

The CAPITAL LETTER



Society for Technical Communication
Sacramento Chapter Newsletter

October 2006

Newsletter Redux

Welcome back, readers. I hope you all had a healthful, enjoyable summer. I'm pleased to announce the continuation of The Capital Letter. First, an introduction. I've been a member of STC (and the Sacramento chapter) for several years, though I've remained a lurker the whole time. In an effort to get more involved with the chapter and meet some members, I finally took the bait on Chuck Petch's repeated requests for volunteers. Several phone calls and emails later, I found myself the new editor of this newsletter.



If you've read the excellent past issues produced by Jim Collins, you'll notice that this issue is a short one. Although there are several items related to chapter, regional, and national events, there is no theme, other than ['feedback, please.'](#) My objective is to collect as much feedback as I can about what you, the readers, would like this newsletter to provide. Presumably, member interests vary widely according to level of experience, employment status, training needs and so on.

If you are relatively new to technical writing, halfway in (a hybrid like me), or considering a career change, what would you find most useful? Employment tips? Networking help? And what about those of you (the majority of chapter members, I understand) who have been in the field 10, 15, or 20 years? If you don't need advice on what employers are looking for, do you still like to hear about networking opportunities or other peer gatherings? Would you like to read about another member's success with the XML editor you're considering? Or how a member navigated through the job search maze in record time? [Flood my inbox.](#) Let me know.

One more thing: will you share your expertise? If you have even a small bit of wisdom to pass along to other members, please consider putting it into words and sending it to me. Can you write a review for a content management system that others might want to use? Have you built a tech pubs department from the ground up? Did you succeed in your search for a technical writing position in our region? As I plan themes for the next several issues, I will need content to make those themes meaningful. I aim to deliver quality content to our chapter via *The Capital Letter*, and I hope you will help me do that.

Chris Masotti, Editor



SOCIETY FOR TECHNICAL COMMUNICATION

About The Capital Letter

The Capital Letter is published ten times a year, September through June, by the Sacramento Chapter of the Society for Technical Communication. Subscriptions are available to nonmembers for \$10 per year. Advertising rates are \$30 per quarter page. We welcome letters to the editor, articles, and information regarding meetings, workshops, and courses pertaining to technical communication. Please submit in MS Word, or plain text format. Articles may be edited as necessary for content and length. The deadline for submission is the 20th of each month for the following month's issue. Send submissions to the Managing Editor, Chris Masotti, chritti@sbcglobal.net or mail to:

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About STC

The Society for Technical Communication is the world's largest professional organization devoted to the advancement of the theory and practice of technical communications. STC's more than 15,000 members include writers, editors, illustrators, graphic designers, multimedia artists, photographers, videographers, printers, publishers, educators, students and others whose work involves making technical information understandable by those who use it.

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STC Mission Statement
Creating and supporting a forum for communities of practice in the profession of technical communications.

In this Issue

- 1.....[Editor's Comments](#)
- 3.....[President's Letter](#)
- 4.....[Observations on the 2006 STC Conference in Las Vegas](#)
- 5.....[Sacramento Area Events](#)
- 6.....[Two Down, One to Go](#)
- 8.....[The New World of STC](#)

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President's Letter

Chuck Petch, President

Welcome to the new Sacramento STC chapter newsletter, edited by Chris Masotti. The chapter is most fortunate that Chris has accepted the challenge to produce our chapter's monthly missive. The newsletter is an opportunity for Chris to expand his writing credits while providing you the latest information about what's happening in the Northern California's technical communications community. Chris plans to bring you a monthly calendar of writing events in Sacramento and nearby cities, current local employment information, as well as reviews and reports about what's happening in the chapter. We hope you will find this new publication informative and helpful to your career as a technical communicator in the Sacramento area.

If you read this month's *STC Tieline* in early September, you know the society is emphasizing its membership drive. In recent years, society membership has declined both locally and nationally as the technical employment market drove people into other jobs and professions. As the economy improved, I have to believe some folks have returned to technical communication, and we would like to bring those old friends back into our community.



Please consider mentioning to your coworkers who used to belong to the society or those who never have that STC is still here, and we're trying harder to be relevant. Our focus locally is employment and training. We want to help members prepare for and find good jobs and help employers find good communicators. Additionally, we have a new local participation option called "Friend of STC Sacramento." This option allows full participation in Sacramento activities, training, and publications for only \$35 annually. It's the ideal way for newcomers to try out the society or old friends to come back at minimal cost. Of course, if you want to enjoy full participation in the international society, including publications, several levels of STC membership are available.

In closing, I also want to remind you that STC Sacramento offers free online training in hundreds of popular programs and technologies to our members and friends. We recently changed the model to let you start training at any time and end whenever you finish your studies, as long as space is available. So why wait? If you've always wanted to learn more about XML, Javascript, FrameMaker, Adobe Acrobat, or whatever, drop me an email, and I'll sign you up for free training at vtc.com. It could give a boost to your career!

Thanks for looking over the new newsletter. We hope you'll give us a few minutes every month to keep you informed about what's happening in technical communication in Sacramento and the nearby Bay Area.

Observations on the 2006 STC Conference in Las Vegas

Gin Galt, STC Member, Sacramento Chapter

For the first time in over seven years, I had the opportunity to go to an STC conference. The last time I went, I worked in the P&P department of a large California bank. I now work for a mid-sized community bank in a department of one. I am now one of those Lone Writers that I used to just hear about.

Going to Las Vegas, I certainly had different expectations for the conference than for conferences in the past. Working for the larger bank, I used to go to sessions about the latest software and online technology. Our processes, the way work came in and went out of the department, were pretty much in place and working well.

This time, I focused on sessions about organizing the documentation function, project management, and being a single contributor department. I networked with others in similar situations to my own. I had the chance to speak to vendors about a couple of software packages that I use, but new “toys” were not something I looked for this time.



Although a couple of the sessions I attended didn't live up to their potential, I'm happy to report that I was able to attend some really good presentations:

Building a Documentation Department from the Ground Up was presented by Barrie Byron from Voxware, Inc. She was animated and fun and obviously enjoyed her job. She had some great tips for creating a department from scratch.

Hands-on Project Management focused on how to use project management in your own group, even if others in your company might not be as organized.

Leveraging Technical Communication into a Process Improvement Career was presented by Elizabeth McQueen, PMP. As a lone writer, it's difficult to create a career path for myself. I've always thought, "I work in this one-person bank department; if I want change or a promotion, there's no place for me to go but someplace else." This session helped me see ways to improve my skills and move forward, even if I choose to stay with my current employer.

I also attended a number of interesting progression sessions that provided short discussions in lots of different areas. Besides the regular sessions, I also attended the SIG networking luncheon and sat at a Policies and Procedures SIG table. First, I met a woman who worked for a large bank in Canada. They use SharePoint for their Intranet, something my bank is thinking of doing. I also talked with the three technical writers for all of Home Depot – and I thought I was overworked! At the end of the luncheon, I had a chance to talk with a senior product manager from Adobe, which was enlightening and beneficial because I use a number of Adobe products, including RoboInfo, PageMaker, and PhotoShop. I think I learned more during lunch than I did during most of the other sessions!

I'm hoping that what happened to me in Las Vegas doesn't stay in Las Vegas (sorry, I couldn't help it!), and that I make the opportunities to use all the great information I picked up while I was there. I'm already looking forward to Minneapolis!

Sacramento Area Events

Next STC Sacramento Meeting: Wednesday, October 18th

Speaker: Strom Snyder, InfoPros

Sacramento's Job Market

Do you have questions about employment opportunities in the region? Would you like information that could help you land that next job or contract? To learn about these and other employment related topics, come listen, ask questions, and discuss tactics with Strom Snyder, an employment expert with many years experience as a headhunter and recruiter. It will be an open Q&A session, with questions we get from you in advance, plus spontaneous questions from the floor. You won't want to miss this one!

Strom Snyder is an experienced staffing professional with a track record of success recruiting and managing the recruitment of high-performance employees. He has seven years of experience in corporate recruitment and 4 years in agency staffing. He has worked as a headhunter, executive recruiter, college recruiter, and technical recruiter. Strom also has an education in information systems and has worked as an IT consultant.

Additionally, Strom has been a peer instructor at Intel University and guest speaker at UC Berkeley Extension. He is passionate about matching the right person with the right job. Strom has worked at InfoPros since 2003 where he enjoys offering temporary and regular employment career options to developers, engineers, technicians, technical writers, and others.

Free to STC Sacramento chapter members

Free to first time visitors and Friends of STC

\$5 for non-members

Date: Wednesday, October 18, 2006

Place: [Coco's Bakery and Restaurant, 7887 Madison Avenue, Citrus Heights](#)

Networking/No-host dinner: 6:00 pm

Presentation: 7:00pm

Next Month's Meeting: Wednesday, November 15, 2006

Speaker: Bill Teie.

Creating An Elaborate Text On Firefighting And Marketing It

2006 STC Region 5 Conference: *50 Facets of Technical Communication*

The STC 2006 Region 5 Conference is being held in Addison, Texas, on Thursday, November 2, 2006 - Saturday, November 4, 2006. Go to <http://www.region5conf.com> for more information.

Two Down, One to Go

Beau Cain, Director, The Region Formerly Known As 8

The Board of Directors meeting at the Society's Annual Conference in Las Vegas marked the end of my second year as a Director, and the beginning of my third and final year in that office. In the two years that have passed, Region 8 chapters and members have made notable contributions to the future operation of our Society. I would like to see Region 8 lead the Society into its next round of changes during my final year as the Director of our region.

Changing Communication Technology

I can hardly believe it, but STC's Communication Director Maurice Martin has already posted STC's very first podcast on the Society's website: www.stc.org/stcmembers/podcasts01.asp (member login required).

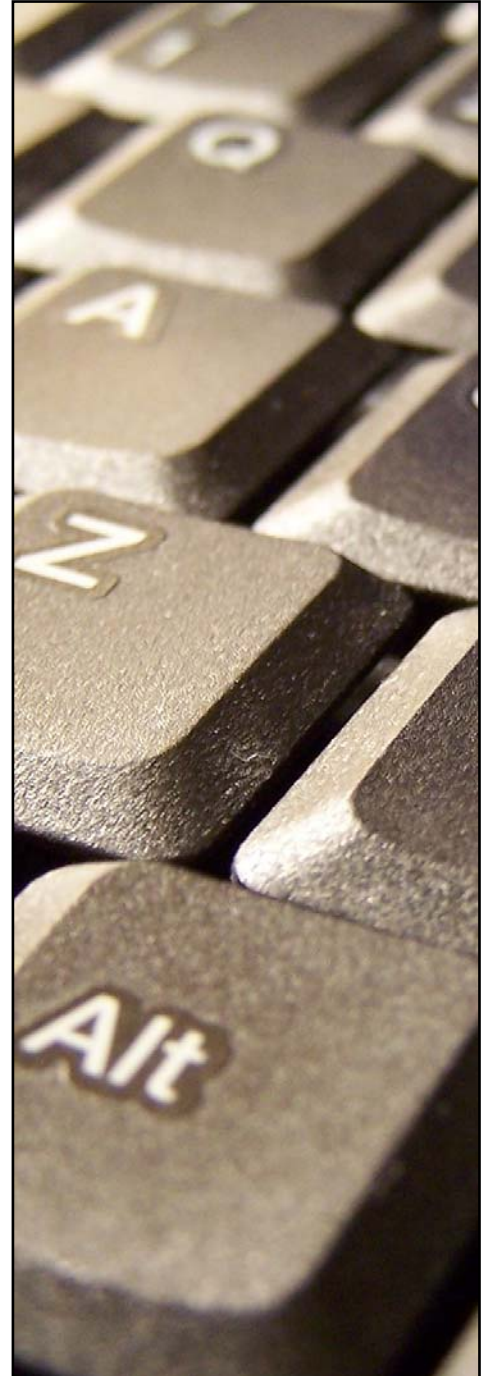
Although podcasting isn't bleeding edge technology, this deployment of a new communication technology seems to have happened at light speed compared to decades of the Society's seeming technophobia. Not only that, but Maurice is ready to publish the Society's second podcast, too!

More personally, I'm pleased that the Society's first podcast is the audio recording of the Leadership Day presentation Chapter Public Relations Best Practices Forum, presented by my long-time STC buddy, George Slaughter, of the Houston chapter. The second podcast will be the audio recording of the Leadership Day presentation about the new STC-CDX.org site ("STC Communication Department eXperimental website") which was given by TransAlpine chapter's commanding Jang Graat. Cleverly, stc-cdx.org is the site where these podcasts will be available for downloading. Everyone, please listen and learn, then contribute! Bravo George, Jang, and Maurice!

Changing Criteria For Recognition

Over the past two years, fewer and fewer Region 8 chapters have applied for Chapter Achievement Awards (CAA), but more chapters have been contenders for my pick as Pacesetter Award winning chapters. The Society's Pacesetter Award is given to no more than one chapter in each region in a year for successfully deploying innovative operations or programs that can be adopted beneficially by other chapters. It was a tough call to distinguish Orange County chapter for its radically different strategy and plan to make their operation self-supporting.

The Community Achievement Award Evaluation Committee (CAAEC) is now accepting input from chapter leaders to help re-design the CAA criteria to make it more relevant to community operations. I encourage every volunteer who has served as an elected leader to send their suggestions to me before July 1. As well, I thank Berkeley chapter President Joe Devney for



already giving me his table of very well-considered suggestions. If you want to read President Devney's list of suggestions, e-mail me.

Changing Community Representation

Separating community sponsorship from the Directors is the most profound and pervasive change that the Board has adopted for the Society in decades. Members now elect their Directors at large rather than by region, because by law Directors of non-profit organizations must represent all members, not just members in their region.

But the Board of Directors recognizes the importance of chapter and SIG activities in the Society's operations, and realizes that these entities deserve Board-level attention. We now have the Leadership Community Resource (LCR), a standing committee of volunteers that communicates with all the chapters and SIGs, and that reports directly to the Society's Executive Director.

The truly great aspect of the LCR is that since it is a committee, it allows far greater volunteer participation in chapter and SIG assistance than did the old Director-Sponsor model. Now you can volunteer to assist communities, and not just your chapter or your SIG, but all STC communities, through participation in the LCR. Contact the LCR through **De Murr** (deirdre.a.murr at disney.com) to get involved and become known as a great servant leader in our Society.

Changing the Community Funding Model

There's not a chapter or SIG officer among us who doesn't recognize this: community funding is changing. The old system of rebating a small portion of a member's dues to the chapters and SIGs to which he or she "belongs" is under scrutiny. In fact, the Board of Directors now avoids using the word "rebate" when speaking of community funding. Instead, they use the word "funding" to help them keep an open mind about how member money might reach chapters and SIGs.

What does this mean for your chapter? I believe it means that every chapter must examine its operation to determine how it can become a money-maker, and then prepare to charge for its services. I hope that each and every community identifies the value they provide their affiliates, determines an attractive price for that affiliation, and sells it. Do you know what your chapter can sell that would pay for its operation? What services are you willing to pay your chapters or SIGs for?

And how does this align with the Society's operation? Isn't STC a non-profit charitable organization? Are we allowed to sell services in order to accumulate financial reserves that help us assure our continued operation and service to members and the community at large? Read on.

Changing Our Strategic Plan

I encourage every chapter leader to examine the Society's new strategic plan (www.stc.org/ppt/orgChart0506.ppt). In particular, pay close attention to the new strategic objectives chart in slide 6, and the explanatory slides 7 through 12. In keeping with the nature of our craft, even the design of this strategic objectives chart is different from our old Strategic Plan. There are concentric circles that identify our core values, surrounded by objectives stated in segments.

The core values are:

- Communicating Effectively
- Cultivating a Risk-taking Global Culture

- Supporting STC with Leading-edge Technology

The objectives are:

- Telling our powerful story
- Implementing a strategic business model
- Growing relationships and choosing partners
- Making money
- Growing and supporting our leaders
- Improving practice through research and education

This is radically different from recent strategic plans in that it is strongly business and marketing oriented. Our communities need to be strongly business and marketing oriented now, because we are recovering from losses related to the struggling economy.

To that end, I ask you to contact **Presidents Jeff Randolph** and **Adele Sommers** in order to get solid ideas about how to make your chapter a well-marketed, money-making business. I urge you to do so this month, as we begin our last year of serving Region 8's members and colleagues together.

Orange County STC website: www.ocstc.org/
San Luis Obispo STC website: www.slostc.org/

As well, I urge each chapter officer to read **STC President Paula Berger's** slideshow, *The New World of STC*: www.stc.org/ppt/orgChart0506.ppt. Pay close attention to slides 14 through 22. They are the graphic depiction of the managing entities that will drive STC's operations this year, and they name the people you will want to contact in order to get answers or give service.

Two down, one year to go, colleagues. Let's make Region 8 lead the way in beneficial changes for STC, our craft, our colleagues, and ourselves.

The New World of STC

Cindy Currie, STC Fellow and Region 1 Director (dir1@stc.org; 603.488.5027)

It's a brand new STC year! Our new President, Paula Berger, has chosen the slogan "The New World of STC" for this year. And a new world it is!

We have a brand **new Executive Director!** She is Susan Allen Burton. Susan accepted the position just days before our Annual Conference earlier this month and was able to be in Las Vegas. She was introduced to attendees during the conference opening program on Monday, May 8. She is dynamic and engaging, with a wealth of association management experience. Susan is the new "face of STC" we've been hoping to find! She will officially join STC by early August. Visit www.stc.org/membership/initiatives01.asp for more information.

The **new Board of Directors** is now in place, effective Monday, May 8, 2006 during the annual Business Meeting, held at the Annual Conference. The Board is smaller and includes: President, First Vice President (1VP), Second Vice President (2VP), Secretary, Treasurer, Immediate Past President (IPP), and eight Directors: six Regional Directors (Regions 1, 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8) and two Directors At Large. Visit www.stc.org/about/board01.asp for details on who's who.

The Executive Director and the **STC Office Management team** (Maurice Martin, Merrick Bechini, and Peg Cottrell) all regularly attend board meetings to ensure tight alignment between the board (that

sets strategy) and the office (that executes strategy). The Office Management team has a wealth of experience to add to the mix, so we're all happy to have working so closely with us. We're all the better for it.

STC has a new Interim Strategic Plan for the 2006-07 year. This newly updated plan is available at www.stc.org/PDF_Files/StrategicPlan.pdf. I highly encourage you to read it to fully understand where STC is going. (And going there, we are!) The graphic **STC Strategy Map** (figure 1) shows our strategic priorities for this year and the specific strategies associated with them. You will see this graphic a lot! Get to know it!

STC Strategy Map

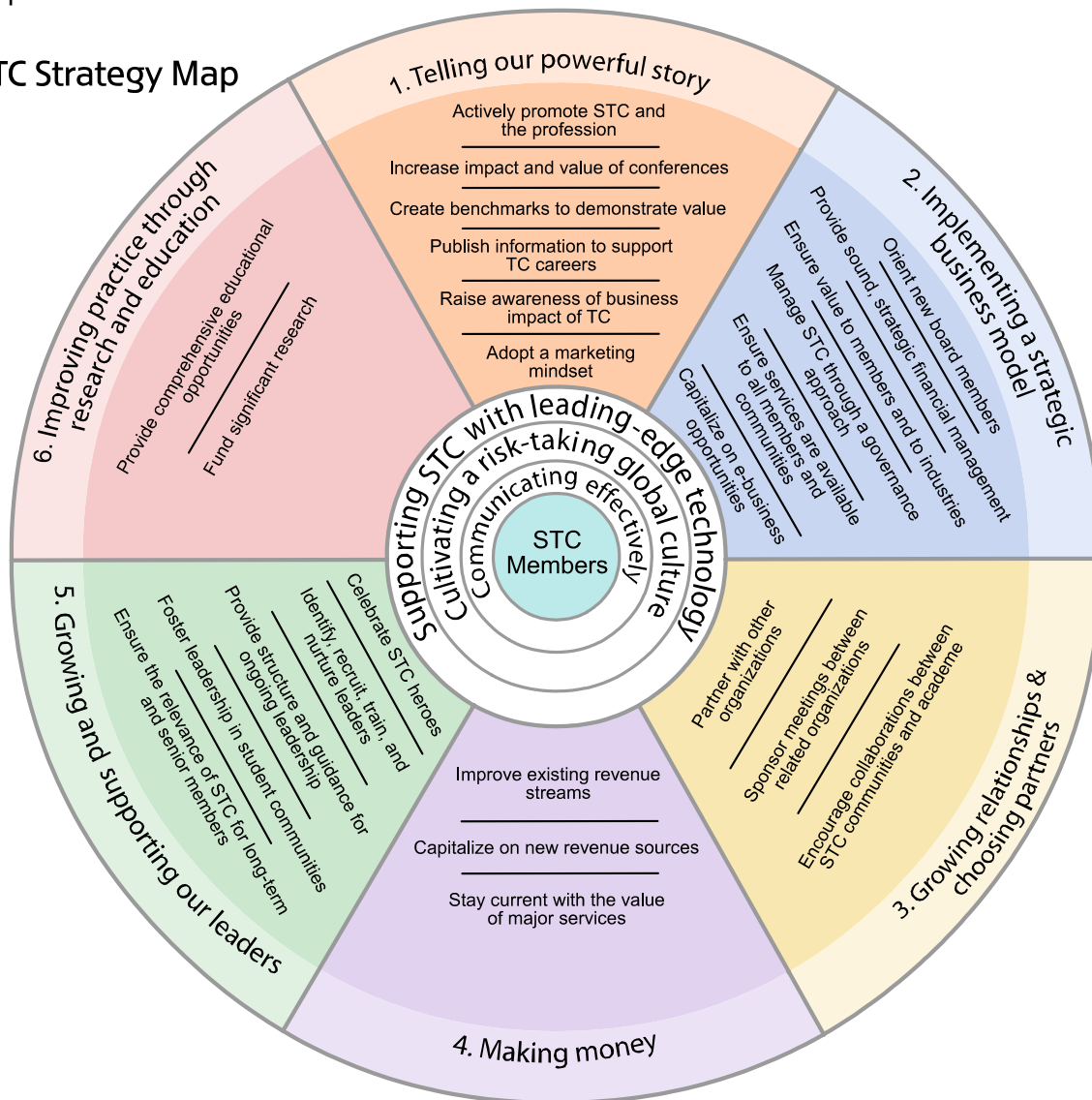


Figure 1: STC Strategy Map: The Circle of Strategic Priorities for 2006-07

Your community strategic plan should reflect the priorities and strategies in the Society document. A good exercise will be to review your plan against the Society plan to ensure you're in alignment and working to help fulfill this year's STC goals.

All major initiatives have an overseer at the Board level (I'm overseeing Communications with new Director At Large, Jeff Staples), and an STC office liaison (Maurice Martin for Communications) to ensure that there is a firm link between the board and the committees and how strategy is being driven through to execution and desired outcomes.

Visit www.stc.org/ppt/orgChart0506.ppt to view a presentation that shows how STC is organized this year and who's leading each committee. It's a very different model from previous years.

STC is now well-positioned to meet our strategic goals for the year. We have a great team in place and a great plan to execute, so I'm excited to get to work on this year's priorities.

Don't miss this one! STC Region 2 will host ***Making Cents of Making Sense: Technical Communication and Business*** in London, England, 13-14 October 2006. This regional conference is aimed at companies in need of technical communication and the people who produce it. The program is going to include speakers who can show the business value of quality technical communication. Visit www.stcuk.org/R2conf for more information. (The next Board meeting will be held on 12-13 October in London, so the full board will be in attendance at this conference.)