

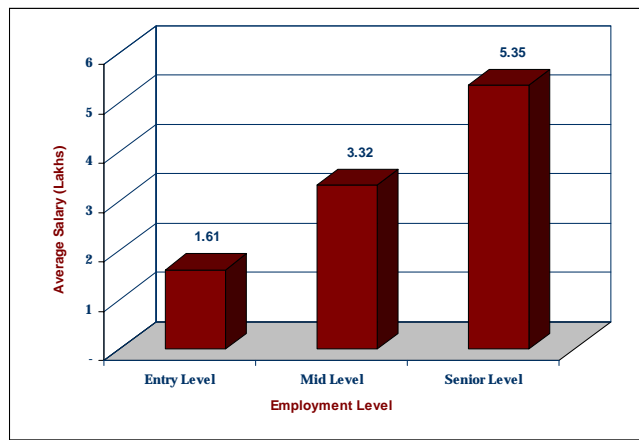


INDUS

How Much Do Technical Communicators Earn in India?

The first-ever technical communicator salary survey in India reveals that the average salary for a technical communicator in India is Rs 3,51,807 per annum, which translates into Rs 29,317 per month. The survey also indicates that ten percent of the technical communication community in the country earn upwards of Rs 54,000 per month.

The salary survey was carried out by the India chapter of STC. Data for the survey was gathered through questionnaires that were handed out to about 150 technical communicators at the India chapter's Annual Conference at Bangalore in December 2001. More than 80 questionnaires were completed and returned, for a response rate of 55 percent.



with 11 or more years of experience, command an average figure of Rs 56,667 per month.

Besides salary, some technical communicators receive perks like stock options, professional society dues, and re-

imbursement of fees for seminars, conferences, and tuitions (see the chart below).

Profile of Respondents

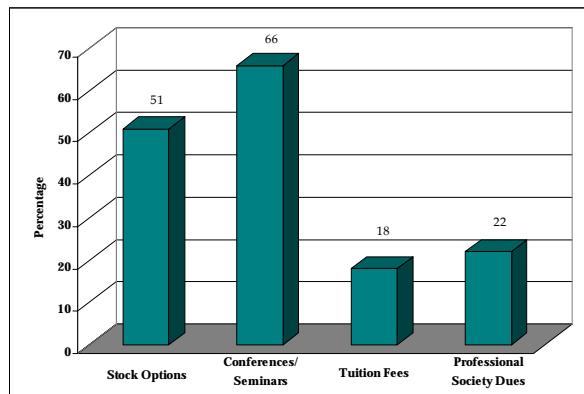
Three out of every four respondents were from the fairer sex. From a seniority perspective in an organisation, 16% of the respondents were at the entry level, 25% held senior level positions, while the rest were at the middle level. In terms of experience, 25% of the respondents had less than 2 years

experience, while 6% had 11 or more years of experience. The bulk of the respondents, 46% precisely, had 2-5 years of technical communication experience.

► Detailed salary data on page 4.

The average salary at the entry level is Rs 13,461 per month. The average goes up to Rs 27,651 at the middle level and Rs 44,612 at the senior level.

For those with less than two years of experience in the field, the average salary is Rs 16,758 per month. The figure for individuals with 2-5 years of experience is Rs 25,022. For those with 6-10 years of experience the figure goes up to Rs 44,592. The seniors in the field,



INSIDE	
Editor's Footnote	2
Presidential Gavel	3
Indexing for Writers	5
STC Elections	7
Software Review	10
STC India Diary	12
Book Review	13
Members' Profile	14



INDUS

Editors

Edwin Skau – edwin@stc-india.org

Pawan Nayar – pawan@stc-india.org

Indus is a bimonthly publication of the India chapter of STC published in the first fortnight of every odd-numbered month. It serves as the primary link between the chapter and its members. We invite letters, articles, and other items from members for publication. We must receive all submissions by the last day of even-numbered month.

Reprints from Indus are permitted if credit is given and a copy of the publication is sent to the Editors.

STC, INDIA CHAPTER

Administrative Council

President – Frederick Menezes

fred@stc-india.org

Vice President – Tharun Kumar Unni

tharun@stc-india.org

Treasurer – B. M. Rao

bmrao@stc-india.org

Secretary – Rohina Dhunjeebhoy

rohina@stc-india.org

Immediate Past President – Peter Yorke

peter@stc-india.org

Address all newsletter correspondence to:

The Editors, *Indus*

STC–India Chapter

E-mail: indus@stc-india.org

© 2002 Society for Technical

Communication, India Chapter.

Making a Difference

One of the greatest challenges to professional growth is the necessity to balance corporate interests with the need for self-fulfilment and continuous self-education. Technical communication is a challenging and demanding profession. At most times, technical communicators are chasing deadlines that they can, at best, only partially influence. At other times, they may lack the motivation to carry on with a job that constantly requires selling ideas that others may buy with reluctance and scepticism.

Embedded within the work pressure, the equation between performing different roles in a firm, and relatively harsh economic times, lies a host of opportunities. The opportunity to hone one's skills and learn new tools and techniques to deliver real value. The opportunity to re-define technical communication as a measurable customer value-add and a business component. The opportunity to carve out a respectable place for Indian technical communicators in the global technical communication community.

The India chapter of STC serves this purpose well. It provides an avenue for learning, networking, growing professionally, and pioneering communication ideas. These are but a part of the cornucopia of benefits presented by the STC – the world's foremost society dedicated to the advancement of technical communication.

It is against this background that we reserve a sacred space for *Indus*. Under the editorship of Frederick Menezes, *Indus* was established as the voice of the India chapter of STC.

It is this tradition that we intend to carry to the end. Hopefully with your contribution, *Indus* will grow beyond being a newsletter, and become the premier publication in India that shares information on all aspects of technical communication.

Do ping us back with your recommendations, critique, and responses to articles, ideas and accolades. If your views are of interest to our community of professional communicators, it belongs in *Indus*.

Looking forward to your enthusiastic support.

Edwin Skau & Pawan Nayar



The mission of the Society for Technical Communication is designing the future of technical communication.

www.stc.org



Frederick Menezes



Creating Value for Ourselves

Through the past few weeks, the TWIN (Technical Writers of India) mailing list has seen a definitive spurt of postings advertising for technical writing positions. This is an encouraging sign when everything else indicates that the IT industry is yet to come out of the economic downturn.

Even though the job postings may be only a coincidence, I believe that awareness about technical communication is rapidly gaining more ground in India. We shall continue to see a steady increase in the demand for "good" technical communicators.

But, do we have an enough supply of "good" technical communicators? In the absence of substantive aca-

demical support, how can we create quality technical communicators?

Forget infusing new blood into the profession. Given the paucity of educational means and methods, how do we build on and hone our own skills?

In this scenario, I believe that one of the best ways to nurture our own growth is by being a part of a sharing community. All of us need to come together, hold our hands, and help each other grow.

The India chapter of STC is commit-

ted to fostering a sharing community. However, for this community to be meaningful, we need all of you to participate—whether you are an STC member or not. The more we are, the more we share, and the more value we create for ourselves.

We have already started organising learning sessions in Bangalore and Pune. Such sessions will begin in other cities soon. The technical communication field is very vast, and every little nugget that we gain from the sharing and learning sessions will help us do our jobs better.

I look forward to your participation and support in building a vibrant and thriving technical communication community in India. ▲



STC India, Managers and City Representatives

Through the efforts of a small network of volunteers, the India chapter of STC is promoting technical communication in India. The Administrative Council of the chapter, headed by the President, is responsible for the running of the chapter. The Administrative Council is supported by the following committee managers and city representatives:

STC Committee Managers

Education Manager — Susan Alexander
susan@stc-india.org

Membership Manager — Prashant Natarajan
prashant@stc-india.org

Competitions Manager — Neeraj Bhatia
neeraj@stc-india.org

Public Relations Manager — Sunil Gokhale
sunil@stc-india.org

Webmaster — Anupama A.
anu@stc-india.org

City Representatives

Chennai — Ramkumar Ramamoorthy
ramkumar@stc-india.org

Delhi — Anissha Aggarwal
anissha@stc-india.org

Hyderabad — Uday Chava
uday@stc-india.org

Mumbai — Suman Saha
suman@stc-india.org

Pune — Makarand Pandit
makarand@stc-india.org

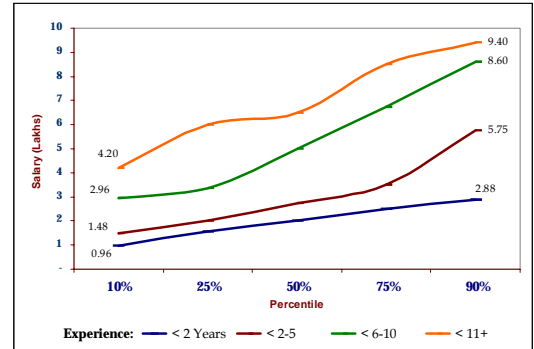


2002 Technical Communicator (India) Salary Survey

The table below shows the salary data for technical writers/editors residing in India. The salary data is presented by selected groupings and shown in percentiles. All figures are in Indian rupees.

The following definitions pertain:

- Base** The total responses in a given category.
- Mean** The value computed by averaging the tabulated responses.
- 10%** Ten percent of the responses were below this value; ninety percent were above this value
- 25%** Twenty-five percent of the responses were below this value; seventy-five percent were above this value.
- 50%** Fifty percent of the responses were below this value; fifty percent were above this value. (This is also called the *median*)
- 75%** Seventy-five percent of the responses were below this value; twenty-five percent were above this
- 90%** Ninety percent of the responses were below this value; ten percent were above this value.



Grouping	Base	Mean	10%	25%	50%	75%	90%
Total	83	Rs 3,51,807	Rs 1, 45, 200	Rs 2,00,000	Rs 2,85,000	Rs 4,00,000	Rs 6,50,000
Employment Level							
Entry	13	1,61,538	1,01,800	1,44,000	1,60,000	2,00,000	2,04,800
Mid-Level	48	3,31,812	1,75,000	2,07,500	2,86,500	3,50,000	6,00,000
Senior-Level	20	5,35,350	2,73,200	3,37,500	5,25,000	6,62,500	8,50,000
Education Level							
Bachelor's Degree	43	3,34,651	1,44,000	1,87,500	2,40,000	4,00,000	6,40,000
Master's Degree or	39	3,74,615	1,72,000	2,45,000	3,10,000	4,50,000	6,60,000
Sex							
Female	62	3,25,161	1,44,000	1,98,500	2,50,000	3,50,000	6,45,000
Male	21	4,30,476	2,40,000	2,88,000	4,00,000	5,50,000	7,00,000
Age							
20-29	42	2,96,357	1,44,600	2,00,000	2,40,000	3,07,500	5,95,000
30-39	33	3,83,242	1,47,200	2,40,000	3,00,000	5,00,000	6,90,000
40 years and above	4	7,26,500	4,99,200	5,64,000	7,25,000	8,87,500	9,55,000
Years of Experience							
Less than 2 years	21	2,01,095	96,000	1,55,000	2,00,000	2,50,000	2,88,000
2-5 years	38	3,00,263	1,48,200	2,00,000	2,75,000	3,50,000	5,75,000
6-10 years	19	5,35,105	2,96,000	3,37,500	5,00,000	6,75,000	8,60,000
11 years or more	5	6,80,000	4,20,000	6,00,000	6,50,000	8,50,000	9,40,000

— Statistical analysis and charts by Frederick Menezes



Indexing for Technical Writers

Indexing has been a passion of mine ever since I began writing technical documentation. To me, it is the key to the use of a technical book. I have found it of utmost help in easy location of relevant content within a book.

There are scores of books on technical indexing that detail how to create an index in the 'right way' with minimal effort while keeping up with the documentation development lifecycle. This is, of course, when you do not have the luxury of a full-time indexer. That, so far, has been a dream in the various companies I have worked at and not a very coveted one at that.

I have found out the hard way that it is up to the writers to put whatever indexing skills they have into practice. As a writer, how should I index a book? The theory goes that it is best to index as you write. Embedded indexing features provided with packages such as FrameMaker and Word help in creating indexes as you update a document. When you actually use these features during the documentation development lifecycle often depends on whether you are updating specific parts of a book or writing a new book.

Updating specific parts of a book or documentation set generally involves adding chunks of information documenting the new or changed functionality. This makes it easier to index as you complete each chunk. On the other hand, writing a new book is a different ball game. Information in a new book is seldom stable and requires constant reorganization making it difficult to get a handle on the structure of an index. Frequent

changes also reduce the motivation to create an index that will need a lot of rework later.

As a result of practical constraints, the practice of indexing is often performed in the technical and editorial review phase or the copyedit phase. Late indexing tends to put a lot of pressure on the writer and sometimes on other team members too. To avoid this pressure, I budget some extra time for indexing during the end of the project. This is especially important if time required for indexing is not part of the delivery process. For example, I usually tend to do a full copyedit and proofread of my book once the book is stable and most reviews are complete. I add the estimated time for creating or updating the index to the required time for copyediting the book.

Creating Draft Index Entries while Copyediting

As I edit a book, I create draft index entries on paper. This helps me decide the structure of the index. Also during the copyedit, I am better able to correlate entries that need to be linked. For example:

password management, 2-19

See also sysadm.ini configuration, 2-10

I use the following practices while creating draft index entries during the copyedit:

Use vocabulary that appears in the book.

Create a list of first-level index entries as you go along. Match capitalization and spelling to that used in the book.

Make a note of the wording and types of phrases used while you are

copyediting and creating draft entries.

If you have time, match the list you created above to the indexes of other books in the same documentation set.

Indexing Quick Tips

Once the basic index is created, the remaining steps to polish the index are standard. The following are some quick tips:

1. Create a maximum of three levels of index entries. For example:

Three levels are necessary here:

processes, 109

management

API, 50

POSIX, 157

memory management, 109

address spaces, 110

API, 115

models, 111

Three levels are not necessary here as there is no need to list the types of components:

hot restart, 8-82

API, 8-88

components, 8-89

site restart, 8-87

2. Create concise entries. Do not create phrases or clauses as entries.
3. Make sure no entries begin with a preposition or article. Eliminate unnecessary adjectives.
4. Index only major instances of a topic. Do not index every instance as you would for a concordance.
5. Index synonyms and competi-

(Continued on page 6)

(Continued from page 5)

tors terms for actions and terms used in the book to further aid users. For example:

computer

See workstation, 3-10

windows messaging

See inter-process communication, 4-12

In the preceding example, computer is a generic term that a user might look up, but workstation is the specific term used in the book. Similarly, windows messaging is more commonly used and understood than, perhaps, inter-process communication, the specific term used in the book.

- Finally, do not forget to edit the index itself. Keep the following in mind while editing the index:
- Check at least five to ten percent of the index entries to make sure they point to the correct page.
- Add See and See also cross-references where necessary.
- Make sure that you do not have two separate entries because of different casing. For example:
indexing, practice of, 3-5
Indexing, practice of, 3-5
- Run a spell-check.

Further Reading

1. Bonura, Larry S., *The Art of Indexing*, 1994, ISBN: 0-471-01449-4
2. University of Chicago, *The Chicago Manual of Style*, 14th Edition, ISBN: 0-226-10389-7

3. Brusaw, Charles T., Alred Gerald J., Oliu Walter E., *Handbook of Technical Writing*, 5th Edition, ISBN: 0-312-16690-7
4. Mulvany, Nancy C., *Indexing Books*, ISBN 0-226-55014-1

(Melanie works as a Technical Writer with Sun Microsystems, France. E-mail: Melanie.Doulton@sun.com) ▲

STC's 49th Annual Conference

Mark your calendar. STC's 49th Annual Conference is scheduled for May 5-8, 2002 at Nashville, Tennessee, USA. The largest conference of its kind, STC Annual Conference attracts over 2,200 professionals from around the globe every year.



This year the conference provides a program of approximately 200 technical sessions. These are 60- to 90-minute presentations, each conducted by one or more experts in some area of technical communication. Attending the conference ensures learning, networking, and job-finding opportunities.

You may register for the conference online. Click the "Online registration" link at <http://www.stc.org/49thConf/index.html>. Registering before April 19 will provide you the best rates. ▲

The Society for Technical Communication (STC) is an individual membership organisation dedicated to advancing the arts and sciences of technical communication. It is the largest organisation of its type in the world.

It's more than 23,000 members include technical writers and editors, graphic designers and technical illustrators, information architects and developers, photographers and audiovisual specialists, multimedia artists, and others whose work involves making technical information available to those who need it.

The mission of the Society for Technical Communication is designing the future of technical communication. If you want to join or know more about STC, please write to Prashant Natarajan at prashant@stc-india.org. ▲



www.stc.org

www.stc-india.org

Frederick Serving As Competition Judge

Frederick Menezes, President of the India chapter of STC, is serving as a judge for the 2001-2002 STC Newsletter Competition.

Frederick had been the Editor of *Indus* since its inception till December 2001. *Indus*, during his editorship, won an Award of Excellence in the STC Newsletter competition of 1999-2000.

Kudos Frederick !





Exercise Your Vote

The annual STC election opens in mid-February and closes on April 15. If you pay your dues by February 28, 2002, you are eligible to vote. Ballots for the STC election are sent out in two phases. For those who have paid their dues early, ballots were mailed around February 20. Those who paid their dues between February 15 and February 28 will have their ballots mailed to them around March 10. The election closes April 15.

You can vote by returning your ballot by mail or using it to vote online. If you wish to vote online, use the Web address and Election Validation Number printed on the ballot, along with your member number, and log in to election Web site at <https://vote.election.com>. (The 5-digit member number can be found on membership cards, issues of *Intercom*, and on most STC mailings.) After logging in, follow the online voting instructions for casting your vote. The site will become active when the election opens. Online voting ends at 12:00 noon EST on April 15, 2002.

Highest Elected Post

Do you know the candidate elected to the office of Second Vice President serves for one year in that position and then serves one year each as First Vice President, President, and Immediate Past President. This makes the office of Second Vice President the highest elected post in STC, Indus lists the vision of two important candidates for the office of Second Vice President, Andrea L. Ames and Suzanna Laurent.

Andrea L. Ames' Vision

(This is an abridged version of Andrea's Vision for a more effective STC.)

THE VISION

If elected, I will work for the next four years to raise our strategic value--both as individuals and as an industry--to the organizations for which we work.

My vision for the industry is one in which:

- Our main goal is to ensure users' success--not necessarily to write documentation or to coerce our users to read documentation
- We design and develop information to enable users to use products--not to fill in for the deficiencies in product design

In other words, in this vision of the future we will no

longer define ourselves by the information products (manuals, help, etc.) we deliver--nor the tools we use to develop them. Instead, our employers will recognize the value we bring to the products and information we design and develop. Think about it: The real value we bring is not the documents we develop but users' increased success! My goal is to work to help the organizations in and with which we work understand this and help enable them to get the most value from us.

As I have travelled around the country speaking with members, I have met many of you who share this vision. From my 17+ years of experience in the industry, my vast network of associates, and the strategic work I have done with various kinds of organizations, I am convinced that this is the right vision. The question remains: How will it happen?

Our main goal is to ensure users' success—not necessarily to write documentation or to coerce our users to read documentation.

— Andrea Ames

THE IMPLEMENTATION

The move toward this vision has already begun--primarily via STC. As our new mission statement proclaims, we are certainly "designing the future of technical communication." STC is one of the most valuable and powerful tools we have, and our work in STC is one of the most important contributions we can make to our own careers. The power of many, the visibility of a large and well-respected professional organization, and vision and leadership are the ingredients that will change the face of our industry.

To do this, I want to work with the Society as I have during my 15-year STC career to enable members of our industry to become leaders and to be recognized for that leadership--particularly within our organizations and among our employers' and clients' industries. Working with the Board of Directors, committee managers, and chapter leaders, I can support and maintain important programs--like branding and governance--that are already working to move us in this direction. I can also work with other leaders to devise new initiatives to raise the visibility of STC and our industry, as well as help our employers and clients further recognize our value.

WHY ME?

Not one to sit around and wait for someone else to

(Continued on page 8)

(Continued from page 7)

take the lead, I have spent most of the past four to five years working to begin changing our industry to fit my vision. In my own career, I have focused on learning and developing skills, technologies, and tools to design and develop information for products and user experiences, rather than documentation deliverables. I am a technical communicator specializing in audience analysis, information and interaction design for product user interfaces and online assistance, usability, and user-centred product and information design and development process.

To assist others in the effort to move toward the future, I have acted as a mentor, teacher, and educational certificate coordinator to:

- Design programs and courses around these skills and technologies
- Impart to my students strategies and problem-solving skills so that they can participate in this new world
- Guide those asking for assistance to develop their careers in similar directions

I have spoken at many STC chapter meetings, regional conferences, and annual conferences, and met many of you--the members of our industry. My presentations are aimed toward helping you make career development choices that increase your value to the industry and to your employers and clients. I have encouraged you to:

- Think outside the traditional documentation box
- Evangelise usability and user-centred design and development techniques within your organization
- Participate in your organization's design and development process at a strategic level

I used my term as Director-Sponsor (1998-2001) to learn as much about you and the Society as possible. Understanding how our organization works enables me to influence STC's direction and effect change. I have also participated very actively in two very important Society initiatives, integrated branding and governance.

I have also served the Society extensively in other international-level positions and at the regional, local and chapter levels.

And although I have spent a lot of time talking to members of the profession, I also draw from extensive experience of my own in the corporate world, academia, and government--both as a direct employee and as a consultant.

I hope you will consider the future of your career and what you would like from your professional organization. Then I urge you to vote, as your vote does make a

difference!

About Andrea

Andrea L. Ames is a technical communicator specializing in user-centred product interface and online information architecture and design, interaction design, and usability. Andrea is a Senior Information Developer at IBM Corporation, where she leads information development for data management products. She is a member of the STC international Board of Directors; coordinator for two University of California Extension technical communication certificates; and a published author and freelance writer. You can contact Andrea at andrea@ucentrics.com.

Suzanna Laurent's Vision

Last November while attending the STC Region 4 Conference in Michigan, I visited the Henry Ford Museum. During that visit I learned a lot about Ford and the automobile he made so successful. Many people have the mistaken idea that Henry Ford was an inventor, but Ford did not invent the automobile. He didn't even "invent" the assembly line.

So what did Henry Ford do? He learned from other people's experiences as well as his own. He took risks. He saw failure as a lesson, and he applied everything he learned to perfect the product, the process, and the policies that shaped the American automobile industry. In short, he was a great innovator. And because he was so willing to share the lessons he learned, he

became an inspiration to many others.

I am running for the office of second vice president of STC because in my own way, I want to do as Henry Ford did. I want to use the lessons that I have learned in my 25 years in management and leadership to create innovations that will make STC vital to the careers of all technical communicators in the many fields within our profession.

One of the more innovative things that I've done in my three-year term as director-sponsor for region 5 is to attend conferences in every region to meet our members and listen to their ideas. This "listening tour" has given me a greater understanding of the challenges facing the Society, its chapters, and our members.

STC members work in more diversified environments than ever before, with experience, skills, and talents that vary widely. Nonetheless, we share the desire to be recognized for our contributions to our workplace. I believe that STC can help members achieve this goal. By proactively promoting the profession of technical communication, we can make a difference in the lives and careers of our members.

My strategies for accomplishing this goal include:

(Continued on page 9)

Proactive promotion of the profession of technical communication can make a difference in the lives and careers of STC members.

— Suzanna Laurent



STC's Fiftieth Anniversary

As part of its fiftieth anniversary celebration in May 2003, STC has created the 50th Anniversary Committee to ensure the event is memorable. The 50th Anniversary Committee is involved in an ongoing effort to collect memories and stories to be shared throughout the Society by means of commemorative literature and a special Website.

Whether you are a Society leader or a chapter member, a member of many years' duration or one who recently joined, a technical communication specialist or a novice, you may share stories about the memorable times we have had. For example, you could share stories about the great session at the Annual Conference that changed your life, perhaps a mentor in the Society who helped groom your career, or a technical communication "first".

Your involvement is easy. Whenever you think of a story you would like to include, send an e-mail or snail mail to Liz Babcock (lizbab@iwvisp.com or 401 N. Warner, Ridgecrest, CA 93555). Liz is the committee member who has volunteered to serve as the initial collection point for your stories.

Keep your stories succinct (250 words or less on any given topic) and entertaining. While you may send several sto-

ries, keep each story to the point and on a single topic.

The following questions will help you write your story:

- What amusing or inspirational story can you tell about how you joined the profession? How did you overcome obstacles that STC members will find educational or amusing?
- What career and/or Society highlight can you share? What is your favourite STC memory?
- What mentor or role model inspired you in your career or in the Society? What makes that person memorable? What did he/she do to help you?
- What experiences, humorous or inspiring, have you had with the changing technology?

This list of questions is not exhaustive. Please communicate with Liz Babcock, lizbab@iwvisp.com, or with other members of the committee, as follows: Georgina Cantoni, committee chair, gcantoni@techcomm-solutions.com; Ken Cook, kenc@kencook.com; Marguerite Krupp, mkrupp@cisco.com; Bill Leavitt, skibill@aol.com; Ernie Mazzatenta, Jande@a-o.com; and Bill Stolgitis, bill@stc.org. All committee members look forward to your messages! ▲

Exercise Your Vote

(Continued from page 8)

- Teaching members how to define the value they add to the products and services we provide, how to measure that value, and to add more value
- Continuing the innovative, proactive, and forward-thinking implementation of the branding and governance initiatives
- Ensuring that the STC board of directors becomes a policy-driven board
- Communicating more effectively with organizations outside our profession and with STC members and chapter leaders internally
- Providing better training for

Society and chapter leaders

- Creating opportunities for members to learn so that they can become more successful in their careers.

With these strategies, and with experienced leadership and guidance, STC can become the catalyst that enables technical communicators to achieve the professional status they have earned. And when that is accomplished, we will have fulfilled my vision for STC to become an organization whose members feel that the Society is absolutely essential to their profession!

I believe that I am the candidate who is most qualified to provide

the leadership necessary to achieve this vision for STC.

About Suzanna

Suzanna Laurent, Director-Sponsor Region 5, is standing for the office of second vice president of STC. She shares her vision of a better STC. Suzanna has produced award-winning documentation as a corporate employee, entrepreneur, and lone writer in a variety of fields. She has served the STC at various levels including Society's Board of Directors (1999-2002). She has presented sessions at 28, besides paper presentations at many more chapter meetings. You may know more about her at <http://pages.prodigy.net/slaurent> send her an e-mail at laurent@prodigy.net. ▲



Demo Creation Software

Have you ever felt the need to explain a series of computer actions to a technician, fellow employee, customer, or user? If yes, read on.

Whether you are trying to explain a computer problem or you require explaining a sequence of software steps, the use of a demo helps. A demo can include any or all three mediums of communication --text, sound, and visual display. Whether you require all three mediums in any demo will depend on your needs. Many demo creation software packages are available in the market. Starters may use Microsoft PowerPoint to create good demos. However, you can use two powerful software packages--Camtasia 3.0.1 and ViewletBuilder2--to create quality demos. This article compares these two powerful software packages by explaining their features and comparative advantages and disadvantages.

Camtasia

Camtasia, the flagship product of TechSmith, is a video-editing tool. You can use Camtasia to record video, edit them, and add text and sound overlays to them. Camtasia can capture text being written on the screen, cursor movements, mouse actions, and menu selections and save these as an image that you can play back later. Camtasia saves output file in multiple formats such as avi, asf, rm, and animated gif. Using the right viewer, you can play these files across multiple operating systems.

Camtasia consists of the following components:

1. Recorder- Recorder captures all

action on computers screen, or a window, or a user-defined fixed region. Using a special feature called ScreenPad, you can insert text in standard or custom shapes such as balloons, notes, and tips. You can even use Recorder to output an avi file that serves as a streaming media encoder directing output to applications such as streaming media encoders, video conferencing applications, video editors, and web cam applications.

2. **Player** - It provides standard video playing features. You can adjust sound and move across the video in both directions.
3. **TSCC**- TechSmith Screen Capture Codec is the standard codec shipped with Camtasia files. This is a video encoder-decoder that is perhaps one of the most efficient for producing quality avi files. You can make executable files, which

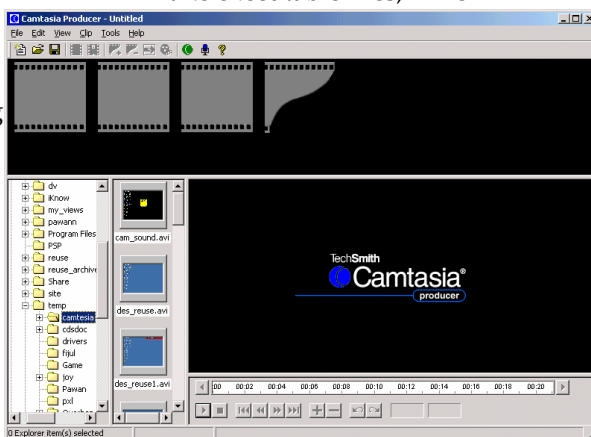
4. **Producer** - Producer is the engine of the Camtasia suite. Producer allows you to edit avi files. You can use multiple avi files to create movies and insert transition between each file. You can add basic credit information about your file and include watermarks (logos) in the avi file. By adjusting between different audio and video formats, you can optimise output file size.
5. **DubIt** - DubIt adds audio overlay to video files produced by Camtasia. You can either import audio from pre-recorded files or add audio in real time to movie clips (avi, rm, asf) and images.

ViewletBuilder

Unlike Camtasia, which is primarily a video demo tool, ViewletBuilder is a frame-based demo-tutorial creation tool that creates interactive output files containing screenshots, text, and speech overlay. ViewletBuilder allows you to define click zones and text zones that can wait for user interaction and check the integrity of response. This feature ensures that the output file does not only serve static information transfer but also causes user to make decisions. Creative use of click zones and text zones can help simulate the user environment and create a computer-based training (CBT). Further, you

can trace mouse pointer movement and track click areas. These features lend animation in the final output file.

The output files produced by



Camtasia Producer

include your video (avi, rm file etc) along with TSCC, thereby ensuring that the user need not install the codec.

(Continued from page 10)

ViewletBuilder are called viewlets. Viewlets are HTML files calling JavaScript functions.

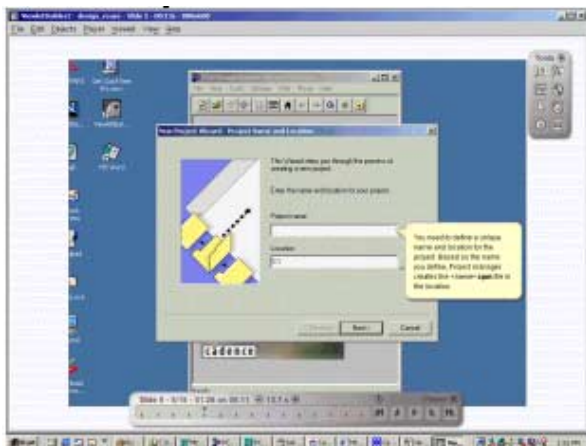
You can create viewlets in Windows, Solaris or Linux and view them in Windows, Solaris, Linux and HP operating systems.

Viewlets are delivered to the user from a web site using streaming technology and all major browser display them. You can also use

als. The advantage of having text and click zones serves as the match winner. The output is interactive, which ensures users do not fall asleep. Greater involvement of users ensures they end retaining information longer.

Use Model

Camtasia is a suite while ViewletBuilder is an effective integrated application. This difference reflects in the two software's use model. In



ViewletBuilder

Camtasia, you have to switch back and forth across multiple tools to use its complete power. For example, if you want to add text in some place in movie, you need to decide in advance and use ScreenPad to generate text or alternatively you need to create a custom graphic and show it at the right time as part of your video.

viewlets in Intranet sites or as part of routine software documentation in CDs.

Camtasia Vs ViewletBuilder

The power of Camtasia lies in capturing sequence of images, whether from a web site or on your own computer. You can even use Camtasia to capture game shots of DirectX games. These images can have text and sound overlay and serve as effective demo of software. You can use Camtasia to capture desktop problems and use it to get faster, effective service from HelpDesk. Electronic and CAD designs, medical explanations, and interactive web sites can include Camtasia files.

As opposed to Camtasia, the real strength of ViewletBuilder lies in creating and maintaining quality tutori-

ViewletBuilder has a simple use model revolving around three steps. First, capture all the screenshots. Second, add text or interaction to them. Finally, add sound. All media--graphic, text, and sound--serve as layers and you can edit each layer independently. This helps in easier creation and maintenance of viewlets - an advantage, which Camtasia would have to work very hard to overcome.

User Documentation

To learn Camtasia, you need to understand its individual compo-

nents. Camtasia documentation lacks quality flow documentation causing limited and often non-intuitive explanation of how to make an effective movie.

ViewletBuilder provides lot more detailed documentation in form of viewlets. Each viewlet explains all pros and cons, instructions, and examples around different aspects of using ViewletBuilder. However ViewletBuilder, in an apparent attempt to popularise viewlets, provides documentation only as viewlets. If you need to search help for some word or some feature, you will find no easy method of accessing the right information. This shortcoming can become irritating.

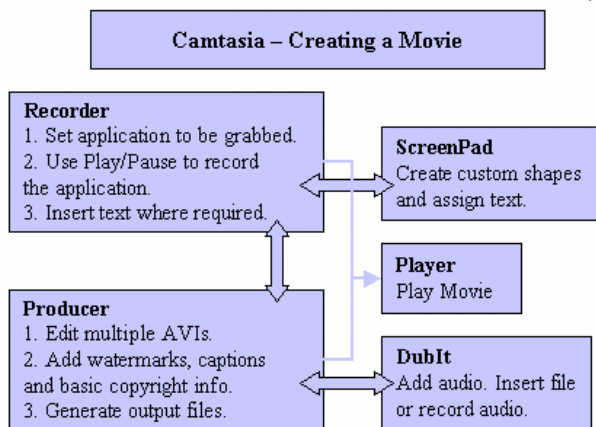
Portability

Both Camtasia and ViewletBuilder produce output in formats that are portable across multiple operating systems. Camtasia generates animated gif files, which run on all important browsers on all operating systems. Animated gif files are 256 colour files and contain no sound. If you need more colours or sound, you can create avi, asf, or rm files in Camtasia. These files require a viewer to be present on the users' system. Although the viewer is free, if users do not have the viewer they might not download and install it on their systems. This might reduce the viewer base. ViewletBuilder generates viewlets, which run on all important browsers on Windows, Solaris, Linux, and HP operating systems.

Output File Size

For a similar nature video without sound, ViewletBuilder and Camtasia have approximately same size. If sound is added, viewlets may require only 40-60% of Camtasia produced equivalent avi file size. However, if you produce output file as animated gif, an option avail-

(Continued on page 12)



able in Camtasia, then that file has the minimum storage space.

Speed

This is one area where Camtasia is a runaway winner. The speed of avi files is extremely fast. Viewlets are often slow.

Cost

Again, Camtasia wins here by a mile. Camtasia costs 150\$ for one license and 500\$ for five licenses. Vielet-Builder comparatively makes a much bigger hole in the pocket. It costs 999\$ for one license and if you buy 21 or more licenses, it costs 450\$/license.

Miscellaneous

Camtasia is produced by TechSmith. For more informa-

tion about camtasia, check www.techsmith.com. Vielet-Builder is a product of Qarbon and its detailed documentation and samples are available at www.qarbon.com.

Summary

If you are looking for an effective demo tool that costs almost a penny and produces output files that can be viewed across multiple browsers and operating systems, use Camtasia. However if you are looking for an effective documentation strategy, which involves going in for eLearning or adding creative tutorials with product documentation on CDs, then vouch ViewletBuilder.

(Pawan is a Senior Technical Writer in Cadence Design Systems, India.) ▲

STC India Diary

February 1, 2002

A training programme on “Documentation Test Plans (DTP)” was held at Bangalore. Ms. Neelam Singh from Oracle India Pvt. Ltd conducted the programme. Neelam emphasized the importance of quality in technical writing and the role of a technical writer in the documentation quality life cycle. Her stimulating talk caused discussions around questions such as what can be defined as quality goals, does quality mean just delivering a document or delivering a quality document and how does one create zero defect documents.

The training discussed several quality processes. First, develop formal test plans for our documents. The testing phase of a document begins when all reviews are complete and we must make testing a part of our documentation life cycle. Second, treat audits in true perspective and learn from them. Neelam encouraged participants to treat audit as “a fact finding exercise and not a fault finding exercise”. Since a technical writer is trained to detect



documentation errors that others might miss, technical writers could don the role of Software Quality Assurance (SQA) in the team. This may require a formal training on SQA. Third, Neelam suggested using metrics to identify patterns on issues such as defect types, areas of defects, and schedule overruns. Data for metrics can be collected throughout the project life cycle. Fourth, use the Trigger and Impact method to calculate the severity of errors. By applying the Trigger and Impact method, we can identify the reasons or the actions that trigger a defect in the document and the impact of these documentation defects. Finally, learn to “windup and introspect. This

helps identify went wrong in the documentation life cycle and what we did right! The learning from such an exercise ensures incremental improvement in quality and processes.

– with inputs from
Rashmi Kumar, SAP Labs,
Bangalore

February 23, 2002

A programme on “Editing” was held at i-flex Solutions, Pride Silicon Plaza, Pune. Sunil Gokhale, an Associate Consultant with i-flex, conducted the session.

During his illuminating and often hilarious presentation, Sunil stressed on the importance of edit review process and offered practical suggestions on how to involve the right people. Sunil explained the types of reviews, provided tips on editing, and stressed on the importance of having consistency documents (like style guides) to regularize editing process. ▲



Primer on Critical Thinking and Writing

Living in or near Delhi presents some great advantages, such as the opportunity to visit the International Book Fair. Stalls at the fair offer access to books that are usually hard to come by, and are sometimes even out of print. One such book that I had the opportunity to buy, is the *Allyn & Bacon Handbook*. Though not part of the *Allyn & Bacon* series for technical writers, this book is a primer on critical thinking and writing, and one that I recommend to anyone who takes this profession seriously.

Technical communicators often do not arrive at their current profession via the writing, or technical route. This means that many actually land their first job, armed with neither of the two basic skills, the ability to write and the ability to comprehend complex information. While the technical information gap is usually resolved over time with prolonged exposure to technical concepts, the WRITING aspect of this craft is often either ignored, or inadequately developed.

A preparation for the job on hand often includes a formula-like approach influenced by stylebooks and very generic and localised information offered on various Web sites. The *Allyn & Bacon Handbook* is based on the theme of Critical Thinking, and Writing Across the Curriculum. Intended for the American college student, the handbook has a strong focus on the interconnection between thinking, reading and writing. The second edition includes valuable tips for those writing in English as a second language (ESL). The book, written by Leonard J. Rosen of Harvard University and Laurence Behrens of the University of California, Santa Barbara, comprises 44 chapters and four appendixes, distributed over 12 sections.

Section one of the book discusses the critical thinking process and various approaches to reading, such as reading to understand, to respond, to evaluate, and to synthesize. While many of us instinctively use some of these techniques, the book presents a useful analysis of the methods and their outcome. A thorough understanding of-how to read-could result in more effective ramping up, and enhance our editing processes as well.

The process of writing is examined and elucidated in Section two. While this is no different from advice offered in other books on the subject, the thread on criti-

cal thinking continues through this chapter and maps the input (reading) to the output (writing). Audience profiling, coherence, parallelism and other driving factors are well explained with copious examples.

Sections three to seven demystify the complexities of English grammar, and explain their proper use with incidental references to rhetorical devices. These sections are exhaustive and offer a comprehensive perspective on issues of style and diction (choice of words, not pronunciation).

Section eight explains the mechanics of writing, and common conventions. Sections nine to eleven analyse various writing scenarios, beginning from research, and ending with finished papers/documents.

Section 12 comprises the ESL section and the appendixes. The ESL chapters (42-44) lay bare the complex dynamics of English grammar for the non-native English speaker. Appendix A talks about using the computer as a writing aid, and discusses early word-processors and their features. Appendix B shares some conventions on

manuscript formats and publishing. Appendixes C and D are glossaries of English usage and terms used in grammar and composition.

The book is a thoroughly enjoyable and informative read. I began to understand why I did things the way I do, and learned a few new tricks as well. I strongly recommend this book to anyone who wants to learn how to write effectively, and has training responsibilities as well.

If this book is not available online, try the following dealer:

Peacock Books
4214/1 Ansari Road,
Darya Ganj, New Delhi -110 002
Phone: 011 3285873, 3280451
e-mail: gupta.atlantic@access.net.in

Shipping costs around Rs. 50/-. The price is sure to be a pleasant surprise. ▲

The book demystifies the complexities of English grammar, and explains its proper use with incidental references to rhetorical devices.



Neeraj Bhatia

Armed with a B.E (Electronics and Telecommunication) and a MBA (Marketing), Neeraj started his career with a four years stint in advertising and followed it with a short stint in client servicing. It was during this period when Neeraj got drawn towards copywriting and started writing press ads, sales literature, scripts for corporate films, and content for multimedia CDs and Web sites.

Technical writing, naturally, became the next logical goal post. Neeraj joined VERITAS, a leading provider of storage management software for data protection, application availability, and disaster recovery. VERITAS provided the ideal background where Neeraj could leverage his writing skills and technical background. At VERITAS, Neeraj is part of a 9-member documentation team, and leads the documentation effort for some product components. He creates Installation and Configuration Guides, User manuals, System Administrator's Guides, Help for cross-platform and Web-based applications, and maintains the group intranet.

Neeraj has found working as a technical communicator (TC) an extremely fulfilling experience. He feels being a TC, helps him to be always at the edge of learning curve. Besides learning the product, Neeraj gets to dabble in QA, GUI design, and usability reviews. Neeraj strongly believes that TCs can add a lot of value to how user interfaces interact with end users.

Neeraj has been an STC member since Oct 2000 and

thinks STC is a great resource pool. Whenever free, Neeraj reads (non-fiction mostly), listens to music, and travels. Neeraj is a proud father of a four-month-old daughter and playing with the newborn is his greatest stress reliever.

Prashant Natarajan

A chemical engineer by education, Prashant Natarajan got hooked to technical writing while still in college. He had seen there existed technical writing even in the chemical industry. Valuable advice from his seniors substantiated his already increasing appreciation for technical writing.

After graduating, Prashant joined eCredit.com as a Technical Writer. From there, he switched to Siemens Information Systems Limited where he works now as a Senior Systems Engineer. He writes and edits online help, user manuals, API references, and tutorials.

Prashant finds technical communication exciting as it provides an opportunity to understand a given domain and explain it to a lay audience. His happiness increases when solutions written by him help solve users' problems. However, Prashant holds a grudge that lack of further education and research facilities in India makes it difficult for Indian technical communicators to proactively impact the global technical communication progress. On the positive side, he believes technical communication will create a big business opportunity for India. To succeed, he declares, Indian technical communicators need to create a strong brand image and popularise the profession further. ▲

Are you seeking a Job? Check who all are scouting for quality talent!

VERITAS Software (Pune)

Need a technical writer who is a self-starter, has flawless English, and grasps technology quickly. Person will create support readiness training (SRT) material for global Technical Support Engineering teams. People with 2-4 years technical writing experience, contact tshiring@veritas.com.

Oracle Software India Pvt. Ltd (Hyderabad)

Need Technical Writer/Senior Technical Writer with 1 -15 years relevant experience writing user manuals in MNCs or good software companies. Candidate should be a post-graduate or engineer and preferably have domain experience in Student Systems/Education Software. Contact Krishna.Kappaganti@oracle.com.

Hewlett Packard (Bangalore)

Need an engineer or science graduate with 1-3 years technical writing/editing experience. For details, contact vrinda@india.hp.com.

Polaris Software Lab Ltd (Gurgaon)

Need a Technical writer with minimum 2 years technical writing/editing experience. Contact sonali.arora@polaris.co.in.

SAP LABS India (Bangalore)

Need a freelancer with minimum 2 year writing experience in RoboHelp and MS Office. Contact Neela.Bopaiah@sap.com.

Source: TWIN