Set the font size for the current paragraph to a very small size. Use the table spacing 'Above' and 'Below' options to set the distance from the text.

One word of warning about using tables for graphics. I inherited a page design that used this method, and the format for CellBody was set to a small size. So Body format was used for real table cell content. This was fine for the printed version, but when I later came to generate Help files (using WebWorks Publisher to map the styles) I couldn't specify different formatting for table cells compared to body text, as they were tagged with the same paragraph style. Oops!

### Page positioning

The methods available for positioning a graphic on the page depend on whether it is an anchored frame or a frame in a table.

You can position an anchored frame at the top or bottom of the column in which the frame is anchored. However, this will detach it from any caption that is in a separate paragraph, and if you are using a side head area you can have problems with lateral alignment.

You can position a table at the top (but not the bottom) of the **next** column or page (left or right) using the Start option from the Table Designer.

A powerful positioning tool for tables is the Float option, which puts the table in the next place it will fit, without breaking the text flow. The equivalent for anchored frames is the Floating

option, available for frames anchored below the current line or at the top or bottom of a column. However, you need to be careful if you float a lot of tables or frames close together: sometimes FM can get confused about where to put them (typically when an edit has pushed a frame onto a new page), and crash. This can be upsetting if you haven't saved your work recently. If you have a file that crashes when you reach a specific page, the judicious insertion of a page break earlier in the file should recover the situation.

### For more information

There is detailed information available in the *FrameMaker User Guide* chapters on Graphics, Anchored Frames and Tables, or in the equivalent on-screen Help topics. **C**

If you have any FrameMaker tips you would like to share with other readers, please send them to [jane@dards.co.uk](mailto:jane@dards.co.uk)

Jane Dards PhD MISTC has been a freelance publications consultant for 19 years, and started using FrameMaker in 1998. E-mail: [jane@dards.co.uk](mailto:jane@dards.co.uk)  
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# Visual Communication Europe 2004

**Kathryn Fourie** gives a glimpse of this event, which is growing in popularity as a source of information for communication professionals.

While not the largest event of its type, the number of exhibitors and visitors at Visual Communication Europe 2004, held in Paris in September, increased by almost 25% since the 2002 event. The international version is held every even year, with a national version in every odd year, and so the next Visual Communication Europe will be in 2006.

## Event facts

- 260 exhibitors
- 20 000m<sup>2</sup> of floor space
- Over 10 000 visitors
- Over 100 new products
- Dozens of launches

## What was exhibited?

Covering a wide range of fields and technologies, Visual Communication Europe 2004 mainly focused on:

- Digital printing
- Advertising
- Commercial signage
- Signposting.

The Graflex 2004 trade show was also incorporated into the event, which helped to broaden the scope of the event. This added sign-makers, rubber stamp manufacturers, engravers and flexographers to the list of exhibitors.

## How valuable was the event?

Whether you want to expand your client base and boost sales as a prospective exhibitor, or simply to keep up-to-date with trends in visual communication, this event is worth a visit. For the visitor, it also offers plenty of innovative ideas to inspire new communication campaigns and the opportunity to compare available products and services.

A highlight of the show was watching a broad selection of digital printers print on almost any material in any size, and comparing the impressive displays of digitally printed posters and displays. The event enabled visitors to meet the newest players in the flatbed inkjet printer market and see the latest digital printing presses for small print runs and customised printing.

Just a few hours at the event are likely to invigorate any communication campaign. It is easy to get stuck in a marketing rut, using the same old tried and tested methods and materials, but you should come away from this event with all the cutting edge trends in printing and advertising media, solvent inks, illuminated signposting and 3D advertising. Although technical information abounds at the event, there is no need to be a technical expert to appreciate the huge visual and marketing displays, or to obtain the information you require from suppliers.



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## 2005 events

### 1-3 February

Middle East Sign Graphic Imaging  
2005: The 7th International Trade  
Exhibition for the Signage, Graphic  
Imaging & Screen Printing Sectors  
Dubai, United Arab Emirates  
[www.signmiddleeast.com](http://www.signmiddleeast.com)

### 14-16 September

Visual Communication France  
Paris, France  
[www.visualparis.com](http://www.visualparis.com)

### 29 September – 1 October

Viscom  
Düsseldorf, Germany  
[www.viscom-messe.com](http://www.viscom-messe.com)

### 6-8 October

Sign España – Visual Communication  
Spain  
Madrid, Spain  
[www.sign-viscom.com](http://www.sign-viscom.com)

### 3-5 November

Visual Communication Italy  
Milan, Italy  
[www.visualcommunication.it](http://www.visualcommunication.it)

## How international was the event?

While the international event still has a strong French flavour, with only 48% of the exhibitors from outside France, international exhibitors at the show this year represented companies in 32 countries. However, as many as 80% of visitors were from France, offering exhibitors the opportunity to penetrate the French market. Despite the French slant, visitors could obtain information in several languages, including English, at most stands.

## In conclusion

Visual Communication Europe 2004 was a modern and professional event, with much to offer exhibitor and visitor alike. **C**

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# 3di achieves Investors in People accreditation



**Standing (left to right):** Tricia Fillingham, Andy Parker, Kirsty Pettman and Steve Reynolds. **Sitting (left to right):** Sue Kelson, Alida Haleem, Paul Ballard, Siobhan Copper and Rob Sexstone.

3di Information Solutions Ltd, the technical authoring and translation specialists based in Ripley, Surrey, have achieved Investors in People accreditation.

The company, which was formed in 2002 with four staff, now employs a full-time staff of ten in its offices in Ripley High Street, plus more than 30 author and translator associates who work off-site and are contracted on a job-by-job basis.

3di recognised that, with this continuing growth, it needed a solid framework for management, clarifying the strategy to take the business forward, and implementing excellent practices to support the training, development and well-being of its employees.

Building on established relationships with Business Link Surrey, the company embarked on the Investors in People (IIP) programme. Using customer and supplier feedback, and ideas from the team, 3di was able to refine and clarify its business strategy and short-term objectives.

Paul Ballard, Managing Director comments, 'The IIP programme has given the whole company the opportunity to think through and agree what has made 3di successful so far.

With the IIP accreditation, coupled with the ISO 9001 quality standard achieved in 2003, I am confident that we have laid solid foundations to keep our staff and customers happy. The challenge now will be to remember the lessons we've learned and to replicate good practice to enable continued growth of the team and the business.'

3di was particularly commended for its relationships with its associate staff, who praised the company highly in comparison with other contracting companies, and for its 'family' atmosphere, where all staff feel a genuine involvement in the progress and success of the company. **C**

## Affiliate roll call

The ISTC would like to thank all its Business Affiliates for their support.

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## Plain Words Help author wins ISTC award

Unlike his horror writer namesake, Dr Stephen King of Plain Words is unsung. But in his own field — technical writing — he won first prize in the ISTC Documentation Awards 2004 for his work on a Help system for geographic information systems (GIS) specialists ESRI UK.

King says his knack of making software documentation genuinely user-friendly is down to putting himself in the user's shoes. 'Online Help is often written by programmers, which means it is overly technical and not accessible to the general user,' he says. 'As a professional writer, I put myself in the mindset of the user and explain how an application works in plain, everyday English.'

Janet Basdell, founder and MD of Plain Words, points out that creating good online Help isn't only about words: 'It's about making sure the look of it is clean and uncluttered, and that it is clearly branded to the organisation that manufactures the product.'

Gavin Ireland, ISTC President, explains the importance of the awards. 'They're the documentation world Oscars, only not as glamorous!' he says. 'They show that real standards are being set to make the documentation that goes with software and other equipment accessible and easy to digest.' 




**Stephen King, winner of Class 2b: Creation and web delivery of non-technical information**

## Record results for Lloyd International Translations

During the third quarter of 2004, Lloyd International, one of Europe's leading technical translation companies, achieved record sales: 41% up on last year. Major new contracts capitalise on the company's technical expertise in specific sectors, such as automotive, engineering and software applications. New projects awarded include:

- **For a motorcycle manufacturer**, translating over 700 pages in QuarkXPress from English into German and Spanish for a parts and accessories catalogue.
- **For an oil drilling equipment manufacturer**, translating a series of maintenance and software manuals into Simplified Chinese.
- **For a leading European developer of office productivity software**, localising 250,000 words (both user interface and documentation) into Latin-American Spanish. Other languages to follow will include Brazilian Portuguese, Simplified Chinese, Russian, Hindi and Arabic.
- **For a global electrical engineering company**, translating all documents for a power-generating plant in Morocco from English to French, comprising some 300,000 words.

During the year, Lloyd developed its British and global teams in several ways. In April, well-known industry figure Dáire Lawlor was appointed as Managing Director, bringing a wealth of senior executive experience in multi-language localisation. After 14 years in the hot seat, founder director Mike Lloyd took on the role of Chairman to focus on strategic objectives.

To enhance the company's ability to offer a full range of cost-effective, high-quality solutions to clients, it has increased its UK production team and consolidated its supply chain. Its engineering localisation expertise and network of in-country language partners has been extended. By deploying teams of linguists, rather than individual freelancers, Lloyd achieves smoother, faster work flows. 

**Kathryn Valdal Fourie** will be compiling the Industry news in 2005. If you have a story for the news pages contact her at: [newsdesk@istc.org.uk](mailto:newsdesk@istc.org.uk)

## Cherryleaf provides lecturer for Coventry course

Cherryleaf director and regular *Communicator* writer, Justin Darley, is to teach a level-3 module in Communication Design for the Multimedia/Communication Design courses at Coventry University, in collaboration with the course leader, Jacqui Bleetman.

The module focuses on Justin's specialist area of single sourcing. Cherryleaf hopes that the arrangement will prove beneficial to both the company and the students, who should gain a hands-on, real-life perspective on the benefits, challenges, tools and techniques involved in single sourcing and content management.

The practical assignment involves an evaluation and redesign of the Government's 'Preparing for Emergencies' leaflet and website ([www.preparingforemergencies.gov.uk](http://www.preparingforemergencies.gov.uk)).

## Why not become an Affiliate?

It couldn't be easier: just contact Carol Hewitt at [istc@istc.org.uk](mailto:istc@istc.org.uk). Affiliation gives you access to ISTC benefits like *Communicator*, the members' area of the website and the online groups. It also entitles you to discounts on Conference and advertising. Your support will help the ISTC to do more.

# A guide to modern technical communications

## Communicating in Style

by Yateendra Joshi

The Energy and Resources Institute, New Delhi, 2003, 250 pages, ISBN 8179930165

Reviewed by Gordon Ingram MISTC

The title of *Communicating in Style* is a little misleading. This is not a style guide in the tradition of Strunk & White's classic *The Elements of Style*. There is nothing about prose style in the book, and very little about English grammar. Rather, the book contains a set of recommendations for developing a polished and professional written communication from a draft text. It is thus more about presentation than style, although the scope is limited to textual rather than graphical presentation.

Yateendra Joshi works for TERI, the Energy and Resources Institute of India. A few points are relevant only to authors writing in or for the subcontinent, such as the use of the Indian English terms *crore* and *lakh* to denote ten million and a hundred thousand respectively. However, these culturally specific issues are always noted when they arise — a refreshing contrast to many Western books — and the author also points out differences in American and British usage in several places.

In general, the recommendations in this book are useful for anyone writing in English (and even conceivably for those writing in other languages, since they are more about presentation than prose style). The author's academic background creates a more significant bias: in particular, three chapters (plus one appendix) on references, poster presentations and submitting articles to journals are unlikely to be very useful to those outside academia and scientific research.

The book covers an admirable range of material. Indeed, its contents are so varied that it would probably have benefited from a little more structure. Although the chapters in the book are clearly defined in terms of subject matter, I think 13 chapters are perhaps a few too many for one unbroken list. The book would divide quite naturally into three parts: one dealing

with structuring textual information (headings, lists, abbreviations and punctuation); one with additional information (tables, illustrations and references); and one with special documents (posters, presentations and letters or e-mails).

There are also several appendices. However, apart from the first one, which contains sample reference formats, these do not really contain reference material, and it would have been better to integrate them with the relevant chapters. Given these structural flaws, it is noticeable that there is no mention of how to structure a document effectively; for example, how many chapters a book can have before it needs to be broken up into sections, and what sort of information to put in appendices.

In a book like this, there are always many more-or-less arbitrary recommendations. Some of these I agree with, such as the advice to give an acronym first and then its definition in brackets, rather than *vice versa*. Others I disagree with, such as the injunction against introducing a list with a colon, especially after a verb. Of course it is impossible to please everyone, but there are a few cases where the author gives hard-and-fast rules for matters that, in reality, are likely to vary with the context. For example, we are advised always to left-justify text: this is indeed a standard in the business world, but academic articles tend to be fully justified.

There are a lot of good things about this book. The layout is original, with quotations, resources and examples on each left-facing page, and the main body text on each right-facing page. This helps to break up the text and makes it even more readable than if it were presented in one continuous stream (not that readability would be a problem anyway, given Yateendra Joshi's clear, engaging prose).

Importantly for a book of this kind, it seems to have been very well proof-read and typeset. I couldn't detect any obvious typos or glitches, although a rather strange ellipsis symbol is used, with the dots in the centre of the line instead of at the bottom (...).

The author seems to have gathered information from an impressive range of sources, ranging from classics such as *The Chicago Manual of Style*, to websites and e-mail lists. Some useful references are given at the end of each chapter, although a single bibliography at the end of the book would also have been helpful. The subject matter is very up-to-date: electronic communications are treated as an integral part of writing, rather than as an afterthought.

Is *Communicating in Style* useful for technical communicators in particular? Well, I certainly learned a few things, such as:

- You should prefer fonts that distinguish between lower-case l, capital I, and the numeral 1.
- A full stop should be skipped after contractions (such as Dr) but not abbreviations (such as Prof.).
- The numerals in a numbered list should be aligned to the right.
- Bullet points should be dark grey instead of black.
- Small capitals should be spaced to help acronyms stand out from surrounding text.

I suspect — since there are chapters on posters, journal articles and references but none on user guides — that this book is mainly targeted at graduate students and junior scientific researchers. TECHWR-L (the main technical writers' e-mail list) is referred to, however, and there is some discussion of how to lay out technical reports. Furthermore the chapters on headings, lists, acronyms, tables and illustrations are likely to be of substantial use in writing technical documentation. I think this book would be indispensable to Indian technical authors, and very useful to technical authors anywhere else — though more as a comprehensive guide to modern technical communications than as a handbook of technical writing. **C**

**Yateendra Joshi** graduated from the College of Agriculture, Pune, and has a master's degree in agriculture from the University of Agricultural Sciences, Bangalore.



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# Line drawings the easy way

**Bettina Giemsa** launches her regular illustration page with a technique that anyone can try: phototracing.

Phototracing can be an effective technique for creating technical illustrations. Of course, tracing an existing picture instead of drawing from scratch seems easy and is often, therefore, considered an appropriate technique for beginners in technical illustration. I used the word 'seem' because, as with all things, there are some rules to follow if you want to achieve good results.

To create a line drawing from a photograph, you take a picture of the subject and use it as a template. Most graphics programs (including Adobe Illustrator®, IsoDraw®, Freehand® and CorelDraw®) offer a background layer on which you can place your photograph. A lock function enables you to lock the layer to prevent the photograph from being accidentally selected, moved or deleted. You then trace the photograph on a second layer, reproducing all reference lines with the tools provided by your graphics program.

## Choosing a photograph

Before you start tracing a photograph, check that it will make a good template:

- The file should not be too large, otherwise your graphics program may become sluggish. Two factors

influence the file size: the colour and resolution of the photograph. To conserve memory, use a grayscale photograph of sufficient resolution to recognise the necessary details. A resolution of between 180 and 250 dpi is usually serviceable.

- The photograph must not be too dark or have reflections in it, as these will cause problems in tracing. When taking pictures yourself, pay attention to correct lighting and use a flash if necessary.

## Limitations of the method

A photograph is always in vanishing point perspective...

- ...and so is any illustration traced from a photograph! Vanishing point perspective corresponds to the way in which a human eye or a camera sees. The disadvantage of this perspective, however, is the natural way in which it presents an object. This requires parts to be depicted differently as their positions change relative to the observer, which means that a part in an illustration will need to be redrawn even if it is merely shifted to another position on the drawing area.

- ...and this means there is a special demand for accuracy! Make sure that all elements and lines you draw are in the correct position. Use auxiliary lines to check position, since any displaced line or ellipse can destroy the whole impression created by the illustration. This is especially true for complex illustrations where more than one object is depicted.

## In conclusion

For phototracing, the same general rule applies as for all technical illustrations: depict only what is needed to convey the desired meaning; omit unnecessary details to make the illustration easy to understand.

When you have finished your illustration, delete the background layer containing the photograph rather than hiding it. This keeps the file small. **C**

**Bettina Giemsa** is responsible for marketing at ITEDO Software in Germany, vendor of the technical illustration products IsoDraw and IsoDraw CADprocess.  
E-mail: BettinaGiemsa@itedo.com  
Website: www.itedo.com

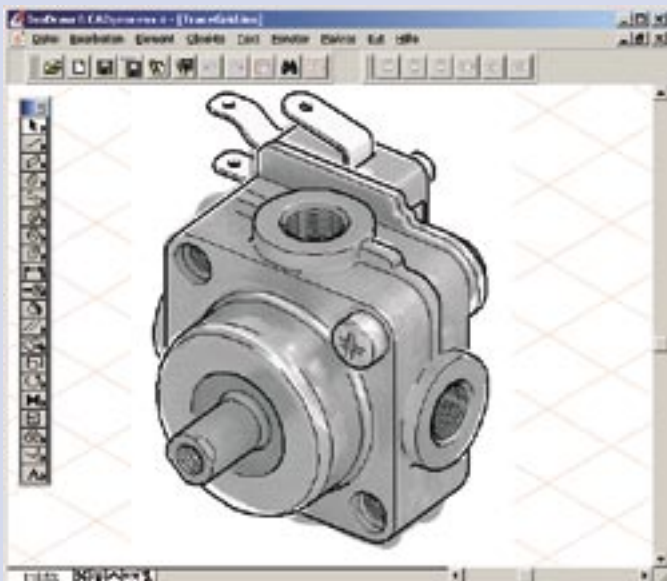


Figure 1. Tracing the photograph

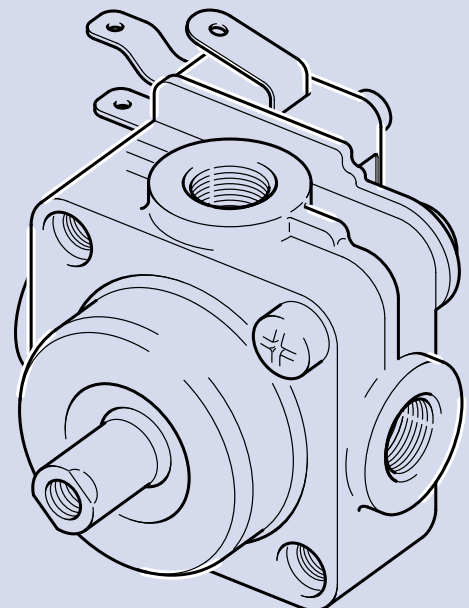


Figure 2. Resulting line drawing

# Writing instructions for software users

**Nick Robson** offers ideas for making appropriate stylistic choices in one of the most widely used types of instructions.

On the face of it, software user guides are a form of technical communication that is simple and straightforward to produce, namely telling the user of an application how to follow a set of sequences. In this article, I shall be considering some of the things you need to do before putting pen to paper to ensure that your writing is pitched appropriately.

## Know your audience

The style of writing will (or should) be mainly influenced by the technical and other abilities of your target audience; so it follows that you must get to know your audience as soon as possible. Establish the following early on:

- **Age groups.** Generally, younger people tend to pick up new information quicker, but they also may race ahead a bit. Although older people may be less used to PC-based technology, they are often more prepared to stay for the long haul.
- **Cultural background.** This can affect your choice of graphics, among other things. For example, you would ordinarily show groups of people as a reasonable mix of both genders. However, you need to avoid this if your documentation is destined for a culture where women are not allowed to work.
- **Educational qualifications.** These may vary wildly; do not assume your audience had a UK-style education.
- **Technical experience.** It is convenient to think that everyone these days has some experience of using PCs, but this is not necessarily so, especially in countries outside Western Europe and North America.

Having established whom you are writing for, use this to help you decide how to pitch the style of your writing.

## Adapt your writing style

The technical ability of your audience will determine such things as your choice of words, length of sentences and length of paragraphs. However, there are certain things you should try to achieve for all audiences.

### *Be consistent*

If early on in the user documentation you instruct the user to 'Switch on the screen' avoid later on instructing them to 'Turn on the screen', especially as (to be pedantic) almost certainly the user will have to press something rather than turn something.

### *Be brief*

Do your best to avoid the temptation to use any more words than you absolutely, positively have to.

Generally, keep explanations to a minimum; don't let them obscure the basic instructions that you are trying to convey. If the complexity of the system demands a lot of explanation, consider moving it into an appendix or into a different version of the document, one written for more experienced readers such as system administrators.

### *Be positive*

Wherever possible, to convey a feeling of confidence, use words such as 'must', 'can' and 'shall' rather than 'should', 'may' and 'might'.

### *Choose the right tone*

Convey a sense of 'efficient equality': you need to talk to users at their level, but without being patronising or condescending. However, don't bother to preface instructions with 'Please'.

### *Be careful with humour*

Resist the temptation to use an unduly informal or jokey style. It might seem like a good idea at the time, but after a while it can become a mite wearisome to the reader (and therefore counterproductive). For the same reason, avoid using an informal typeface, such as one that mimics handwriting. Also, don't forget that humour rarely translates.

### *Keep it simple*

Don't baffle your readers with science. Instead of referring all the time to the 'PrintCorp C2004 UltraLaser Colour Printer', identify it once as such but, thereafter, simply refer to 'the printer'.

### *Keep the reader involved*

Some words are more involving than others. For example, 'can help' is more involving than 'will allow', as in 'This program can help you to improve throughput...' rather than 'This program will allow you to improve throughput...'.

### *Think about viewpoint and voice*

Use the second person; involve the user; instead of 'If it is necessary to input data...', write 'If you need to input data...'. Use the active voice, as in 'Turn on the barcode reader.'

### *Provide assistance*

Keep it as simple as possible in the first instance. For example, encourage the users to check the easy things first, as in 'Is the scanner switched on?' or 'Has the data cable fallen off the back of the workstation?' However, be wary of getting the users too involved; consider whether they are qualified to change printer toner cartridges, for example. If more detailed diagnostic information is required, consider moving it to the back of the user documentation as an appendix.

### *Consider word order*

Examine the correct sequence of events, and instruct the users in that order. For example, write: 'Ensure that the printer is switched on, then send the file to the printer' rather than 'Send the file to the printer, having first ensured that it is switched on'.

## The next stage

In the next article, I shall be looking at using aspects of document and page construction to help users get the best from the documents. **C**

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# Eel meat again!

**Richard Hodgkinson**, Convenor of Working Group 2, reports back from the latest meeting in Takayama.

At the invitation of the Information Processing Society of Japan (IPSJ), ISO/IEC JTC 1/SC 7/WG 2 — System software documentation, met on 25–27 October in Takayama, Japan.

Attending were Mike Unwalla FISTC, our new PUKE (Principal UK Expert), Annette Reilly of the STC (USA), Ralph Robinson also of the STC (Canada), Phil Cohen FISTC representing Australia, Tom Kurihara of the IEEE Computer Society (USA) and Professor Yoshikazu Yamamoto of the IPSJ (Japan).

The town of Takayama lies in the Japanese Alps and contains many streets of traditional wooden houses. Every spare piece of land is cultivated with vegetable plots, ornamental trees, small rice paddies and tea bushes. Twice a year, the population of 70,000 swells to more than 250,000 as three-story floats (*yatai*) parade through the streets at festival time. Local delicacies include the delicious Hida beef and eels. Very little of the eel is wasted... one main dish was accompanied by a soup containing whole eels' livers and vertebrae were also served in crunchy, one-inch lengths!

Despite our inability to speak Japanese, everyone was very helpful and treated us as honoured guests.

## Standards progressed *ISO/IEC 9127:1988, User documentation and cover information for consumer software packages*

This standard is being revised and had been delayed by substantial changes to its content. Following this meeting, the new draft and Disposition of National Body Comments were forwarded for DIS (Draft International Standard) ballot to the SC 7 Secretariat.

## *ISO/IEC CD 15289, Content of software and systems life cycle process information products (documentation)*

Following our previous meeting in Brisbane, the draft of this standard has been revised and shared with other SC 7 Working Groups for comment. The changes were discussed in Takayama

and the new draft and Disposition of National Body Comments were subsequently forwarded for FCD (Final Committee Draft) ballot.

## Study Group on User Documentation Standards *Background*

This study group was formed in 2003 to determine the appropriate relationship and structure of future WG 2 standards, taking into account the ISO/IEC JTC 1/SC 7 liaison with the IEEE Computer Society (IEEE 1063 addresses Software User Documentation and has been tabled for adoption by ISO).

The current suite of WG 2 documentation standards was created to fulfil specific requirements and was not structured in accordance with an overall plan. Consequently, there are several overlaps and gaps between the standards produced.

The Study Group met for the final time in Takayama and completed the work from its previous meeting in Brisbane, where members had considered the documentation needs of the audience for these standards. The audiences are identified as:

- Designers and developers of documentation
- Managers of documentation
- Acquirers and suppliers of documentation
- Testers and assessors of documentation.

Two main areas of documentation were also agreed:

1. Software user documentation
2. Systems and software lifecycle documentation.

Lists of specific requirements for these audiences and areas of documentation were drawn up. These were sub-divided into 'normative' requirements and 'informative' recommendations.

The existing collection of ISO and IEEE standards have also been reviewed as potential sources of content for the new suite of standards.

## *What happens next?*

The Study Group will provide a report to the SC 7 Secretariat in February and present its plan at the next SC 7 Plenary meeting (in Helsinki in May).

Thereafter, we expect to start the process of developing the new suite of standards. This will begin with the drafting and balloting of up to eight New Project (that is, Standards) proposals and, while the ballots are underway, WG 2 will start collecting input for the initial drafts.

If you would like to contribute to or review these software documentation standards, please contact me. **C**

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From left: Annette, Richard, Mike, Ralph, Yoshikazu, Phil and Tom

# Words and pictures across languages

**Heidi Kerschl** discusses the art of graphics management for multilingual documentation.

The old truism about a picture painting a thousand words is particularly appropriate when it comes to designing operating instructions and manuals. However, it is not always easy to find the best way of integrating and preparing visuals when documentation is to be published in a range of languages, or 'localised'. If clients come to us with what is effectively a blank sheet of paper, we often guide them towards using structured FrameMaker® for producing their documentation, since FrameMaker offers a good localisation workflow and is highly compatible with specialist tools that we use. It is also beneficial in offering a clear route forward if the client wishes to move to a clip management system at a future stage. That said, we also work closely with many clients who produce excellent, well-presented documentation in Word.

Common to both environments is the need to manage all graphics that are used in the manuals properly, particularly screen captures that are likely to need localisation. We recommend that all graphics be held as external files, referenced from the Word or FrameMaker files, since this saves on file bloat and gives a clearer path through the localisation process.

If an English manual contains 84 screen shots that are held as external graphics files, we can simply replace these graphics files with the German versions (using the same file names) when producing the German manual, for example. The German graphics then appear instantly in the right places in the manual. If the graphics were originally embedded in the Word or FrameMaker file, it is a time-consuming and laborious task to go through the manual, find each English screen capture image, delete it, and insert the German one in its place. Added to that, of course, is the risk of somebody overlooking one or putting the wrong screen in the wrong place (easily done when using similar screens in a foreign language). This all involves additional time (and thus cost) during final quality control checks. Far better

to take a quality assurance view and to use a system that gets it right first time.

However, even in documentation expertly prepared in FrameMaker, with all graphics neatly linked to separate folders, it is not always easy to turn the material into a successful multilingual offering. The first rule is never to incorporate into a graphic any text that might need translation. It is very

**As you may imagine, revision-tracking 700 screens per manual — and at any one time, we tend to work on three manuals concurrently for this particular client — can be a little tricky.**

time-consuming and costly to manually edit .eps, .tif and other graphic files, especially when the same process needs to be repeated for 10 to 15 languages. Instead of embedding text in graphics, use call-outs or link text to numbered table entries.

Managing local language screen shots — an essential element of most user manuals — presents specific challenges. First of all, you need to check that you have the correct number and kind of screens for each language. Then you need to check that the screens don't contain typos, truncated strings or bits of another language — it can be difficult to explain the differences between Iberian and Brazilian Portuguese to a Japanese software engineer! Let's assume the manual contains 55 screen shots and is translated into 10 languages. Now we are managing 550 individual files. Let's then assume that, on average, 10 of these need correcting in five languages. So now we're up to 600 screens. Our corrective input results in the client realising the need for more revision and sending us an amended set of another 10 screens per language, and we are now managing 700 individual files. At the end of the project, we need to make sure that the correct and most up-to-date screens have been used in the manual for all languages.

As you may imagine, revision-tracking 700 screens per manual — and

at any one time, we tend to work on three manuals concurrently for this particular client — can be a little tricky. That's why, inspired by David Smith's demonstration of his document management system at the 2003 ISTC conference in Buxton, our Managing Director Nick Rosenthal decided we should develop our own screen clip management application. After all, it's not really relevant whether you're

downloading, editing and re-uploading documents or screen clips as long as you establish the right kind of access, meta-data, editing and reporting functions.

About a year after Buxton, our own screen clip management system was operational, and we, our clients and our translators are delighted with it. Those who attended Nick's talk at the recent STC event in Munich will already be familiar with it, but anyone who would like to know more about the pitfalls of managing graphics should keep an eye out, because Nick may well demonstrate our system at future ISTC and STC events. In the meantime, see below for a few tips for avoiding pitfalls. **C**

## Tips for including graphics in multilingual documents

- Link graphics as external files.
- Don't embed text in graphics.
- Supply local language screen shots.
- Have local language screen shots checked by a translator.
- Maintain tight version control on screen shots and graphics.

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*How long have you been in the business and what do you do?*

About 15 years. I'm a Content Developer on a team responsible for aiding committees in developing and publishing British Standards. The committee members supply the technical expertise and we supply the writing expertise. I don't actually write the standards — the committees do that — but I give advice on document structure and correct wording, edit the drafts, and work with committee members to resolve queries. I'm also responsible for getting the completed standards to print and for proof-reading the typeset version.

*What is the most rewarding aspect of your job?*

It's always good to see a standard published, especially if it has taken two or three years to complete. The ones I most enjoy working on are those that make a difference to people's lives, such as fire safety standards.

*What is hardest?*

It can sometimes be difficult to establish a good working relationship if a committee have been working on a draft for a long time and I come along and do a hatchet job on it! Fortunately, this happens less often, now that we get involved in new projects at an earlier stage. It can also be difficult to persuade committees that, however important their standard is, there is no reason not to follow the rules.

*What's the worst thing about being a technical communicator?*

Some of the more routine work can get fairly tedious, but that's true of any job. It can be difficult explaining what

## In this issue, we meet Sophie Watson, who recently took on the role of Newsletter Editor for the ISTC.

I do too! Actually, one of the worst things is really silly: filling in official forms is a nightmare because my job never fits into any of the categories.

*How did you get into technical communication?*

By accident. I got a job temping as a DTP operator at British Telecom when I was 19, on the strength of knowing Ventura Publisher from a post-school year in a reprographics office. I constantly queried the text I worked on, so I was given additional editing and proofreading roles. I stayed there until the Technical Publications Unit was outsourced in 1994, and I've worked in technical communication ever since.

*What qualifications do you have?*

- A-levels in English, German, Maths and Art
- BA in Typography & Graphic Communication (1<sup>st</sup> class hon).

*Did you get any of these qualifications later in life?*

I didn't go to university until I was 27. My A-level grades from school weren't good enough for my chosen course, so I started work instead. I studied for Art A-level at evening classes in my mid-20s and won a place on the degree course as a result.

*Have employers supported your professional development?*

Not until I started working at BSI; I've been a temp or contractor most of my working life.

*Is there enough training in technical communication?*

There might be enough, but I'm not sure that it's apparent — I can't think of any courses off the top of my head.

*How do you think technical communication has changed?*

The growth of electronic documentation has probably been the single biggest change.

*How do you expect it to change in the next five years?*

It's difficult to predict, but I think that technology will continue to develop. Maybe we'll see CD-ROMs with interactive technical manuals that speak to the user!

*If you could change career, what would you do instead and why?*

I would quite like to be more involved in graphic design, but that's still a form of communication. I can't imagine not being involved in communication in one way or another.

*What made you offer to edit the ISTC Newsletter?*

I was asked to have a go at it by Iain Wright, who is a former colleague of mine from BT, and I hate to refuse a request from a friend! Seriously, I thought it would be an interesting challenge, and one that would enable me to get more involved with the ISTC. It was also a chance to use some of my design and typography skills, which I don't use much as part of my day job.

*How do you hope to develop the Newsletter in the future?*

For the time being I'm not planning many changes, other than the tweaking I've already done on the design. The format works well for an electronic document, and I don't want to expand the page count too much because of the effect that would have on file size. What I would like is to get more input from individual members to maximise interest and thereby readership.

*What do you need from ISTC members?*

Content! I'd like to see more input from members: articles, snippets of news (personal or professional), suggestions, ideas... Over 1500 people read the Newsletter but very few contribute to it at present, which I think is a pity. Of course, I'd love it if more people wrote articles, but two-line news items are just as useful and it doesn't take long to fire off an e-mail if you come across something of interest. I also want to know what members would like to see in the Newsletter, so that I can do my best to provide it. Feedback — whether in the form of letters for publication or personal e-mails — is really useful and can only lead to improvements. **C**

Send contributions for the ISTC Newsletter to Sophie at [newsletter.editor@istc.org.uk](mailto:newsletter.editor@istc.org.uk)





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