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Getting Future-Ready!



Welcome Note



Mugdha Kulkarni

With immense pleasure, we handover this newsletter to you.

Immense sounds like a small word today considering only a limited number of days and efforts we could spend on collecting proposals, scanning through the entries, editing, designing, and finally publishing this newsletter.

When the articles started trickling in, it was inspiring to see the kind of topics our fellow writers found interesting. From SEO to solution documentation, from accessibility to embedded user assistance. Yes, all the articles indicated that we are quite adaptable to the changes influenced by technological advancement. Yes, we do belong to the brave new world!

I am sure you'll enjoy reading this newsletter. There's something for each one of us in here.

But there's one fascinating fact about all these articles that I must share with you.

In the interesting times like this, it's obvious to spread our wings, and broaden our horizons. If you've been a technical writer for some time now, you must be feeling that change all around you. The changing style guides, new-age tools, modern authoring and delivery formats, evolving processes, and the new way of working. Even the designations and department names for God's sake! Change is in the air. It's inevitable.

So how do you quickly adapt to it? By not forgetting the basics. The time-less principles. What's the one thing that we all strive to achieve? – "Helping users!" Yes, if your focus is clear, every little change makes sense. And that's exactly what I see in all these articles. The focus is never forgotten. That's precisely what makes this newsletter so readable.

We couldn't give justice to a few excellent writers and topics for the want of time. I am sure we will keep promoting this unpublished community expertise through the rest of the year, in one way or the other.

I sincerely hope you find this newsletter inspiring! Inspiring enough to compel you to submit an article to the Indus team, and to send a session proposal for the annual conference! ☺

Happy reading!

A special thanks are in order to *Kedar Kulkarni*, who developed this newsletter almost single-handedly. I stepped in much later almost when he was nearing the finish line.

Thanks, Kedar, for all your efforts. For giving this task a priority over your weekends and nights.



When SEO meets Documentation – Mayur Bhandarkar



Google is an absolute necessity in the information age. An end user looking for information will always use Google to find the information. This makes it absolutely essential for information providers to organize information in such a way that the right information is delivered to the end user. The current trend in the information age is not getting the information, but getting the right and appropriate information.

Documentation (help files and user guides) has undergone, and is still undergoing, a rapid change in the information age. Mobile computing and intuitive UI has eliminated the need for guides in many cases. The process of delivering help along with the software are things of the past. Nowadays, help is available online, and companies have sub-domains that is dedicated for support or help. The online age demands that help should be available online and should be accessible 24x7 without the restriction of geographical boundaries.

The information providers have accepted the reality of providing help online, but the problem is half-solved. Although there is a lot of information available online, the end users complain that they are not able to access the appropriate or relevant information. They say that they have to go through a lot of irrelevant information before finding the appropriate information. Although Google search or file-based searches exist, the search results displayed can only be accurate or relevant if the information has been optimized to suit the requirements of the search.

Search Engine Optimization (SEO) involves optimizing a web site for search engines. It is a process of designing and developing a web site to rank well in search engine results. In fact it is much more but we are going to limit the description to what is required for the needs of online documentation.

So how does implementing SEO on the existing content help? Well, if your help is online and if you want the end users to reach the right page or topic, on your website then it is absolutely essential for the content to be organized and optimized for search engines. Remember this fact, people may know the website where the information is available, but they will still use Google to reach the page or topic relevant to them. And if the result is not displayed in the first page, or the first 10 results of Google, then you have lost a customer.

DOES THIS ALL SOUND INTERESTING? YES, IT IS! KEEP A WATCH ON STC PUNE'S ANNOUNCEMENTS. MAYUR WILL BE CONDUCTING A SESSION ON THIS TOPIC SOON!

From “Technical Writer” to “User Solutions Provider”



Ugur Akinci

www.tcc6.com

Once upon a time I was a writer, a journalist, dispatching daily news reports for a daily newspaper. It was the 90s, still the era of the “book”, the “codex”. “Page” was still the unit of information delivery. Conversations like the following were regular and familiar:

“Where did you say you saw it?”

“On the sports page, page 9, towards the middle left.”

The pages had numbers, every one of them. They had footers and headers. The books had covers, one in the front, and one in the back.

The book paradigm was so deeply ingrained in the global culture it even seeped into our daily language.

People who agreed on an issue were said to be “on the same page.”

If you decided to forget the past and start to do something new, you were said to have “turned a new page” in your life’s journey.

When the judge sentenced a criminal according to the full extent of the law, he “threw the book” at the perpetrator.

Then gradually, slowly but surely, the book paradigm started to erode.

We as “technical writers” found ourselves writing “help files” where page number simply did not make any sense. Neither did “covers” of any kind.

We still had paragraphs but preserving the “chapters” started to make less and less sense because thanks to do wonder of HTML links people started to jump all over the place like information hungry grasshoppers. A click here,

another click there, and our voracious readers became voracious browsers and mouse clickers.

The traditional “control” that the author had (start from the first page and patiently read towards the last) were getting lost in a pleasant way. The readers just wanted to go directly at the “information” without the author acting like a navigation police. People wanted to go to the information they wanted, whenever they wanted, as frequently as they wanted.

At this point, we technical “writers” started to realize that the users were not even after “information”; they were after “solutions.”

People had problems. They could not replace the water filter. They did not know where to apply to get their social security checks.

They wanted someone to “tell” them how, right away – and better still, “show” them.

“Show” them? Like in the movies? Yes indeed, like in the movies.

So we first started to draw illustrations, then animated GIFs, then found ourselves shooting videos, and posting them on the YouTube, embedding them into our PDFs and web sites and HTML help files.

The “book mountain” was melting off in all directions in a huge avalanche of solutions gushing off in all kinds of packages.

These have all happened in the closing years of the last century.

In this century, just like rabbits, other great questions started to multiply fast.

“Since we are creating all these solutions in all kinds of shapes and all kinds of platforms, can we write only once and publish it many times?”

Humans are not only smart but they are lazy too. And in a capitalist market economy, time is money. So it was natural to start asking if there were a shorter and simpler way to publish and maintain all that onslaught of information without

re-writing and re-editing it separately over and over again.

Thus was born the whole single-sourcing idea and writers as creators and facilitators of “data.”

Another trend that hastened the transition from the “book paradigm” to topic-based single-sourced data engineering was globalization.

Product and services started selling across the national boundaries at an increasing pace, no doubt thanks to the Internet as well.

That meant consumers speaking different languages consuming each other’s products and services.

So how to get over the “language issue” as quickly and cheaply as possible?

Answer was topic-based localization. Not only the traditional “user guides” but the web sites and everything else had to be translated into different languages as well. And the best way to do that was if the information came in as small and specific chunks as possible; not as “books” but as “topics.” So we technical writers now had to become “plain writers” and ruthless editors as well.

All of a sudden we found ourselves swimming in an ocean of alphabet soup that included acronyms like XML, HTML5, CHM, CMS, while paying more attention than ever to UX and ROI.

It’s a beautiful new era with more opportunities for technical communicators than ever in this brave new world of “structured authoring.”

The hats we are wearing are multiplying fast.

Now we are not only the providers of lean, relevant, correct and fresh content, but we are also thinking about the best ways to “tag” such content so that it can be transformed from one “delivery format” to another at the click of a button.

It is very clear that the “writers” who will grow and prosper in our noble professions (because we truly are help and relief providers) are those who

accept and welcome our evolution from “writers” into “user solutions providers” and come up with new ways to serve the users.

When I started working for my company eleven years ago I was creating “books”, both online PDF and also printed ones, the kind that would become out of date within a matter of months.

Now not only we have produced our first truly single-sourced PDF and CHM deliverables but we took our first steps towards Mobile Authoring. Next is video production.

When I was a little kid I loved to read novels and always wanted to become a writer. My father was a radio repairman and a radar technician. Thus I wanted to become an engineer too. Until a decade ago I didn’t know how one could do both.

These days however the only way to prosper and be happy for me is to do both as a technical communicator. The years ahead will see more “writers” who are solving problems and making life easier for all of us.

I salute all my Indian technical communicator brothers and sisters for the kind of difference they are making as “user solution providers” in the world today.

Dr. Ugur Akinci is a senior technical communicator and user solutions provider working for Fortune 100 hi-tech companies since 1998. You are welcomed to read his free tips and tutorials at <http://www.tcc6.com>

Dr. Ugur has been keenly following the STC activities in Pune for a last few months. He is the president of STC Washington, DC - Metro Baltimore chapter. His warmth for Pune's small community has made a lasting impression on us. Don't be surprised if we announce a joint activity soon!

Conversing with Sajitha Jayaprakash



Sajitha has been in technical communication for almost two decades now, and heads the documentation and training team at TomTom.

What prompted us to interview her was the fact that she has written eight books so far. Three of her books are on technical writing, and the others include a variety of titles helpful in progressing one's career.

You can see the entire list on her profile at <http://in.linkedin.com/in/sajitha>

You can also follow her blog at <http://sajithajayaprakash.wordpress.com>

What was the inspiration behind your first book? Tell us the story.

When I started interviewing candidates around 2000-2005, especially for the position of trainee technical writers, I realized a few things:

- Freshers did not have a clear idea about the job profile, skill sets, and career path in this field. It was difficult for them to get the appropriate information.
- Although there was no dearth of technical writing related books, there was a lack of books specific to the Indian audience. Usually, these aspects are taken for granted in the other countries where technical writing has been a career option for more than 3-4 decades. Most of the books I read by foreign authors were about processes and procedures.
- Though some candidates thought of attending private organizations conducting short term training, they found the fee too expensive.

Hence, I felt the need for a one stop reference point for the new writers and even those who are pursuing a career in this field.

How did you write your first book?

When I started, I was not writing a book. I was writing my experiences and generally answering to the questions that people asked.

When I realized that I had more than 300 pages worth of information in place, I thought of compiling it into a book wherein students or freshers would find all the information they are looking for. I actively started looking out for publishers since 2005, but no one was ready to publish a book on “technical writing”. Himalaya publishers were interested because they are into text book publication and hence they knew the market requirement.

When I got a go ahead from Himalaya publishers, I just had to think of the high-level chapters, and organize the information.

Today, I see everyone using my books: freshers, experienced technical writers, technical translators, marketing executives, managers, recruiting managers, institutes, and anybody who wants to understand the basic concepts of technical writing.

How was the feeling of being a published author? Do you still remember the first time you held the hard copy of your first book?

I was excited, thrilled, delighted, hysterical, charged, overwhelmed, all at the same time. I sensed a feeling of accomplishment. Oh yes, I still remember the first time I held the hard copy of my first book – It was like holding my second baby. That's exactly how I felt. 😊

Do you get to interact with your readers? How is that experience?

Oh yes. Many readers have written back to me mentioning how they liked the book(s), or how the books have helped them, or just to mention that they found it easy to understand. Some wrote to me for further guidance or just for the sake of writing to an author. Whatever the reason, it feels good when readers write back.

What are most prominent challenges and joys of taking up such projects besides work?

There were many challenges, but for me it was always “time” related – not enough time for family and friends, or not enough time for writing. Sometimes if had to put in extra hours for official work, I had to figure out how to manage deadlines on both fronts.

However, it was a joy of fulfilling my dream and being a published author. I started with a dream of having one book published. Now with eight, I sense a feeling of satisfaction and achievement!

Please educate us on the skills and qualities a writer needs to author books.

Being a writer definitely helps. Apart from that, you need to be extremely organized, disciplined, and focused.

Most of us struggle to manage office and home. How do you find motivation and time to take up book-writing projects?

Getting a publisher to agree to publish the book and the very thought of getting the books published was enough motivation. The efforts for the book were put in after the office and house work hours – that’s after 9:00 pm.

What about your family? Do they have a role in this whole process?

When I was working on my first book, there were times when I used to be disheartened by the rejections. My daughter Soumya who was then about 10 years old used to point to me the poster in her room (that I had put up for her). It was an inspirational poem titled *Don't Quit*. When I finally found a publisher who was interested in the book, and I had to work towards a deadline, she literally mothered me and ensured that I spent a few hours every day, and many hours during the weekends working on this book. Soumya would fondly tell me, “Mom, you can do it!” Jayaprakash, my husband, contributed in his own way by sharing my workload at home without any complaints. I could dedicate enough time to the book.

I would also like to mention my parents who are now in their heavenly abode. My mother had always taught me that to achieve something we need to have a heartfelt passion for it and work towards achieving it. My father taught me the value of time. He used to always say that discipline, sincerity, and hard work always pays. I think I have inherited certain values from them both that helped me!!

What are your future plans? Anything new on the radar?

I had recently taken a break of 6 months from work. That’s when Himalaya publishers requested me to write a text book. I took on that because I like the topic and thus I wrote my eighth book *“Enhancing Professional and Personal Skills”*.

I used the time to pen down idea for two more books. They are in draft stage. Now that I am back to work, I need to concentrate and get settled at the new place. Only then can I get back to focusing on the manuscripts.

Where can we buy your books?

The books by Himalaya publishers are available on sale on their web page:
<http://jws.himpub.com/himalaya/jsp/innerIndex.jsp>

Three books are also available on Amazon.

What advice do you reserve for aspiring technical writers?

One of the reasons for becoming a technical writer is because you like writing and, of course, you are good at it. Unfortunately, many people come into this field, not because they are interested in technology or in writing, but are looking for less-demanding jobs.

First and foremost try to identify if this is the right profession for you. Money is important, but in this field, interest in the job and writing abilities are extremely crucial. This can make or break your career. *Darwin's Theory of the survival of the fittest applies to this scenario as*

well. Among all the others, only the good writers, with genuine interest in the field will survive and progress further. The others will get stagnated, bored, and will be disillusioned by their choice!

If you have not come into this profession out of choice, discover what it is, and decide if you are content and happy with your profession. A lot depends on the personal attitude and the basic interest (like reading and writing).

My sincere advice can be summarized as:

- Technical writing will NOT satisfy your creative craving in the regular sense. Technical writing very often requires you to write in a restricted manner. You also have to follow styles and formats.
- Do not be lured by the money. There are only a handful of writers who see this as a dream job! But do not opt for technical writing for wrong reasons because when reality sinks in, you will become disillusioned.
- Do not focus only on documentation tools. Many “wanna-be” writers believe that knowing desktop publishing tools will get them a job. Instead, focus on:
 - Language, writing, and presentation of information.
 - Subject and technologies (electronics, if you want to document electronics consumer items or finance, if you want to document banking software).
- Read, read, and read. Try to read about various aspects of technical writing and understand the profile well.
- Practice. Practice to write in a restricted manner, using the generic rules and guidelines. Refer to books and the style guides. The more you practice, the more perfect you become.
- Come out of the comfort of the cocoon. If you are basically a loner, try to become

communicative and expressive with your thoughts and ideas. Strange as it may sound, this will help you a lot in your career as technical communication is about communicating. You just can't avoid it!

Almost two decades back (nineteen to be precise), armed with a degree in Electronics engineering, I chose the lesser known career options of that time. It has definitely made all the difference – I am sure many of you will agree with me!

CONTENT STRATEGY

is a widely discussed term in many technical communication summits these days. Content is a critical asset that requires strategic planning and meaningful investment. Many industry experts opine that technical writers need to organize and manage their content in a more efficient manner. It is time to add value to the content using content strategy practices.

Ameya Atawane has been studying content strategy and its close association with user experience design. She is planning to take a session on Content Strategy in our monthly meets, which will cover the components of content strategy and the key traits involved.

Keep a watch on the Pune Activity announcement mails to know more!

Embedded User Assistance



Aparna Mudaliar

Recently, I randomly picked a handful of people from my team and asked what would be the first thing that they would do if they got stuck with their application. Would you expect that everyone said they would press F1? I am sorry to disappoint you! Only one-third of the people said so. The only solace is that none of them are technical writers!

The results make you think. We need to analyze our traditional Help architecture. To align ourselves with the upcoming trends in technology, we need to break away from our traditional Help systems and adopt the architecture of thin Help. These days, it is called Embedded User Assistance (Embedded UA).

What Is Embedded User Assistance?

In simple terms, Embedded UA can be defined as just-in-time and just enough information to help users complete their current task. It should be an essential source of information that they can easily access without searching for a Help topic or reading too much information that is available in the user's guide. Another important aspect is that it must be readily available (right on the current user interface page) when and where users need it.

The obvious question is: Does this mean that we are on the verge of discarding **Help**? The answer is a combination of yes and no. The following subtopics explain the most common Embedded UA components that you can include in your application.

Tooltips

A tooltip is visible when you move your pointer on a user interface (UI) element such as icon or a text box. You can also provide tooltips to provide full forms of acronyms that you have included on your UI page. Tooltip content should be short and precise.

Help Pop-ups

A Help pop-up can contain more detailed information than a tooltip. Only fields or sections of the application window for which users would need an explanation might need a pop-up. For example, commonly used fields such as **Name** and **Description** do not need a pop-up. However, for certain fields, users might need to understand how their input might impact the underlying process or further tasks. In this case, a pop-up might help users enter the most appropriate input.

Help Areas or Help Trays

Depending on the complexity of the UI elements in the application window, one or more elements might need user assistance. In this case, including too many pop-ups might give a cluttered look. Here, using Help areas or trays is best. A designated area in the application area can serve as the Help area, and its contents can change depending on the control of the UI element. It is advisable to identify the usage of Help areas during the prototype phase. As a result, developers do not have to rework the screen layouts during their core development.

Labels, Hints, and Instructional Text

UI labels, inline text, below-field text, or instructional text are all examples of static text. It is recommended that you comply with your style guide when you generate the Help text.

System Messages

The error messages, information messages, and warnings that are displayed in the UI are examples of system messages. It is very important that the system messages are clear and helpful. In addition, make sure that you use consistent terms and phrases across all messages. Clear, meaningful, and unambiguous system messages can help users troubleshoot and resolve problems faster.

Best Practices for Embedded UA

A good embedded UA should satisfy the following aspects:

Just-in-time Information The Embedded UA should address the information need of a user at the right time. Moreover, it should provide the authentic information that a user requires. The information that you provide should help the user proceed with further tasks. For example, in case of range-value fields, it would help if you provide the lower and upper limit values as hints. This would help users provide the correct input on the first attempt.

Obvious Location Users should not need to hunt for Embedded UA. It should be available at a location that is obvious to the users. For example, you want to provide a pop-up for a set of fields in a screen. In this case, the Help icon should be available next to each field text box. Help icons in the right corner of the screen would not be helpful.

Brief and Focused Content The information that you provide in the Embedded UA should be crisp and concise. In addition, it would help if you analyze the users of your application and provide the level of information accordingly.

Here is an example of how you can ensure crisp and concise content. The Help content that is mentioned below provides information about the elbow criterion threshold parameter.

Original Text

You set the elbow criterion threshold in order to specify the optimal number of clusters to be created in the clustering process.

The elbow criterion states that the number of clusters to be created should be such that adding another cluster does not provide any additional information. To understand this rule further, plot a graph of the percentage of variance that is explained by the clusters against the number of clusters. The graph indicates that the first few clusters add significant information. That is, these clusters explain a lot of variance. However, at a certain point, the marginal gain generated by adding new clusters will drop, producing an angle (an “elbow”) on the graph. To establish this angle (point), you need to define some threshold on the marginal gain. In other words, you need to define the elbow criterion threshold.

The value for the elbow criterion threshold can be in between 0.001 and 0.1. The default value is 0.01. If you increase the default value, you decrease the number of clusters that will be created. Conversely, if you decrease the default value, you increase the number of clusters that will be created.

Revised Text

You set the elbow criterion threshold in order to specify the optimal number of clusters to be created in the clustering process. The value for the elbow criterion threshold can be between 0.001 and 0.1. The default value is 0.01. If you increase the default value, you decrease the number of clusters that will be created. Conversely, if you decrease the default value, you increase the number of clusters that will be created.

For details, see “Appendix 2: Clustering Parameters” in SAS Offer Optimization for Communications User’s Guide.

In the revised text, only the text that is relevant to the user is retained in the pop-up. The rest of the content is included in the user’s guide.

Collaborative Effort

Working with Embedded UA should be a collaborative effort of usability experts, technical writers, and developers. In addition, it is advisable that you demonstrate the Embedded UA to all the involved parties, such as product management, development team, testing team, and technical support.

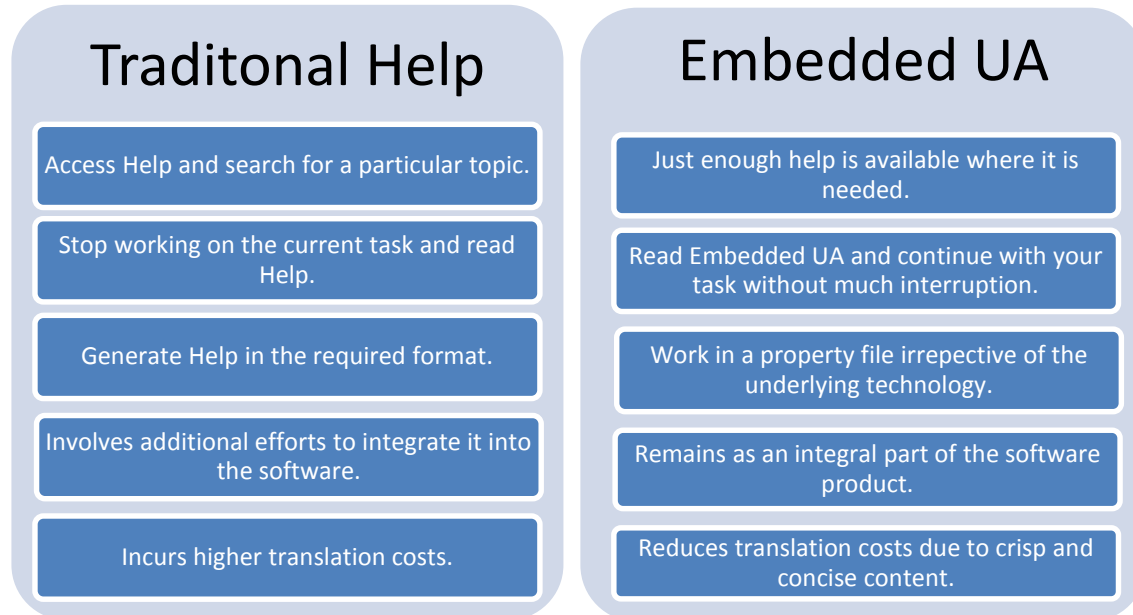
Implementing Embedded UA

The content of Embedded UA can be in the form of property files. You would need to work with your developers to create a property file. There is absolutely no need to gear up a new Help tool or another content management system!

Traditional Help versus Embedded UA

Now that you have a little understanding about Embedded UA, let us see how we can differentiate it from our traditional Help.

Here is a brief comparative analysis of traditional Help and Embedded UA



Conclusion

So having worked with Embedded UA, you can identify the complex scenarios of your application and include only these Help topics in your Help system. The user’s guide would be a comprehensive source of all the required information.

References

This article is compiled from information that is published in Help-on-Doc, the SAS intranet site.

Aparna Mudaliar works as a technical writer for SAS R&D, Pune, India. She is currently working on Flex-based web applications for Communications Solutions. She has keen interest in meditation, swimming, and cooking something exotic. She can be reached at aparnatw2001@gmail.com.



Accessibility Matters!



Makarand Pandit
in conversation with
Shilpi Kapoor

Mak: What made you think of contributing to accessibility issues?

Shilpi: I was working as a security analyst and networking consultant for a U.S.-based company. I didn't know that my boss was paralyzed until the day there was an issue with his assistive technology. It was a shocking realization. If you are not aware of someone's disability, you treat that individual as equal.

In country like India, when you hear the word "disabled," everything is negative in context. There were hardly any efforts to use technology for providing the much-needed accessibility.

Considering the condition of infrastructure in our country, I thought it was better to use technology for providing people with accessibility rather than work on improving physical infrastructure.

Mak: Among various types of impairment, which do you think is the most difficult to cater to? Why?

Shilpi: We don't have such a take. There are different problems that people face with different disabilities. Technology can help them overcome some of those problems. We prefer to address the issues rather than figuring out who is more affected. That is our approach.

Mak: What are the various challenges you faced so far?

Shilpi: The first challenge we faced was that nobody wanted our service. IT companies were not willing to pay us. There was no value attributed to our work. So, it was a zero-demand market. We literally had to create the market by increasing awareness.

The second challenge was the absence of a legal framework that stressed accessibility. The

government was not thinking about technology for disabled people when we started. No organizations, neither private nor public, were concerned about providing accessibility for disabled people. They simply used to say, "We don't have disabled clients." With no legal framework, the IT sector was just ignoring the issue of accessibility in contracts. Unfortunately, the scenario has not changed much to date.

Mak: Isn't that strange considering that many IT companies have offices all over the world?

Shilpi: True! They are catering to international clients. When you deal with organizations from countries like the U.S., U.K., or Australia, it is impossible to neglect the accessibility guidelines. If you cannot satisfy client's requirements (exclusively mentioned in contract), then it's your mistake. But why be led by contractual obligations? Accessibility is something you can offer as an integral part of your service. I think the IT industry in India should gear up and self-govern.

Mak: Is there any provision of Section 508 in India?

Shilpi: We don't have a law yet. We merely have guidelines for Indian government's website (GIGW). These guidelines are hidden within the general guidelines.

We are working on "Persons with Disabilities Act." Once it passes, all government websites and private websites related to and concerned with citizens will have to be accessible.

As the new e-governance policies are being implemented, government bodies are becoming aware about Web content accessibility. For example, in Maharashtra, when a vendor delivers the project, he has to submit a checklist that assures the content is accessible. [BarrierBreak is headquartered in Mumbai.]

Mak: Will the state governments apply pressure so organizations will have to comply?

Shilpi: Let's hope so! Take the example of Maharashtra state. The income tax department got the vendors trained in accessibility, which is

very interesting. They are paneling vendors based on their knowledge of localization. The government is making sure that the vendor is delivering exactly what is asked for before making any payment. That kind of systemic change is what we need.

We don't mind waiting. But it has to be systemic if we are to see true implementation of the principle of accessibility. I hope that we can see noticeable changes in the coming six months.

Mak: How are assistive technologies being developed at BarrierBreak? Are you inventing them from scratch or are you localizing the solutions you importing?

Shilpi: Our approach is not to reinvent the wheel. Instead, we emphasize localizing the products. Right now, we are negotiating for India. For example, an English screen reader in India costs Rs. 60,000/- if bought directly. We negotiated for the bulk of requirements for India, localized it in Hindi [India's national language] and brought the price down to Rs. 21,000/-. We plan to localize it into the regional languages as well.

Considering their economic condition, disabled people may not necessarily be able to afford the price of equipment. But an employer who employs a disabled person can afford to buy that technology at a slightly higher price. This is one of the ways to reduce the entry barrier.

A lot of these products are expensive. When you buy an expensive product, you want warranty, training, and support, which we provide. We are not just selling the technology. We want to bring a systemic change through our products. In the future, we will be developing many products on our own. These might be soft products like mobile apps. We are sure that apps can play a major role in making the world more accessible.

As far as hardware products are concerned, we are not in a position to do much owing to limitations of manufacturing facilities in India. There is one more angle to this. At the moment,

we don't have the numbers that can make design and manufacturing feasible. The demand for assistive technology is fairly limited. Many people still think assistive technology means wheelchairs and hearing aids. Hopefully, by educating the masses and subsidizing the products, we can achieve the numbers.

Mak: What are the economic aspects of accessibility in India?

Shilpi: If we provide a disabled person with assistive technology that gives him mobility and connectivity, he can contribute to society with full potential. Skills of disabled people are grossly underutilized in our country. With assistive technology, job opportunities will open up. Once a person is employable, he would soon become a taxpayer. Thus, assistive technology can certainly increase the state's revenue.

Establishments like restaurants, coffee shops, and cinemas can raise their revenue by providing simple accessibility solutions. For example, a restaurant can provide a menu in braille. These are very simple solutions.

Assistive technology can make a large part of the population more productive. With income, their standard of living will improve and so will the demand for appliances and lifestyle products. Consider the total untapped purchasing potential of this segment of population. It will be a boost to the country's economy! This is as true about the rest of the world as it is for India.

Mak: How can training in assistive technology be improved in India?

Shilpi: We need to train the people with disabilities at early age, say, from school level. We must train the educators for effective implementation of assistive technology.

Currently, schools are not teaching assistive technology. Nonprofit organizations are doing this job. The problem is that by the time a disabled child meets a nonprofit organization, he/she is 14 to 16 years old, which is too late

What we need is standardized training across the country. The government should work with the corporate sector to design a curriculum for this training program for teachers. Everyone will benefit as a result.

Mak: What's the role of communicators and developers in ensuring accessibility?

Shilpi: Technical communicators are producing a considerable part of the content being consumed today. It is their responsibility to develop accessible content. In fact, everybody creating content has to know how accessibility works. A lot of difference can be made by simply following the established guidelines.

Mak: India is considered as a development hub of the world. What do you think about accessibility training for developers in India?

Shilpi: Training for developers is must. But IT companies should realize this. Accessibility is considered as an add-on, not an essential entity. SDLC [software development life cycle] should include testing and assessment for accessibility. We must understand that it is not about a separate disability sector but about mainstream industries.

Mak: What do you expect from government bodies, NGOs, and international organizations if they want to work with BarrierBreak?

Shilpi: We are willing to work with any organization with matching or overlapping goals. Our only hurdle is resources. Collective efforts of NGOs and international organizations will be of great help. There are so many segments where we cannot reach. Any proposal from NGOs or international organizations is most welcome.

Mak: Is BarrierBreak trying to team up with any e-commerce sites?

Shilpi: It is important for the e-commerce sites to realize that they could be the preferred buying mechanism for a large part of disabled population. They should not only make their shopping carts accessible, but also stock a lot of assistive technology products. The conventional

stores may not be able to stock such products for the lower demand and limited rack-space. We are talking with some e-commerce sites and hoping for positive results very soon.

Mak: How you are going to sell the technology solutions imported from your partner abroad?

Shilpi: We largely sell to government, corporate, and NGOs. We have outlets in Mumbai, Delhi, and Bangalore. We are now looking at setting up a dealer network. In the past, we tried using nonprofit to provide technology, but had limited success.

Our product section has become entirely an e-commerce site. Very soon, customers will be able to buy our products online. We are also providing large numbers of software products.

Though a large part of our sales comes from government and NGOs, we like to see our products available in mainstream market. We cannot achieve this by sticking with the nonprofit sector.

Another reason for going mainstream is the mentality of Indian parents. They tend to be secretive about their child's disabilities. Such parents would rarely make a direct call and ask for our product. However, if a product is available at a retail outlet, they quickly buy it.

We are also in discussion with hospitals and government organizations regarding making our products available through them.

Mak: Considering your experience in this field, what would you suggest to anybody who wants to work in this field for short-term as well as long-term?

Shilpi: First and foremost, don't look at this as a charity. Look at this as a sustainable business. Considering it as a charity is killing the sector. Charity is what you do only once and out of extra income. Making a product accessible is a one-time action. Keeping it accessible is a continuous process.

For short-term, pick a focus area and work not only with nonprofits, but also with mainstream

organizations to push your idea. That is what we are lacking. When any assistive technology product comes to India, they are talking only with the disability domain. To make people aware of your product, you must work with mainstream business. Anybody working in this field for two or three years should not concentrate only on nonprofits. They need to concentrate on mainstream business. That is what going to change the entire field.

For long-term, show organizations the value associated with providing accessibility to users. Show them the economies of scale. You need to invest good time for collecting data. The challenge in data collection is that you don't have the demographics available. If more data is available, a lot of business and government policy decisions will be easy and quick.

Mak: How can EPUB 3.0 help to improve accessibility?

Shilpi: EPUB 3.0 is latest standard for eBooks. Until now, the books for disabled were published separately. EPUB 3.0 is a format that is accessible for disabled, as well as non-disabled people. EPUB 3.0 is an important step in mainstreaming accessibility. It eliminates the need for a separate version for disabled people.

The current scenario is that the publisher has to publish a separate version for disabled readers. Then some nonprofit organization converts it, prints it, and distributes it. If a publisher publishes a book in EPUB 3.0 format, it will be a "common version for all users." Thus, there will be a great reduction in cost and time. This will increase the number of buyers and hence encourage the publishers to publish more.

EPUB 3.0 is certainly a major development that will have a far-reaching impact. It is capable of bringing about a revolutionary change.

Mak: Among the electronic gadgets available today, which one you think is most useful?

Shilpi: All of them are useful. These devices enable you to access any information anytime and from anywhere.

Recently I saw a "talking TV" in London. It was for sale in a retail outlet. I instantly thought, "I want it in India." That's the kind of technology we need. But a lot of devices available need to be a lot more user-friendly. For example, almost all set-top boxes in India have their manual and screen-instructions in English. These things must be localized since half of the population using them does not understand English. Most of them cannot even read local language. So, a thing like a talking menu will be of great help.

Mak: Any concluding remarks?

Shilpi: I think awareness is the first step and it is increasing. Technology will definitely act as an enabler. The future definitely looks brighter than the past. The only wish is, the sooner, the better!

Shilpi Kapoor is managing director at BarrierBreak Technologies & Net Systems Informatics. She was previously working with National Centre for Promotion of Employment for Disabled People and Indian Association for the Visually Handicapped. For more information, visit

<http://in.linkedin.com/pub/dir/Shilpi/Kapoor>

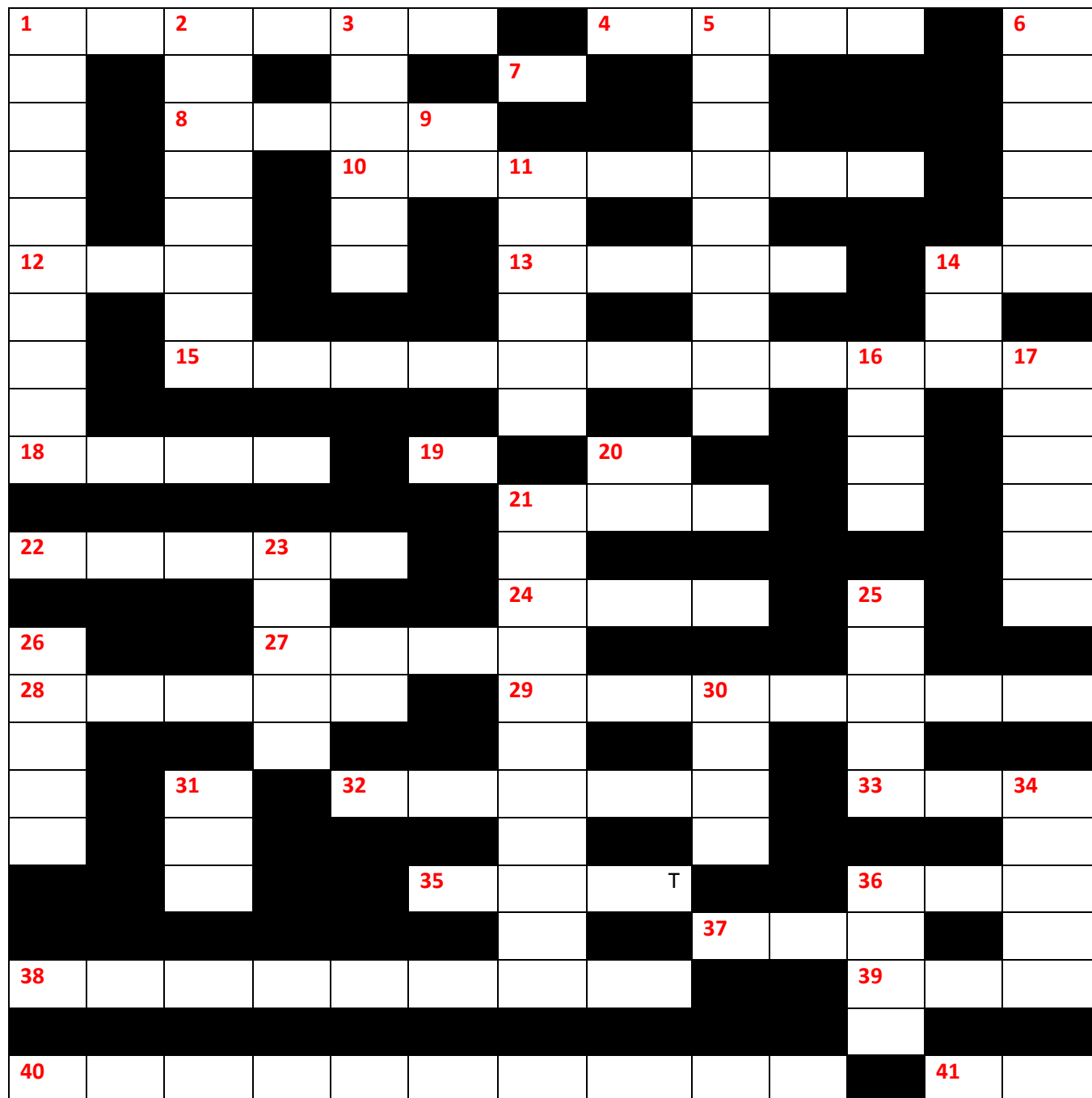
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<http://in.linkedin.com/in/makarandpandit>



Crossword Puzzle



Kalpana Pathak



Crossword Clues

1. (Across) The default style in MS Word is. (6)
1. (Down) A term used to refer to moving through a screen or program. One of the types of links. (10)
2. (Down) Identify this Software tool by its icon that is used to create Online Help.(8) 
3. (Down) Name of the voice that a writer should use in documentation: (6)
4. (Across) A four letter word frequently used to check whether a host is on the network. (4)
5. (Down) The free image-editing software that starts with the same word as the first name of a leading Indian bowler. (9)
6. (Down) A type of comma. Technical writers must use it in the documentation. (7)
7. (Across) Shortcut key used in FrameMaker to access the paragraph tags. (1)
8. (Across) A type of release in which only release notes and a read me file are bundled. (4)
9. (Down) A type of article. (2)
10. (Across) Used as a noun- Synonym for moment. (7)
11. (Down) As per IBM style guide, avoid this word because it is usually superfluous. (It's an adverb.) (6)
12. (Across) Short form of an exam to gain the product proficiency. This company's products are largely used in technical writing. (3)
13. (Across) A verb used while describing the actions of a mouse.
14. (Across) The cardinal number that is the product of ten and four. (Roman numeral) (2)
14. (Down) An XML based file format developed by Microsoft. Similar to PDF format. When you view the format online or printed, it stays exactly the same and data in the file cannot be manipulated or modified. (3)
15. (Across) Writers use this in lists or procedures to provide clarity and rhythm in writing. (Noun) (11)
16. (Down) Used to describe a graphic representation of an object that a user can select or open. (4)
17. (Down) On which date the National Grammar Day is celebrated in United States? (5 words & 1 number)
18. (Across) Writers use this in documents to provide information that is of special importance (4)
19. (Across) Shortcut key used in FrameMaker to access the character tags. (1)
20. (Down) A combination of shortcut key used in FrameMaker to open Table Designer.
21. (Across) Called as Valid XML. (3)
21. (Down) Identify this very popular Web-based tutorial development tool by its icon: 
22. (Across) A not-for-profit open standard consortium. One of their standards is widely used in technical writing. (5)
23. (Down) It is called as Quick information retriever. (5)
24. (Across) Used in FrameMaker for structured document. (3) Similar to DTD in DITA.
25. (Down) This punctuation mark used at the end of a sentence or phrase that introduces a list. (5)
26. (Down) Verb that is used to arrange the text in parallel or straight. (5)
27. (Across) The XML architecture that defines how to publish technical documentation (4)
28. (Across) Another word for heading, or, one of the principles used in Information Mapping. (5 words)
29. (Across) A kind of documentation that is used in DITA. (7)
30. (Down) Word for a collection of information. (4)
31. (Down) Software that is used to create online documentation. (3)
32. (Across) A type of message. (5)
33. (Across) An option displayed in the File menu; available in almost all applications.(3)
34. (Down) A conjunction that refers to a period of time. As per IBM Style Guide, do not use this term as a synonym for "although" or "though" in documentation. (5)
35. (Across) Shortcut key used in FrameMaker to show/hide text symbols.
36. (Across) Nickname of a technical writer's yahoo group.
36. (Down) Name of a topic type used in DITA.
37. (Across) Shortcut key used in Microsoft Word to convert small letters to All Caps.
38. (Across) An alphabetical list of words that often explain a definition of a concept. Used at the end of a book. (7)
39. (Across) Another word for developer.
40. (Across) Which section of the Americans with Disabilities Act requires that a VPAT be provided for products being offered to the US Government? The VPAT describes the degree to which a product is accessible to people with disabilities. (7 words & 3 numbers)
41. (Across) This is a Latin abbreviation. Writers should use its English equivalent in documentation. (2)

Crowd-sourced references

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<http://tcc6.com/> - Ugur Akinci's blog

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Helpful Websites

<http://stc-india.org> – STC India's website

<http://a4esl.org/q/h/grammar.html> - Grammar Quizzes

<http://www.grammarbook.com/> - For online grammar quizzes. Also gives corporate account for grammar quizzes for employees for a reasonable cost

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