

The Willamette Galley

Willamette Valley Chapter
Society for Technical Communication

Chapter Meeting

March 10—Mike Hamilton, “MadCap Tools Extravaganza!”

The Hilton Portland and Executive Tower provided the location for networking, an appetizer buffet, and program in Alexander’s Restaurant on the 23rd floor. The view of the city lights was beautiful.

Mike Hamilton, the vice president of Product Management for MadCap Software, presented an overview of the company’s tools for technical communicators (TCs). MadCap’s XML-based tools for:

Authoring

- ♦ Flare—Uses authoring and publishing to create a variety of deliverables for traditional print, Help systems, or Web- and mobile-based publishing
- ♦ Blaze—Uses content authoring for topic-based authoring and single-sourcing to publish complex documents
- ♦ X-Edit—Allows subject-matter experts (SMEs), managers, and other contributors to provide new information, comments, and annotations for project files
- ♦ X-Edit Review—Allows SMEs to add short comments or edits to project files in final project review

Multimedia

- ♦ Mimic—Creates simulations, videos, and animations for presentations, tutorials, and online use
- ♦ Capture—Captures computer graphics and Windows-editable images for use as single-sourced data
- ♦ Echo—Records, adds, and edits audio files

Localization

- ♦ Lingo—Integrates authoring, translation, and publishing files; protects file path data by tracking the files sent to translation companies

Advanced Support

- ♦ Analyzer—Checks and reports consistency errors, broken links, and other issues in documents and suggests possible fixes
- ♦ Feedback—Focuses on customers’ experiences, responds to customers’ comments, and creates action charts for documentation teams (Feedback works only with Flare products.) 

Calendar of Events

Oct. 21 (Thurs.): Jackie Damrau, “Transitioning from a Technical Writer to a Business Analyst,” Mentor Graphics (Wilsonville), 6:15 PM–8:15 PM; watch the WVC Web site (<http://www.stcwvc.org>) for last-minute details.

See “WVC Activities” on page 13 for additional chapter events.

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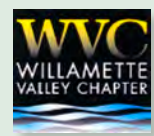
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STC Mission Statement

STC advances the theory and practice of technical communication across all user abilities and media so that both businesses and customers benefit from safe, appropriate, and effective use of products, information, and services.

The Willamette Galley

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President's Message

Dear Friends,

I'm relishing my job as WVC president today because I have the enormous pleasure of announcing that our chapter has been named an STC Community of Distinction.

To be considered for the Community of Distinction award, a chapter or community must document in detail how it has fulfilled a rigorous set of very specific requirements set out by STC. From the group of communities who do this successfully, the Community Achievement Award (CAA) committee recommends for Community of Distinction only one community per size category (for this year's award period, we fell in the 151–300 member category). The recommendations are considered by the STC Board, which must approve all Community of Distinction awards.

Karen Lane, the CAA committee representative who called to notify me of the award, commented at length about the strong performance of the chapter, particularly in a very difficult year. The official citation on the award will read: "For providing members with value-laden programs during



difficult financial times, supporting student members with mentoring and internship opportunities, and

using creative meeting formats and social media to expand the effective reach of the community."

This is a tremendous achievement for the chapter and one we could not have reached without contributions from many people over the past year. I hope you will join me in thanking—and congratulating—everyone who contributed to this accomplishment by volunteering to help with chapter activities, submitting ideas or feedback, contributing to our newsletter, or participated in chapter meetings and events.

We are truly fortunate to have in the Portland-Vancouver metropolitan area such dedicated members and such a vibrant community. Undoubtedly, this has been a very challenging period, but this award suggests that we are among the chapters that have been most successful at thriving and continuing to deliver value. I hope that you feel as fortunate as I do to have this community as a resource!

Congratulations!
Toni

Letter from the Co-Editors

Following through on the 2009–2010 foci of "Vital Careers: Diversity and Versatility," this issue addresses how WVC members manage their career paths for professional changes as well as individual preferences. The focus of this issue examines how technical communicators apply professional skills and personal traits to hobbies and careers.

- ♦ In the Op-Ed, Valerie M. Ball gallops the hobby-horse career

on the wild side—and leaves the reins in the reader's hands.

- ♦ Karen O'Keefe locates geocaches.
- ♦ Martha Sippel considers three alternate careers for technical communicators.
- ♦ Maralee Sautter clarifies Twitter basics and guides readers through the creation of a Twitter account.

Enjoy!
Valerie and Carol

Op-Ed: Take That Hobby Horse for a Gallop on the Wild Side!

By Valerie M. Ball, Co-Editor, *The Willamette Galley*

When the *Galley* staff discussed foci for the year 2009–2010, we cast the evolution of hobbies into new careers for the April issue.

However, as we discussed the topic further throughout the year, we realized that we had not adequately defined our terms. “Hobby” became too casual, too trifling, and deteriorated into dilettantism.

After acknowledging our initial error, we analyzed how technical communicators pursue their leisure activities. We discovered that we needed to define the two words that identify our profession: “technical” and “communication.” Even at play, these words underlie our attitudes and behavior.

Technical

As technical communicators (TCs), we are “technical” in our search for detail as part of our consistent methodology. An illustration of this quality is a TC’s tendency to ignore conventions and actually read directions. Those who do not read directions, even surreptitiously, often scan the “quick-start” guide in its placement at the top of a newly opened box. Those TCs who openly read directions often claim they wish to learn how another writer solves communication problems.

On a more serious and perhaps more accurate level, though, TCs read directions because they want detail; they want to know the “why” behind conditions or outcomes, whether at work or play.

Communication

In addition to a propensity for detail and a desire to understand the theory behind a practice, TCs know how to exercise communication techniques. These techniques include audience analysis based upon such criteria as reading level, technical expertise, cultural expectations, socio-economic

standards, and education, all of which enable a TC to create communication that an audience comprehends easily.

A TC’s acute capability for audience analysis matches a thorough knowledge of numerous types of media delivery. This knowledge enables the TC to select or create a delivery format that appeals to both primary and secondary audiences.

Beyond Dilettante Label

The innate qualities and training/experience of a TC—attention to technical accuracy and a command of media—almost always ensure that a TC brings a professional demeanor to any leisure activity that many may regard as a hobby. Thus, TCs are not likely dilettantes.


Beyond the dilettante label, though, can a TC more easily morph a so-called hobby into a second career? This question may best be answered with an illustration...

Golf, Anyone?

Golf pros have considerably more athletic skill and training than most of those who play golf as a leisure activity. Of enthusiasts who pursue golf for leisure, though, the followers most likely to achieve professional and monetary satisfaction are technical communicators. TCs can achieve this level because they transfer their technical adaptability and communication skills to honing a leisure activity into a career. A TC can write or edit golf books or magazines, consult for and advise about electronic training programs, design layout for golf publications, or review golf courses and related resorts as a travel writer or editor. From a participant’s viewpoint, the TC understands the technical terms and conditions as well as the physical demands and personal shortcomings.

New Career?

So, how does a TC transform a “hobby” into a career? Such a transformation likely takes the same amount of dedication, apprenticeship, and occasional or extensive training as a TC’s original evolution into a specific genre




“a TC brings a professional demeanor to any leisure activity”

within technical communication. Market growth in the “hobby” career is another deciding factor in the success of the venture; some hobby/career morphs depend upon consumer popularity and being in the right place at the right time.

Or— Gallop on the Wild Side?

But if a TC has enough sense of adventure or enough desire, pursuing a secondary or new career during leisure time can be a rewarding hobby in itself.

Such a gallop on the wild side may bring the satisfaction of testing a dream—or the hobby horse might even win the race. 

The views in this article are those of co-editor V.M. Ball and do not represent her employer or the WVC STC and its members and affiliates.

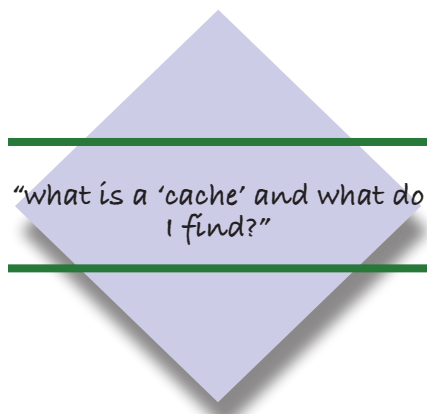
Business or Monkey Business?

By Karen O'Keefe, WVC 2nd Vice President

[Editors' Note—A version of this article was published in the June 2010 Intercom. Karen expanded the article for The Galley.]

On my time off work, I might be doing any of the following with Pompey, 3muddogs, or BBI Dragon:

- ♦ Playing poker
- ♦ Estimating the size of an extinct cinder cone
- ♦ Examining a bus stop shelter for hidden magnetic objects
- ♦ Trying to spot a salmon ladder in a natural area
- ♦ Translating a message from Navajo to English



- ♦ Solving a Sudoku puzzle
- ♦ Searching the woods for hidden Tupperware or an old ammunition canister
- ♦ Stealthily lifting up lamppost skirts
- ♦ Walking a labyrinth in a cathedral
- ♦ Lurking near a telephone pole while carrying exactly 67.6 fluid ounces of water
- ♦ Sitting on a park bench in a park in Eugene while my sister in Idaho operates a nearby webcam via the Internet
- ♦ Cleaning up a local park
- ♦ Hiking through the forest and feeling around a desiccated tree stump
- ♦ Climbing a rock formation

So, you might ask, am I some kind of government agent? A spy, perhaps? A detective? A scientist? Just crazy? Nope, I am a geocacher and I am one of 4–5 million people around the world who use Global Positioning System (GPS) technology in a sport called “geocaching.” In each example, I was trying to “earn” permission to log a “find” on geocaching.com. So far I have logged more than 300 finds.

Geocaching?

You may not know this, but geocaching started here near Portland and has expanded to over a million caches on all seven continents, including 100 countries. Even Space Station Mir has a geocache in locker 17!

This begs the question, what is a “cache” and what do I find? A cache can be a container, an event, a geological formation, a landmark, and even a webcam photo. When the cache is a container, geocachers trade trinkets of various kinds. I once traded a lovely gold coin for a souvenir from the Beijing Olympics, which I then traded for a stuffed animal with a mission to go to Hawaii. To find a cache, I sometimes go online to download latitudinal and longitudinal coordinates to my GPS receiver and then set out to find a container; while at other times, I solve a puzzle to find the coordinates.

Geocaching Adventures

Let me tell you about one of my favorite geocaching adventures: I was in San Francisco with my sister (aka Pompey), and we looked on geocaching.com to see if there were geocaches nearby (there were). In fact, when we entered the nearest cache’s latitudinal and longitudinal coordinates into Google Maps, we discovered the location was right up the street from us (albeit the steepest street in San Francisco).



Karen O'Keefe stands on a geocache

The “House of Peace and Grace” turned out to be a “mystery cache” on top of Nob Hill, where we had a 360-degree view of the city. At Grace Cathedral, the cache site, we were required to identify sculptures and artists of some amazing Italian artwork and send our answers to the cache “owner” for credit to log the cache. While we were at the cathedral, we met the bishop and walked the labyrinth in an outdoor rotunda. Without having a purpose, Laurel and I would have missed what we found at the cathedral. You will hear similar comments from most geocachers.

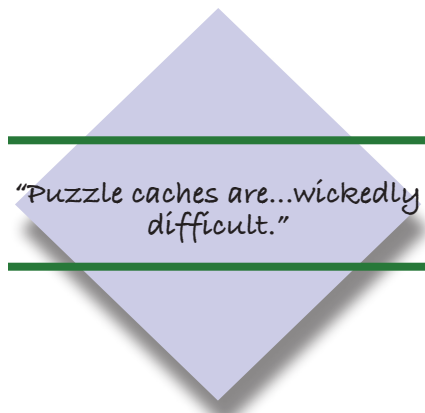
Another favorite cache was the “original stash” plaque, which commemorates the first geocache ever placed...in Estacada. Geocachers are clever—and some create diabolical caches that take some serious observational and thinking skills to find, while others place large containers in fairly easy-to-find areas. The only limit is the imagination of the cache hider (and some strict rules).

Business, cont'd on page 5

In July, I'll be attending Geowoodstock, where geocachers from around the world gather to trade stories, trinkets, cache ideas, and look for geocaches together.

Although geocaching has been around for 10 years, it is just starting to enter the public domain (now you occasionally hear about it in TV shows and on the news). I learned about geocaching on my round-the-country trip last year and have been hooked ever since. I was happily surprised to find a sport that was ideal for technical communicators, who are generally technically savvy, excellent problem solvers, creative thinkers, and quick learners.

I also love that geocaching is inclusive: some caches are wheelchair accessible, while others



require the skills of a mountain climber. With more than a million caches in place around the world, there are plenty for everyone to find—and in fact if you go on geocaching.com right now, you may be surprised to find some in your neighborhood.

Geocaching and Technical Communication

What does geocaching have to do with technical communication? Geocaching:

- ◆ Develops technical skills: I know much more now about GPS technology, public benchmarking and city

planning, Web coding, and availability of various tools. I'll know more after the next caching adventure.

- ◆ Supports relationship building: I once took my boss caching at lunchtime, where we found a couple of caches within walking distance of the office. Our short outing gave us time to get to know one another while doing something fun.
- ◆ Fosters team building: One day I planned a surprise geocaching activity for my writing team. I showed up for work with a picnic lunch, and we set out to find two nearby caches, which we couldn't have found without concentrated teamwork.
- ◆ Enhances problem-solving skills: Some geocache hidings (which can be any geocacher, by the way, including me) are especially tricky and like to place caches that take real problem-solving skills. Puzzle caches are good examples. I often feel successful just figuring out how to approach solving a puzzle. Some are easier than others (transposing Braille into letters) and some are wickedly difficult.
- ◆ Hones observational acuity: When you know what you are looking for and your GPS has brought you within 5–10 feet of a cache, you learn to start looking for what is out of place (does that pole look EXACTLY like the one next to it? Why is there a pile of sticks in that stump?).
- ◆ Provides a wide variety of opportunities for learning: I never would have expected myself to be lying in bed at night pronouncing Navajo words out loud—words that were used by Indian Code Talkers working with our US military to send messages to our troops overseas during WWII.

- ◆ Send us outside: Many people look at geocaching as walking (or biking/hiking/kayaking) with a purpose...and are using it to lose weight!

When I was interviewed recently on a geocaching-related podcast, I described geocaching as a “worldwide treasure-hunting game for techo-geeks.” If you want to hear that interview or learn more about geocaching, go to http://www.cacheamaniacs.com/index.php?post_id=602561 or <http://www.geocaching.com>.

Oh, and you may call me Karen, but I also answer to Snark-Hunter (a nod to Lewis Carroll's great poem “The Hunting of the Snark”).

Karen O'Keefe is a technical writer at NWEA, a non-profit organization started to support best practices in education. In addition to her role as 2nd Vice President of the Willamette Valley Chapter of STC, Karen enjoys solving puzzles of all kinds as well as geocaching with her dog. Karen has been an STC member since 1987.

WVC Membership

The latest membership report is for February 1–March 31, 2010. As of March 31, the WVC has 90 members.

	Feb.	Mar.
New Members	0	1
Returning—WVC	1	0
Unaffiliated	15	0
Transferred in	0	0
Transferred out	0	0
Cancelled—WVC	0	4
Cancelled—STC	0	1
Total Members	190	90

Editors' Note—STC International sends the membership totals to the WVC Membership and Mailing List Manager Jeff Jansen. Jeff feels the huge drop in membership is caused by a time lag between lapsing memberships and STC membership reporting.

Three Alternate Careers for Technical Communicators

By Martha Sippel, STC Fellow, Rocky Mountain Chapter

[Editors' Note—This article is a reprint of an article published originally in the Rocky Mountain Chapter Technicalities, Volume 47, Number 5, April–May 2007, pp. 26–29. http://www.stcrmc.org/assets/technicalities/apr_may_2007/apr_may_2007.pdf

I've been fortunate to experience a few different careers and many job positions. I think I've finally found my technical calling, but am not sure that I've found my true purpose in life because I still long to be outside instead of sitting at a computer. But that's another story.

Alternate careers are plentiful for technical communicators. If you are a successful technical communicator, you may find that you can transfer your skills to several different careers. As technical communicators, here are three of the skills we use often:

- ♦ We take disorganized information and tighten it into a neat order that makes sense to most people.
- ♦ We talk to many different experts about complicated topics, ask questions, digest the information, and rewrite it so it makes sense to both professionals and laypeople.
- ♦ We interview and observe users to help developers and managers understand what it is that users truly want out of our software, hardware, Web site, or Web application.

How can you apply these skills to different careers? There are several options.

As a technical communicator, hopefully you've learned to think outside the box and employ the ingenuity that you've developed over the years. However, we technical communicators often sell ourselves short. You may ask, "How can I translate my expertise into another career?" or "How can I market myself differently?"

Or maybe you wonder how you can stay employed full time, yet parlay your full-time employment into another career within your company?

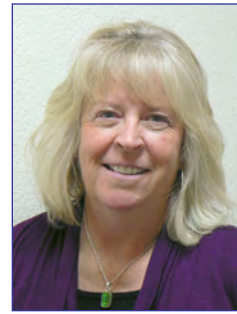
Here are three potential alternate careers that relate to the three skills described above.

Information Architecture

There are many paths to becoming an information architect. Let's review the first example above. As technical communicators, we often find ourselves taking disorganized information from multiple sources and organizing it into a logical order. We also can rewrite the information so it sounds like it came from the same source. We might talk to people while we are performing this task, but we may not have the time to do this so often we complete this task on our own. How does this translate into another career?

This task is performed frequently by information architects (IAs) who are organizing and synthesizing large amounts of information to make it more easily understood. Information architects perform many different tasks to develop logical results. As Wikipedia says:

"Information architecture is the practice of structuring information (knowledge or data) for specific purposes in a specific context. The context might be Web development,



user interactions, database development, programming, technical writing, or enterprise architecture. Information

architecture has somewhat different meanings in these different branches of what might be called IS and/or IT architecture."

If IA interests you, look up information architect in Wikipedia and check out the resources. I'll list a few usability and IA Web sites at the end of this article.

How can you gain the experience you need to perform information architecture tasks as a professional? It doesn't happen overnight. Take a college course on the topic, or attend a training session or appropriate conference. If money is a concern, volunteering to help someone who works in the business will allow you to learn new skills. Volunteer to help organize something that sorely needs it, like a site on your company intranet, a nonprofit Web site, a charity auction document, or a neighborhood newsletter. Investigate the information architects in your professional organization(s) and ask if you can talk to them (a few STC RMC [Rocky Mountain Chapter] members are IAs or interaction designers).

Training

How about the second skill? As technical communicators, we interview experts about complicated topics, digest the information they provide, ask questions to understand it thoroughly enough

*"think outside the box
and employ the ingenuity"*

Careers, cont'd on page 7

to write about it, and rewrite it so it makes sense to both professionals and laypeople alike. These skills transfer to about any industry you can think of, including training.



Successful trainers listen to what their students want and provide the information they need. These trainers not only listen, but they condense information, find solutions that make sense to their students, and teach in different ways so most of their students can apply their education in a professional career.

Training requires understanding the information, employing listening skills, and being able to synthesize the information into something that makes sense to most people. Yes, it's more complicated than that, but it's a start. I'm not implying that you can simply call yourself a trainer, but if training people interests you, there are resources available. Wikipedia defines training as:

“Training refers to the acquisition of knowledge, skills, and competencies as a result of the teaching of vocational or practical skills and knowledge that relates to specific useful skills. It forms the core of apprenticeships and provides the backbone of content at technical colleges and polytechnics. Today it is often referred to as professional development.”

This definition sounds a lot like some of the tasks that many technical communicators perform daily.

Many trainers I know did not get a formal education in instructional design, education, or information design. They moved into the positions by taking on more training-related tasks and then parlayed that information and education into a new career. Start by researching options that interest you and talking to people who are professional trainers. If it sounds like something you would like to do, investigate your options to move in this direction.

Usability

The third example is interviewing and observing users to help the developers and managers understand what it is that they truly want out of our software, hardware, Web site, or Web application. Usability testing provides information that potentially improves the design and makes products more user friendly.

Maybe you haven't been fortunate enough to do even rudimentary usability testing, but it is something that I find very interesting. Many of us think that our models are user friendly, but put a simple paper prototype in front of someone who is unfamiliar with it and observe the results. It's humbling.

I first performed a simple usability test to illustrate that a design was unintuitive. Our team was developing an employee timesheet Web application and nobody could figure out what was wrong. In this case, everyone needed to fill out their own timesheets. However, managers needed to approve timesheets and the accounting department needed to perform tasks related to managing timesheets, so the application needed to provide different methods for specific employees.

In other words, we had to think about all of the users and which tasks they needed to perform. I got management approval to perform some rudimentary usability tests (as long as it didn't take too much time). I invited the lead developer into a conference room and asked him to keep quiet or I would tie his hands down (not really, but you get the idea). I then brought in user after user who demonstrated again and again that they did not understand that they should click on the clock icon to display the timesheet. I got the point across and our graphic designer worked to make the design more intuitive so employees knew where to click to get what they needed.

Usability links directly to technical communication in many ways. The first is that both require an understanding of your audience, your audience's goals, and how to



best meet those goals. Wikipedia defines usability as:

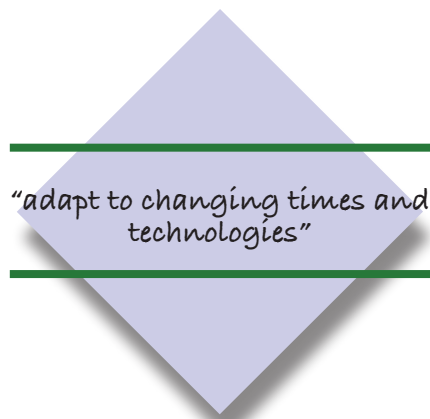
“Usability is a term used to denote the ease with which people can employ a particular tool or other human-made object in order to achieve a particular goal. Usability can also refer to the methods of measuring usability and the study of the principles behind an object's perceived efficiency or elegance. In

human-computer interaction and computer science, usability usually refers to the elegance and clarity with which the interaction with a computer program or a Web site is designed. The term is also used often in the context of products like consumer electronics, or in the areas of communication, and knowledge transfer objects (such as a cookbook, a document or online help). It can also refer to the efficient design of mechanical objects such as a door handle or a hammer.”

I imagine that most of these terms are familiar to you, so you can see how usability relates directly to technical communication and provides another related alternate career for technical communicators.

Summary

Information architecture, training, and usability are three alternative careers into which technical communicators can transition. Again, I am not implying you can simply change your title and move into one of these fields because each profession requires specific education, knowledge, and experience. But if you are




“adapt to changing times and technologies”

dedicated, you can do it. As technical communicators, we must always adapt to changing times and technologies to gain more respect as professionals. Here is how I adapted and moved into alternate careers.

My previous career in the petroleum industry taught me to be versatile and flexible while I discovered that I enjoyed writing about technical topics. After obtaining another bachelor's degree in technical communication (with an emphasis in technical writing and editing), I not only found another job; I discovered new careers in technical communications, usability, and information architecture. I love interaction design and determining

what works best for the largest number of people.

After leaving corporate America to pursue my independence, I find that my future is limited only by my thoughts and actions. With continued learning, patience, and a positive attitude, you can change your career. Listen to what people who love what they do have to say. It might help you find your path to alternate careers that are more interesting, or that pay you more than your current position. The freedom I have found as an independent consultant working from home allows me to pursue passions and hobbies unrelated to my professional career. Go forth and prosper! 

Martha is an STC Fellow who has won several international and local awards. She has developed and presented compelling and accurate technical material for more than 30 years. As Principal of AzuWrite LLC, Martha designs Web sites and Web applications, and provides information architecture and usability expertise to clients and nonprofit organizations.

Additional Resources

American Society for Training and Development: <http://www.astd.org/astd>

Boxes and Arrows Web site: <http://www.boxesandarrows.com/>

Information Architecture Institute: <http://iainstitute.org/library/subjectPage.php?id=47&filterLanguage>

Jakob Nielsen's Web site: <http://www.useit.com/>

Jesse James Garrett's IA resources: <http://jgg.net/ia/>

Lou Rosenfeld's Web site: <http://louisrosenfeld.com/home/>

Nielsen Norman Group: <http://www.nngroup.com/> (also links to Jakob Nielsen, Don Norman, and Bruce Tognazzini—Ask Tog)

The Usability Professionals' Association: <http://www.upassoc.org/> (see Usability Resources)

University of Minnesota at Duluth Web page with numerous links to a wide variety of information architecture resources: <http://www.d.umn.edu/itss/support/Training/Online/webdesign/architecture.html>

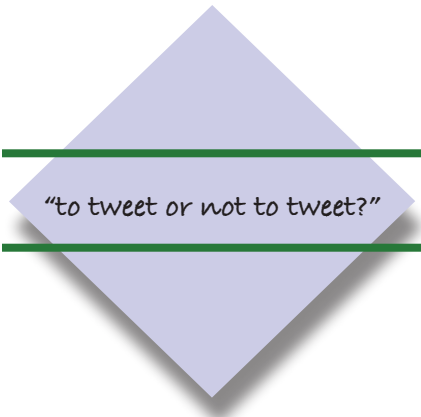
User Experience Network (UXNet): <http://uxnet.org/>

Twitter Basics: Flock to a New Ornithology

By Maralee Sautter, WVC Web Manager and STC IDL SIG Assistant Manager

Twitter is one of the most active social media sites today. In a platform similar to a micro-blog, this forum condenses communications to 140 characters, including spaces, which allows businesses to advertise products and services, celebrities to boost publicity, and regular people to write about interesting subjects or send personal news. The current Twitter homepage tagline reads: "Discover what's happening right now, anywhere in the world."

Twitter drills down to one question: What are you doing? As with all social media, the choice of participating is up to the individual, and for those who are interested in following or communicating details of what is happening around them, Twitter is a good choice. So, when contemplating whether to jump on the Twitter train, first ask the soul-searching question: to tweet or not to tweet?



"to tweet or not to tweet?"

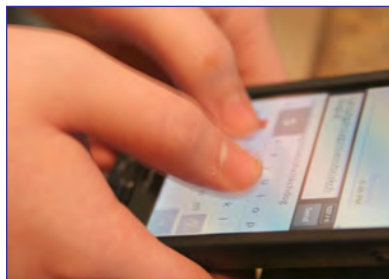
Demographics

Social Media Today (<http://www.socialmediatoday.com>) concludes the median age of a Twitter user is 31. However, this does not preclude other ages from using Twitter, since use depends on a participant's willingness to share and disseminate information. Twitter savvy also depends on updating followers with newsworthy posts

and following people or topics that are of personal interest. For many STC members, regardless of age, keeping up with the current technology is an important strategy for professional growth.

However, a fellow technical communicator of mine labeled Twitter as something for "popular and interesting people" to do. Since he decided he is neither, he dropped out of the Twitter loop and stuck to his blogging.

As a case in point, a recent headline in the very popular People magazine reads, "Lady Gaga Battles Britney Spears for Twitter Supremacy" (<http://www.people.com/people/article/0,,20414855,00.html>). Of course, these pop-star singers are idols of the under-30 club. Young Twitter users can text like race-car pistons on their cell phones and can play video games at lightning speed with those same thumbs and



Thumb tweeting

fingers. They are naturals at Twitter since they were born with hands that reached for electronics.

The Edison Research group (http://edisonresearch.com/twitter_usage_2010.php) concludes "nearly two-thirds of active Twitter users access social networking sites using a mobile phone. But, Twitter is not relegated just to cell phones; it can be accessed through the computer, for those of us who need the "big screen." The only drawback is the portability issue—cell phones provide instant communication since they are mobile and are more accessible than a computer.



Twitter is about communication preferences, and it appeals to those who like to communicate with short and

rapid-fire texting. The challenge is to write something meaningful in 140 characters or less. The demographics lean toward the younger set who want to communicate quickly and easily. They have a different mindset than the e-communicators who despairingly cull through mountains of detailed business and personal email.

Twitter Talk/Talk Back

One of the greatest ways to learn about Twitter is to visit the site at <http://twitter.com>. Business 101 provides users with a good overview, a getting started tutorial, best practices, and relevant case studies. While many suggestions do not apply to individuals, the ideas are good for self-promotion



Original tweeting

and background information. To print a guide from the Twitter site, click <http://business.twitter.com/twitter101/print>.

Birds twitter to send messages to other birds. The Twitter mascot is a little blue bird that appears in random places on the Twitter Web site. Thus, many of the terms on the Twitter site refer to birds:

- ♦ A **tweet** is the act of posting and sending an individual text message from the Twitter

Twitter, cont'd on page 10

homepage. A reply is a message that starts with an @ sign. Only people who follow both users will see the message.

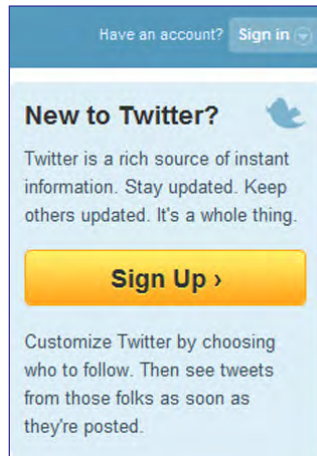
- ♦ **Followers** are participants who receive tweets from someone they are following. Conversely, participants send messages to those who are following them.
- ♦ **Retweets** are messages that are copied, pasted, and reposted to other followers. A retweet starts with RT, such as RT @username.
- ♦ **Hashtags** organize tweets into categories or topics. A hashtag is a # symbol followed by a term describing or naming the topic. A hashtag is used most often for conferences and events, such as #STC10, which was used at the 2010 STC Summit in Dallas, Texas.
- ♦ **Direct messages** send private email to Twitter recipients. It is better to avoid direct messages, since texting or email provides the same result. A direct message starts with D, such as D @username.

Getting Started

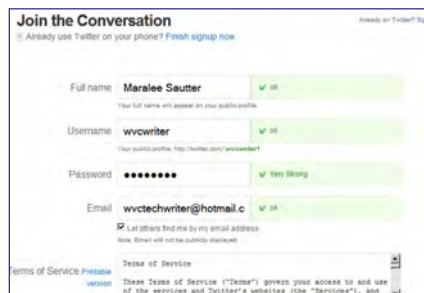
In May 2010, WVC senior member Rachel Houghton met me at a local coffee shop. The objective was for me to sign up for a Twitter account.

The process was very easy and straightforward, but I want to share the steps with novices and encourage them to sign up if interested. During my session with Rachel, I signed up for an account, created my profile, and sent a short tweet. Here are the basic steps I followed:

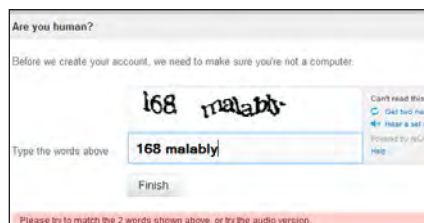
1. In your browser, type in <http://twitter.com>. After the home page appears, click **Sign Up**.



2. The profile screen is self-explanatory, and you only need to fill a few entries. If you want other people to find you by email address, check the box. They will only be able to find you if they already have your email address. Click **Create my account** after the set-up information is satisfactory.



3. The next screen asks: "Are you human?" Type in the characters represented in the glyphs. This may take a try or two, since interpreting the glyphs is not always easy.

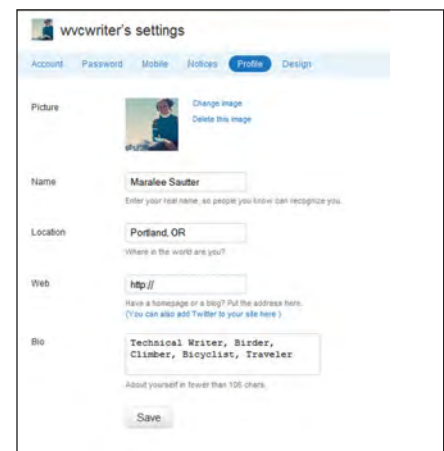


4. The **Find sources that interest you** screen is divided into three steps:
 - a. **Suggestions:** Select topics that are personally

interesting. You can change your topics at any time.

- b. **Friends:** Select friends from your address book to see if they are using Twitter.
 - c. **Search:** If you missed any contacts, now is your chance to find them. Click **Next step** to create your settings.
5. The settings screen allows you to customize your account information, change your password, enable mobile notification, set up email notices, change your profile, and customize the design of your profile.

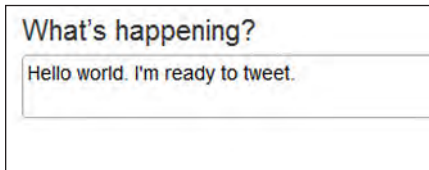
Start with the profile page. Click **Profile** in the top menu bar. The first item of business is to upload a picture or avatar of yourself. Nothing says newbie like a twitter bird in the photo area of your profile. Click **Save** to finish. My current profile page follows:



6. Change or update the other settings in the menu bar to your satisfaction. If you want to follow tweets on your cell phone, click the **Mobile** tab and enter your cell phone number. Then, turn on the device updates and click **Save**.



7. If you are finished with your settings, click **Home** in the top-right corner. If you have followers, you might want to send your first message. Enter the message and click **Tweet** to send your message.

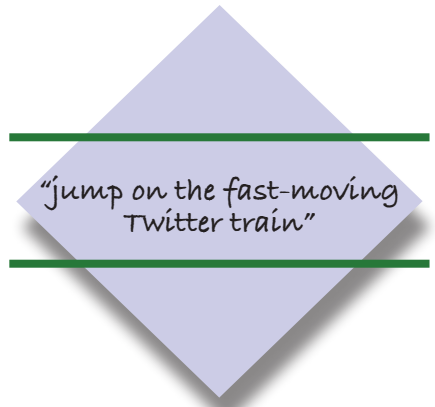


8. From the homepage, click **Sign out** in the top-right corner to end the session.

Why Tweet?

Social media accounts need attention, especially Twitter. Therefore, once you have some followers, try to post messages a few times a week to be consistent. As encouragement, find someone to converse with or follow so there is motivation to keep returning. Another suggestion is to follow topics that are exciting to you.

One of the best uses of Twitter is for events like the STC Summit. In 2010 people sent tweets to attendees to notify STC followers about meetings, special events, and impromptu gatherings. Regardless of whether you jump on the fast-moving Twitter train or not, the phenomenon is worth understanding. If nothing else, you can converse within a group while other group members send tweets to their network of friends, as they feign interest in what you are doing or saying.



Suggested Resources

- Twitter Web site: <http://twitter.com/>
- General guide to Twitter: <http://mashable.com/guidebook/twitter/>
- Twitter 101: <http://business.twitter.com/twitter101/>
- Advice for better tweeting: <http://mashable.com/2009/07/20/twitter-new-users/>
- Dictionary of Twitter words: <http://mashable.com/2008/11/15/twitterspeak/>
- Twitter statistics: <http://www.socialmediatoday.com/SMC/78505>
- Humorous stories about Twitter: David Pogue. September 1, 2009. *The World According to Twitter*. New York: Black Dog & Leventhal Publishers. 

Maralee Sautter has been a technical communicator for ten years. She has worked as a contractor, consultant, and staff writer for many high-tech and Fortune 500 firms in the greater Portland Area. She also teaches technical writing classes at Portland State University as a part-time adjunct faculty member. Maralee currently works as a contractor for Xerox Corporation.

Twitter Commands

Do more than Tweet! Use these commands to Twitter:

FOLLOW username

Start following a user

UNFOLLOW username

Stop following a user

ON/OFF

Turn all Tweet notifications on or off

ON/OFF username

Set Tweet notifications for a user on or off (you'll still be following them even if you set it to "off")

D username + your-message

Send a direct message to a user

@username

Reply to a tweet, also indicates someone's "handle" on their Twitter home page

RT @username

Retweet a user's latest tweet from any user

GET username

Read the latest tweet from any user

FAV username

Identify a user's latest tweet as a favorite

Source: Twitter Web site support at <http://support.twitter.com/forums/59008/entries/14020-the-official-twitter-text-commands>

Networking Opportunities

Local opportunities for meeting and connecting with other technical communicators are numerous. Before and after WVC program meetings, members have the opportunity to network with other WVC members. Chapter program meetings are the third Thursday of most months. No program meetings are held in July and August.

WVC Independent Contractors SIG manager Bill Harrison schedules meetings with topics of interest to independent contractors in various locations in the Portland metro area. Contact Bill at billharrison@beyondthetrail.com for the meeting topics, times, and locations.

Other professional networking possibilities for WVC members include CHIFOO, American Society for Training and Development (ASTD), the Software Association of Oregon (SAO), and the International Association of Self-Employed Creative Professionals (IASECP).

CHIFOO

The 2010 Computer-Human Interaction Forum of Oregon (CHIFOO, <http://www.chifoo.org>) program is "Interaction Leadership: Expand Your Sphere of Influence."

CHIFOO program meetings are generally the first Wednesday of the month. The evening begins at 5:00 pm with CHIFOOd at the Deschutes Brewery (210 NW 11th Ave., Portland), followed by registration and networking at 6:30 PM and the program at 7:00 PM at the University of Oregon White Stag Building in Old Town.

Upcoming programs are:

Oct. 6: Bill DeRouchey, "Pulling Off the Mask," 7:00 PM

Nov. 3: Dwayne King, "Design Thinking for a Better World," 7:00 PM

ASTD

The Cascadia Chapter of the American Society for Training and Development (ASTD, <http://www.astdcascadia.org>) offers a variety of program, special interest group, and networking meetings. The ASTD-Cascadia Chapter Web site contains the latest information about programs, times, and location details.

Local and regional events include:

Sept. 30: Transitions SIG, Rosalind Hughes-Smith, "Marketing Plans," Beaverton City Library, Meeting Room A (12375 SW 5th St., Beaverton), 5:00 PM–8:00 PM

Oct. 20–21: ASTD-Cascadia Regional Conference, "Learning to Play...Playing to Learn!" Salem Conference Center (200 Commercial St. SE), Salem

SAO

The Software Association of Oregon (SAO, <http://www.sao.org>) is the largest group of software and technical professionals in Oregon and SW Washington. SAO offers many opportunities for networking and learning.

Additional information about SAO events is on the SAO Web site and include:

Oct. 18–20: Pacific Northwest Software Quality Conference (PNSQC), "PNSQC 2010: Achieving Quality in a Complex Environment," World Trade Center (121 SW Salmon, Portland), 8:00 AM–5:00 PM

Nov. 17: Quality Assurance Forum and Developers Forum, "Blurring the Line between QA and Dev in an Agile Environment," location TBD, 9:00 AM–4:00 PM


IASECP

The International Association of Self-Employed Communication Professionals (IASECP, [http://](http://www.iasecp.com)

www.iasecp.com) offers webinars to provide more members access to meetings. In addition to the webinars, IASECP also schedules other events listed on the IASECP Web site.

WVC Employment News

Maralee Sautter, the WVC employment information manager, posts job openings weekly to the WVC jobs list, WVCJOBS-L. Email Maralee at employment@stcwvc.org with questions.

The jobs list is a subscription-only list. WVC members subscribe for free, while non-members subscribe for a \$75 annual fee. To subscribe, go to the WVC Web site (<http://www.stcwvc.org>) and follow the link to the "Signup for Updates" page (Employment>Signup for Updates). 




Painting by Donovan Madden

Oregon woods

WVC Activities

The Willamette Valley Chapter (WVC) offers local opportunities for STC members and non-members to learn about new tools and technologies, network with other TCs, and receive recognition from colleagues. For 2010–2011, the WVC Administrative Council plans to schedule both onsite and webinar meetings in a variety of locations. Program meetings are the third Thursday of each month, except July and August. For the latest information about program topics, times, and locations, see the WVC Web site at <http://www.stcwvc.org>. Other chapter activities include workshops, WVC competitions, competition-award and volunteer-recognition banquets, and networking events. Watch for details on the WVC Web site.

All WVC members are welcome to attend the WVC business meetings on the fourth Thursday of each month, except July, when there is no meeting. Meetings begin at 6:15 PM; locations vary monthly. Contact Toni Mantych at president@stcwvc.org if you'd like to attend a meeting.

The Independent Contractors SIG meets at different locations in the Portland metro area. Contact Independent Contractors SIG Manager Bill Harrison (billharrison@beyondthetrail.com) for meeting topics, locations, and times or to add your name to the SIG mailing list. 

Upcoming Conferences

This column lists conferences and events that may interest STC-WVC members.

Sept. 27–Oct. 1: Human Factors and Ergonomics Society (HFES), 54th Annual Meeting; San Francisco, CA (<http://www.hfes.org/web/hfesmeetings/2010annualmeeting.html>)

Sept. 29–Oct. 2: LavaCon 2.0: The Conference on Digital Media and Content Strategies: 8th Annual Conference on Professional Development; San Diego, CA (<http://lavacon.org>)

Oct. 26–30: Association for Educational Communications and Technology (AECT); 2010 AECT International Convention; Anaheim, CA (<http://www.aect.org/events/Anaheim10/>)

Oct. 27–30: American Translators Association (ATA), 51st Annual Conference; Denver, CO (http://atanet.org/conferencesandseminars/annual_conference.php)

Nov. 11–13: American Medical Writers Association (AMWA), Annual Conference, Milwaukee, WI (<http://www.amwa.org/default.asp?id=433>)

Nov. 15–16: Center for Information-Development Management (CIDM), DITA Europe 2010 Conference; Vienna, Austria (<http://www.infomanagementcenter.com/DITAEurope/2010/index.htm>)


Disclaimer: Please regard the preceding information only as a guide; the WVC and The Willamette Valley cannot guarantee accuracy.

STC Puget Sound


The Puget Sound Chapter holds its monthly chapter/program meetings from 6:00 PM–8:30 PM on the third Tuesday of the month in Bellevue, WA. No events are scheduled for June, July, August, and December.

STC-Puget Sound also hosts informal roundtables to discuss a variety of topics and to network. Roundtables are held in a various locations in the Seattle area.

Watch the “Upcoming Events” page on the Puget Sound Web site (<http://www.stc-psc.org>) for additional information about the chapter meetings, roundtables, and other events.

If interested, WVC members can subscribe to Puget Sound's event mailings on the Puget Sound Web site. 

STC Mid-Valley

The Mid-Valley Chapter spans the Willamette Valley from Salem to Oregon's southern border. For information about the Mid-Valley Chapter, contact David Anderson at 541-758-7602 or email him at daamp1@msn.com. 

WVC Mission Statement

Our local chapter will serve the interests of technical communicators in the Willamette Valley/Portland-Vancouver metro area by providing opportunities to:

- ♦ Network with other professionals in the community
- ♦ Promote best practices in technical communications
- ♦ Offer educational opportunities to encourage and support professional growth and career development

Educational Opportunities

Learning opportunities come in many forms: STC webinars, STC certification courses, and classes, both onsite and online.

STC Webinars

STC offers fee-based educational live webinars for members and non-members. Generally, webinars are presented on Wednesdays from 1:00 PM–2:00 PM EDT. The fee for STC members is \$79; for non-members, \$149. One site is allowed one telephone connection and one computer connection. Additional telephone and computer connections are \$150 each. Registration closes 24 hours before the webinar is presented. For complete information and a list of future webinars, check the STC Web site at <http://www.stc.org/edu/seminarso1.asp>.

STC offers members and nonmembers the ability to view previously given live webinars via the STC Live Learning Center (<http://www.softconference.com/stc/amh.asp>). This library of 24/7 Web seminars is available for people who were unable to attend the live webinar. The cost for an archived webinar is:

- ♦ Members—\$49
- ♦ Nonmembers—\$99

STC Certification

STC offers online certification courses where class participants (members or non-members) earn STC certifications for an in-depth study of areas in technical communication. Courses are five to eight sessions in duration, taught by STC experts, and cost:

- ♦ Members—\$595
- ♦ Non-members—\$995
- ♦ Student members—\$295
- ♦ Student non-members—\$995

For additional information, see <http://www.stc.org/edu/online-certificate-courses.asp>.

Classes

Classes to refresh or learn skills are available either as onsite or online courses from local colleges and universities or private vendors.

Onsite Classes

Many local universities and colleges hold classes of interest to technical communicators. For example, the Portland State University Department of English offers courses in tools—RoboHelp, FrameMaker, and Creative Suite—<http://www.english.pdx.edu/index.php>). PSU’s Graduate School of Education Continuing Education (CEED, <http://www.ceed.pdx.edu>) provides classes in Training and Development, and the Professional Development Center (PDC, <http://www.pdc.pdx.edu>) offers programs in several areas including human resource management, multimedia, and information technology.

Local colleges and universities include:

- ♦ Portland State University (<http://www.pdx.edu>)
- ♦ Portland Community College (<http://www.pcc.edu>)
- ♦ Washington State University (<http://www.vancouver.wsu.edu>)
- ♦ Clark College (<http://www.clark.edu>)
- ♦ Chemeketa Community College (<http://www.chemeketa.edu>)

Local vendors providing tools and training classes include:

- ♦ New Horizons (<http://www.newhorizonsoregon.com>)
- ♦ Kinetic Technology Solutions (http://www.kineticoregon.com/tech_training/default.asp)

Online Training

Online-based vendors offer a wide variety of classes of interest to TCs. Three vendors to try are:

- ♦ Online-Learning.com (<http://www.online-learning.com>)
- ♦ Writers Online Workshops (<http://www.writersonlineworkshops.com>)
- ♦ W3 Schools (<http://www.w3schools.com>)

Upcoming Classes

Dates	Class/Webinar	Title	Day/Time
Sept. 28–Dec. 7	PSU	FrameMaker	T/5:30 PM–9:10 PM
Sept. 28–Dec. 10	PSU PDC	XHTML and CSS	Online Class
Sept. 30–Dec. 9	PSU	Trends in Technical Communication: One-page Documents, Gaming Documentation, Project Planning	Th/5:30 PM–9:10 PM
Oct. 4	New Horizons (Bvtn)	Interviewing Skills	M/8:30 AM–4:30 PM
Oct. 14–Nov. 18	STC Certification	Technical Communication Manager	Th/10:30 AM–12:00 PM EDT
Oct. 19–Oct. 20	Kinetic (Bvtn)	Captivate 4 (Level 1)	TW/9:00 AM–4:30 PM

Disclaimer: The STC-WVC and The Willamette Galley staff are not responsible for the schedules, contents, or results of courses in this column. —Editors

Submissions to *The Galley*

Policies

The Willamette Galley co-editors, Valerie M. Ball and Carol L. Larson, read and review textual and visual submissions and publish those that, to the knowledge of *The Galley* staff, do not violate laws regarding libel, slander, pornography, or civil rights.

The Galley co-editors also obey copyright laws. Contributors must cite quotations according to the 15th edition of *The Chicago Manual of Style*; but contributors must apply for copyright permissions from the source for lengthy passages of text, illustrations, charts, photographs, or related materials. Please let the editors know if this article has run elsewhere and if it has been submitted for consideration to other publications.

Deadlines

Send submissions to *The Galley* co-editors—Valerie (valerie.ball@oit.edu) or Carol (carol@larson-tech.com). Deadlines are:

- ♦ 10th day of the month that precedes the publishing month: Op-Ed articles (one *Galley* page); book/software reviews (500–750 words)
- ♦ 15th day of the month that precedes the publishing month: Feature articles (750–1,000 words); letters to the editor (<150 words); bios (50–75 words)

Galley Foci for 2009–2010

“Hope” and “change” continue to be the words of the moment, so the 2009–2010 *Galley* focus is “Vital Careers: Diversity and Versatility.” We encourage our readers to become our writers by contributing feature articles about the following topics.

Issue	Focus
October	Career Retooling/Transferable Skills
December	New Networking Methods
February	Laying Groundwork/Preparation/Reeducation for a New Career or Moving to a New Career (Long-range planning to be able to use skills when opportunities arise)
April	Hobbies Become New Careers
June	Technical Professionals Form New Business Ventures

Other Topics

Yes, we have a focus for each issue, but we welcome contributions about technical topics that relate to our audience. Please share with us your ideas for articles as well as unsolicited pieces that meet our criteria.

Letters to *The Galley* Co-Editors

We welcome all letters to the co-editors that meet the following:

- ♦ Length: 150 words or less
- ♦ Deadline: 15th of month preceding publication (Jan., Mar., May, July, Sept., Nov.)

Publication depends upon adherence to *Galley* policies. Please email letters to Valerie Ball (valerie.ball@oit.edu) or Carol Larson (carol@larson-tech.com).

Contact STC/WVC

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