

# The CAPITAL LETTER



Society for Technical Communication  
Sacramento Chapter Newsletter

January 2007

## Getting Your Money's Worth

Hello readers. I trust you are all well on the way to realizing those self-improvements you envisioned on December 31<sup>st</sup>—you know...quitting vices, getting to the gym *at least* once per week, and, of course, making a few additions to your bag of technical communications skills.



If you're already off the wagon on the first two, well, can't help you there. But, in hopes of helping with the skill set, I'm glad to report plenty of opportunities for STC members looking to expand their horizons.

Let's look at workshops, conferences, and seminars. There are quite a few options within a two-hour drive for most members, for as little as \$22. Some of these are web seminars that you can attend in your pajamas. Subject matter ranges from content management to harnessing the power of DITA, so there's likely something for nearly everyone. See page 5 for the list of upcoming events.

If you'd like to 'attend' the live web seminars that STC is offering, but can't because they are held during working hours, there are some changes that will interest you. See Chuck Petch's article on page 3 for details on this and other benefits that you can reap as a member of STC. If you are working on your portfolio, and considering putting the Framemaker notch in your belt, Paul Mooney has some pointers that you'll find helpful. He gives some background on the demand for Framemaker among employers, and some practical advice on acquiring the fundamental skills that those employers are seeking in applicants. See Paul's article on page 4 of this issue.

And finally, the STC Sacramento chapter is hard at work putting together monthly meetings that feature an impressive collection of speakers. The last couple of meetings had members sticking around for an extra hour or so, getting the inside track on changes in the Sacramento job market, or learning what it takes to make it in self-publishing a technical manual.

Following suit in creating value for members, this month's meeting offers front-row access to an information security expert. Rosa Umbach, Assistant Chief State Information Security Officer for the State of California, will be speaking on security measures that are small on pain, and big on gain. Details are on page 7. I hope to see you there.

Chris Masotti, Editor



### 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](mailto: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.

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Hospitality	Vacant
Satellite Liaison	Vacant

## President's Letter

*by Chuck Petch, Sacramento Chapter President*

Even as the children were nestled all snug in their beds, it seems STC international was busy in their workshop creating value for members. Over the holidays we received a number of announcements that would have been easy to miss if you were busy lighting Hanukkah candles or hanging your stockings by the chimney with care.

On December 20th, the announcement came that online registration was open for the 54th annual international conference, called the Technical Communication Summit, in Minneapolis May 12-16. The email message points out that at an early bird registration fee of \$645, the conference is a good value compared to other conferences. Programs and events have yet to be announced, but I'll say that the conference has always left me educated, energized, and enthusiastic about our profession. So if you want to enjoy professional enrichment combined with springtime in the north country of the Midwest, I'm certain you'll get plenty of value from attending. For details, see the conference website:

<http://www.stc.org/54thConf/index.asp>.

Around the same time the international conference was announced, Beau Cain, the Region 8 sponsor, sent around news of special discounts being offered to STC Northern California members who want to attend the DITA 2007-West conference February 5-7, 2007 at the DoubleTree Hotel in San Jose. XML and DITA are hot topics these days, making the discount a welcome value add for members of our chapter. See this website for details: <http://www.travelthepath.com/conf/dita2007.shtml>.

Barely had the lighted ball fallen on Times Square when STC announced a major improvement in webinars. A significant objection has been that webinars were often scheduled during working hours and could not be viewed at another time. With the new year, STC is changing to a new hosting vendor that offers the ability to review the webinar after it has been presented. Now instead of interrupting your busy day, you'll be able to snuggle up under the covers and catch a webinar before turning in for the night. Many of these events are well worth the cost, but even if it's a sleeper, the sleep therapy may be worth the price of admission.

Scholarships are one more important benefit offered by STC international. Students pursuing an education and future career in technical communication should certainly apply. You'll find details about the scholarship here: [http://www.stc.org/edu/scholarshipInfo01\\_national.asp](http://www.stc.org/edu/scholarshipInfo01_national.asp).

Finally, our local chapter continues to meet the third Wednesday of every month at Coco's to offer diverse and interesting presentations and networking with your friends in the profession. We're a small and friendly group, so I hope you'll join us. Additionally, we still offer free online training in a very large list of applications at [vtc.com](http://vtc.com) and frequent employment postings to our employment Yahoo group.

All of this adds up to excellent value for members of STC. Since this is the time to renew your annual dues (renewals close at the end of February), we hope you'll not only renew your own membership but will encourage your coworkers to renew or join for the first time. Thanks for your support in the past, and we look forward to serving you and networking with you in the new year.



## November Meeting Report

*Staff*

At the November meeting, retired firefighter Bill Teie spoke about his experience as a self-published author of technical manuals on firefighting.

Bill's presentation was very, very good; inspirational even. He never thought of writing or publishing until he retired, and then he discovered there were no in-depth textbooks on firefighting, so he set out to write one. A little over a year later, he was done.

The book was very well received by college forestry programs and fire departments all over the country and around the world. It has spawned several smaller books and a couple of special rewrites for local audiences in other countries, including South Africa and Australia.

His is a classic niche story. Bill found the right niche where few or inadequate books existed and filled it. In total, he has sold 78,000 self-published books, including 30,000 of the hardback textbooks at \$57 each. In the publishing industry, that's a very large and healthy number of sales; and he has many more years of sales to look forward to. Incidentally, he obtains the advice of a specialty firefighting bookstore owner for pricing. In general, he aims for a minimum of doubling his money when he sells at a 50% discount. In other words, if a book costs him \$5 to print, he sells it for at least \$20. That way, when he gives bookstores a 40% to 50% discount (\$8-10), he still makes a profit that matches or exceeds his cost (\$5-7). The cover price of \$20 breaks down like this: cost=\$5, Bill's profit=\$5, discount=\$10 (which includes shipping, distributor profit, and bookstore profit).

He handles all publishing and shipping himself, having the four-color hardbound books printed in bulk in China and then shipping to distributors, stores, and consumers as the orders come in. He has some of his smaller books printed in Sacramento at Commerce Printing. He finds local printers competitive for the smaller publications, but not for the large, hardbound book.

He has been running his book publishing business for about a dozen years and finds it an enjoyable post-retirement career. As he put it, he retired from one career and started another.

## The Employment Report

### Got Frame?

*Paul Mooney, Sacramento Chapter Employment Director*

As you peruse job openings on Monster, Dice, and Yahoo Hot Jobs, you'll notice that 30-40% of technical writing positions require Adobe Framemaker experience. Most companies and government agencies use Word exclusively (and all technical writers are expected to be proficient in Word), but up to 80% of professional technical writing organizations do require Framemaker skills.

For those with little or no Framemaker experience, you can develop your Framemaker skills in a number of ways. To begin with, take advantage of the online Framemaker training offered through the Sacramento STC Chapter (it's free to members). Also, if you go to Amazon.com and search on Framemaker, you'll find several "four-star" books ranging from self-paced tutorials to advanced techniques. Many of these books can be purchased used on eBay for as little as five dollars!

If you're serious about improving your skills, then access to Framemaker is critical. The current version (7.2) costs \$795, but as a student (take a night class), you can purchase an academic license for \$389. Another trick is to buy an older version on eBay for \$50, and then buy the 7.2 upgrade for \$189 (be careful when buying older versions online—the license can be used only once to upgrade to a newer

version). Spending a few hundred dollars to buy Framemaker may sound extreme, but it's an investment that will pay huge dividends when you land a better, higher-paying job.



Once you've acquired one or two books and a copy of Framemaker, plan on spending several hours a week studying and practicing. Treat it like a college course: identify the chapters you need to complete each week and stick with it (remember, your goal is to improve your employment opportunities and income). If possible, find a friend who knows Framemaker, and ask for help when that master template misbehaves.

In terms of Framemaker skills, start with the basic skills and then work towards the more advanced techniques:

1. Create and edit files based on existing templates.
2. Develop and maintain a variety of new templates.
3. Convert simple documents to other formats (Word > Frame, Frame > XML, etc.)

You can easily add Framemaker documents to your portfolio by taking a document you've done in Word and converting it to Framemaker, including building your own template. By the time you're done, not only will you have a sample that you can hand to employers and say, "I did this completely in Frame from the ground up," you'll also know Framemaker pretty well, particularly if you convert several different types of documents.

Lastly, look for opportunities to apply your Framemaker skills and build your resume. Volunteer to write a small document, or accept a short-term contract. All training and work experience is relevant. In the "Skills" section of your resume, include a clear description of your Framemaker knowledge, and add samples to your portfolio from your converted documents and other work. In preparation for interviews, anticipate and practice answering questions about your Framemaker skills and experience.

Developing your Framemaker skills is neither difficult nor elusive. Create a three-month training plan, buy Framemaker if necessary, and augment your portfolio. Once done, apply for positions requiring basic Framemaker skills, and then continue to advance your knowledge of Framemaker. I think you'll agree: the rewards are well worth the effort.

*Many thanks to Chuck Petch, President of the Sacramento STC Chapter, and Strom Synder, Staffing Services Manager at InfoPros, for their contributions to this article.*

## Events

### January 17, 2007

LIVE WEB SEMINAR: The X Factor—From HTML to XHTML

<http://www.stc.org/edu/seminarsList01.asp>

Neil Perlin will host an STC live Web seminar, "The X Factor—From HTML to XHTML," from 1 to 2:30 PM Eastern Time. The seminar will address how and why XHTML is used and how it works at the code level. Participants will learn how XHTML differs from HTML and XML, what its codes look like, how to convert files from other formats to XHTML, and what tools can be used to do so.

## **January 29-February 2, 2007**

DITA Boot Camp

Seaport Computer & Conference Center, 459 Seaport Ct. Redwood City, CA 94063

Sponsored by Astoria Software, JoAnn Hackos presents four workshops, Minimalism, Structured Writing, XML and DITA to give attendees a strong foundation for topic-based authoring. Registration: \$1950, CIDM members \$1755. STC members receive 10% discount by contacting Lovonya Thomas at (303) 232-7586 or [lovonya.thomas@comtech-serv.com](mailto:lovonya.thomas@comtech-serv.com).

## **January 31, 2007**

LIVE WEB SEMINAR: ANSI Z535.6—A New Standard for Safety Information in Product-accompanying Literature

<http://www.stc.org/edu/seminarsList01.asp>

Elaine Wisniewski and Steven Hall will present an STC live Web seminar, "ANSI Z535.6—A New Standard for Safety Information in Product-accompanying Literature," from 1 to 2:30 PM Eastern Time. Participants will learn about a new national standard for presenting safety messages in owners' manuals. The standard ANSI Z535.6, Product Safety Information in Product Manuals, Instructions, and Other Collateral Materials, was published in the fall of 2006. It focuses on the design and placement of product safety messages (or warnings) in product-accompanying documents.

## **February 1, 2007**

East Bay STC Meeting: "Documenting APIs: Your First Week on the Job," by Jim Bisso

Crow Canyon Country Club, 711 Silver Lake Drive, Danville, California

More Information: <http://ebstc.org/chapter-meetings.html>

For a technical communicator, the task of documenting an API can be overwhelming. By having a defined methodology for documenting APIs, the technical communicator can bring order to chaos. This presentation illustrates one such methodology for understanding the API documentation process and documentation deliverables.

## **February 5-7, 2007**

DITA 2007-West

Doubletree San Jose, San Jose, California USA

More Information: <http://www.travelthepath.com/conf/dita2007.shtml>

DITA 2007™-West, the second annual North American conference of DITA users, brings together experts from around the globe for a conference designed to help attendees leverage the power of the Darwin Information Typing Architecture OASIS Standard.

**February 7, 2007**

LIVE WEB SEMINAR: Creating Indexes on Web Sites and Intranets

<http://www.stc.org/edu/seminarsList01.asp>

Heather Hedden will host an STC live Web seminar, "Creating Indexes on Web Sites and Intranets," from 1 to 2:30 PM Eastern Time. The seminar will focus on manually created A-Z site indexes as a solution for managers of Web or HTML content. The structure of HTML indexes and a review of how such indexes compare with site maps, taxonomies, and search engines—as well as an overview of Web indexing tools—will be presented.

**April 13, 2007**

2007 US Spring CM Summit: 'Managing Content Management Projects'

The Palace Hotel, San Francisco CA (US)

More Information: <http://www.cmpros.org/events/summits/2007-us-spring-cm-summit>

This summit will cover how to effectively plan, manage, and implement complex content management projects. The goal is to give participants a range of tools they can use for their projects.

**Next STC Sacramento Meeting:** Wednesday, January 17, 2007

**Speaker:** Rosa Umbach, Computer Security Expert

**Topic:** Security: All Gain and no Pain

Rosa Umbach is the Assistant Chief State Information Security Officer for the State of California, responsible for developing statewide information security policy. Before taking that position in 2006, she was the Information Security Officer for the California Office of Statewide Health Planning and Development for more than five years. She has held information-security-related positions in other departments as well, having worked in those roles over the last twenty years.

Rosa has managed the development of training materials—print, video, and computer-based. Those materials have been widely cited and used not only among state agencies, but also in local governments. She is a former president of the Sacramento chapter of the Information Systems Security Association. She will be speaking about information security and privacy, and the challenges of communicating the importance of—and techniques required to assure—information security and privacy.

**Free to STC Sacramento chapter members**

**Free to first-time visitors and Friends of STC**

**\$5 for non-members**

**Date:** Wednesday, January 17, 2007

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

**Networking/No-host dinner:** 6:00 pm

**Presentation:** 7:00 pm

**Info:** [http://stcsacramento.org/03\\_Meetings.htm](http://stcsacramento.org/03_Meetings.htm)