



NY METRO

news

New York Metro Chapter

Great Meetings and Elections

Open Source Wikis: a New Platform for Tech Writing Groups

October 25th Meeting

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Open Source Wikis present a compelling value proposition for tech doc departments, as well as an opportunity for tech writers to expand their skills and get hands-on experience with the new generation of Web-based publishing tools.

The Web is driving a move away from traditional desktop-oriented publishing tools toward centralized publishing models enabled by Content Management Systems (CMS). A traditional CMS can bring huge benefits, but also represents a large undertaking. Wikis are another story. Originally conceived as the “simplest possible database,” the first browser-based Wiki was designed to enable any Web user to create and edit Web content. Wikis have grown since the early days. In August 2007, the English version of Wikipedia (perhaps the most famous Wiki) offered 1,945,048 articles. Along the way, Wiki technology has evolved to include many of the features of CMS, to the point where Wikis and CMS technology have essentially converged. In fact, at this point the main difference between a high-end Wiki and a CMS is probably not the technology, but the governance model.

Open source, standards-based Wikis are changing both the economics and the nature of technical publishing, adding many of the benefits of centralized content management while reducing costs. While they lack some of the features and the level of support available with commercial systems and require that you put the pieces together yourself, they also bring a fresh Web-based approach, with direct integrated access to Web users. A CMS-based Wiki can enable organizations to publish more efficiently, achieving benefits such as re-use and repurposing and supporting new workflow and publishing models such as shared writing and interactive publishing. The technology can support Web content
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Information Developers– New Role of Technical Writers in a Flat World

By Virginia Lynch and Maud Keisman

In her September presentation to STC’s New York Metro chapter, JoAnn T. Hackos



discussed the challenges that we writers face in the dawn of the 21st century. Technology has enabled organizations to work across cities, states, countries, language differences, and time zones. In our increasingly global world, companies now create products and services for use in multiple countries, necessitating different technologies, requirements, processes, and languages. Our offices and colleagues are spread all over the map. In many cases, we don’t know our international users, but we continue to design and write information that is supposed to help them use our products.

How is that possible? With years of experience as a lecturer, consultant, and author in the field of technical communication, JoAnn offered a pragmatic set of tools to meet these challenges. A key tool in her toolbox is what she calls “Basic Hygiene.” Even in this fast-paced world where deadline is king—and style, grammar, punctuation, spelling, and even clarity seem to have been sacrificed for quantity—JoAnn points out that knowledge of basic writing skills is still critical to our success as writers. Basic Hygiene also comprises an understanding and appreciation of editing, the information development life cycle, fundamental web and computer skills, and of course attention to detail. Perhaps less obvious to our writer selves is the importance of effective oral communication skills, and professional appearance and demeanor, all of which are as critical to our success as our writing and organizational skills.
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NY Metro STC Surveys Members on Programs

By John Posada, NY Metro STC Program Chairman

Sometimes, the only way of knowing what STC chapter members want for programs is to ask them. Some concept.

However, this is exactly what the NY Metro STC Council did. We asked you what kind of programs you wanted for the coming 2007-2008 chapter year by issuing a survey and asking you to respond. 55 of you did and we thank you.

During the period between May and July, the Council met on more than one occasion and considered a number of possible topics that we thought best summarized the direction that technical communications was heading. We then reduced the topics down to a list of 10 topics and asked you to rank the topics in order of interest.

At the same time, we included some questions about meeting locations and time. Following are the results of the questions.

Program Topic	Very interested (%)	Not interested (%)
Creating better documentation through online collaboration	74.5	3.9
Writing training materials	72	8
Using human factors to improve deliverables	68.8	6.3
Using personas, use cases, and scenarios	65.3	10.2
Planning and managing large documentation projects	64.7	9.8
Information mapping	64	18
Develop resumes and portfolios	50	22.9
What's new in FrameMaker 8	47	26.5
Applying six sigma methodology to improve documentation	43.8	18.8

Rank the following topics you would like to see as full-day workshops

Workshop Topic	Very Interested (%)	Not interested (%)
Using minimalism to better analyze and document business processes	34.7	20.4
Writing software development kits (SDK)	33	32
Indexing documentation and online content	18.4	46.9

We then asked you about meeting locations and times.

When would you most prefer to attend NY Metro STC events?

Meeting time of day	Prefer (%)	Do not prefer (%)
In the evening	90	4
Mid-day	27	58

Rank the following NY Metro STC meeting venues/areas

Meeting time of day	Prefer (%)	Do not prefer (%)
NYC/Arnos' 38th and 8th	65	21.7
Northern NJ	57.5	35
Central NJ (Edison, Piscataway)	25	65

When asked for suggestions for other topics, members replied:

Working as a liaison between the Business and IT -- Discuss issues involved and ways to improve communication between the technicians and users of program applications.	Special knowledge management needs, risks, opportunities for documentation organizations
Usability, use cases, case studies from various orgs, content management, reusing content & strategies	Content reusability, deployment of online training and documentation deliverables
Review of Popular Document Management Systems	Developing scholarly papers
Software for WireFraming	Simplified English pro/con
Using DITA/XML/Structured documents in a one-person shop	Knowledge management
API Documentation	Single sourcing
Demo of content management at a company	Breaking into medical writing
Building a technical communication business	Our focus is DITA, conversion, and managing topics
Evaluation of web sites - design, robustness, interactivity. video-audio enhanced - but ... simple, as well!	Improving visibility of your doc group within your company
Applying the FrameMaker DITA in FM8	Multimedia Techniques

In closing, we also learned that if a topic were particularly strong, 87% of you would attend, even if the speaker appeared over a remote teleconference. My thanks to Richard Caraballo, Virginia Lynch, and Donna Timpone—without their help, the survey would not have taken place. There will be more on what we are doing with this information in the next issue.

Do You Look As Smart As You Are?

©By Nancy Beltrandi

Although few can admit to judging a book by its cover, hiring decisions are often made within the first three seconds of a job interview using the criteria of appearance. Seems impossible to believe, how could such bias exist? Of course, this would exclude those with the right academic credentials, prestigious resumes, and networks counting names in the ten thousands. Wrong! Ability, education, reputation, competence, position, connections, and experience got you in the door. Now you have to stay there. For those who think that appearance does not matter, read on, because on a job interview, appearance matters.

Personal appearance is what we look like: head-to-toe. It is defined by our clothing, accessories, and personal grooming. Together, these three components of our personal appearance deliver our unspoken message. Even academics, who claim to have no interest in fashion, make a statement through the clothing that they wear. Intentional or not, our non-verbal communication is delivered in a matter of seconds.

If the clothing that you wear has a shape and a color, and is made out of fabric, then you have a look. The message a look conveys can range from I'm the perfect candidate to I'm an independent thinker to I'm great fun at a party. If the clothing shape is complementary to the body shape, along with the quality of fabric, then you have a good fit. Color also, can trigger thoughts such as extrovert, introvert, or team player.

Think of the last time you noticed a well-dressed person. Was it the style of the garment, how it fit, or the color? Accessories are handbags, briefcases, hats, gloves, stockings, socks, shoes, and jewelry. Accessories include all extra small pieces of clothing used to accent, objects held for either purpose or decoration, and everything else other than an actual garment. Like clothing, the shape, color, and quality of the material of the accessory continue to say more about your personal brand. Most people wear at least one piece of jewelry, a watch. And since the purpose of an accessory is to accent, the same well-dressed person would use these items for those subtle finishing touches.

Personal grooming for women refers to haircut, hair color, and hairstyle; skin care; makeup, or not; fingernail shapes and nail color. Similarly, for men it would be haircut, hair color, and hairstyle; and, fingernails. Particular hairstyles, for both women and men, may look good in one context, and not the next. A hairstyle determined by facial structure and hair type usually looks good everywhere.

Like it or not, your personal appearance sets the tone to present yourself in business. Dressing a certain way for business does not require losing your identity in order to become the model in the magazine. What it does mean is refining your appearance by adding more professional components. Still think that your personal appearance doesn't matter? Just before your next interview, ask yourself, what does a potential employer see in the first three seconds?

Thank You Donna!

As most of you know, Donna was the Chapter President for many years—until now. Under her management, the organization managed to survive a difficult period. Without Donna's tireless efforts, there would not be a NY Metro STC Chapter today—we would be missing all of the networking, fine meals and great programs. For quite some time, Donna held the Chapter together and patiently rebuilt it. So, thank you, Donna from all of us who enjoy our meetings!

Elections

Election of Officers will be completed on 10/31/07. Members will receive ballots via email and vote online. Cathy Jarcho is coordinating the nominating committee, consisting of three NY Metro STC Chapter members who have no desire to run for office at this time.

October Meeting (Continued from page 1)

The technology can support Web content management as well as (with the advent of standards such as DITA) traditional formats such as PDF and Windows Help and multi-channel publishing to other XML-based formats.

This presentation reviews how structured writing practices, the Web, and standards-based tools are converging to bring new capabilities and options for technical documentation management. It includes an overview of the Open Source CMS/Wiki landscape, the main issues involved in successful implementation, a demo of a Wiki-style CMS in action, and an opportunity for Q&A and discussion. And you can try it at home! We'll show how a moderately savvy computer user can download a Wiki CMS package, set it up in a few hours on a PC or Mac, and join the world of Open Source.

Peter Dykstra Biography: Peter Dykstra is the founder and principal consultant for MetaphorX, a consultancy specializing in helping companies design and implement Open Source content management solutions. He is former senior vice president and director of product information for Donovan Data Systems, a New York- and London-based company supplying enterprise systems for the advertising and broadcast industries, where he managed writing groups and technical publishing systems. He is a senior member of the STC and has presented at STC and other industry conferences.

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Society for Technical Communication

Mission

Creating and supporting a forum for communities of practice in the profession of technical communication.

STC is an individual membership organization dedicated to advancing the arts and sciences of technical communication. It is the largest organization of its type in the world. Its 18,000 members include technical writers and editors, content developers, documentation specialists, technical illustrators, instructional designers, academics, information architects, usability and human factors professionals, visual designers, Web designers and developers, and translators - anyone whose work makes technical information available to those who need it.

Society membership provides opportunities for ongoing learning and professional networking. Through the efforts of a small, full-time staff and a large network of volunteers, STC promotes the public welfare by educating its members and industry about issues concerning technical communication.

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New York Metro Chapter STC Salary Survey

By Cathy Jarcho

The New York Metro Chapter will be conducting a survey of its members this fall to determine what local salaries are, based on a number of factors. For example, we will look at the association between how many years you have been working in the field and your total salary in the last year. We will be looking at a total of ten variables and how they relate to one another. We hope to be able to help technical writers, managers, and recruiters determine what salaries are fair and reasonable in the New York City area.

Information Developers—New Role of Technical Writers in a Flat World (Continued from page 1)

With the threat of outsourcing looming large in the technology community, we must find new ways to reinvent ourselves, beginning with our title and job description. It is no longer enough to be a skilled writer, so we find ourselves reborn as information developers. Today's information developer is a career-oriented individual, constantly searching for new resources and solutions to today's organizational and communication challenges.

In line with our expanded role, JoAnn recommended that we upgrade our skill sets with knowledge about current innovations in the areas of information architecture, information design, content management, technology development, content localization/translation, and customer studies. We should be attentive to new international information standards such as XML, OASIS Dita and DocBook, ISO, W3C, and others. Whether or not we use these standards, we need to be familiar with the terminology so we can communicate effectively with our domestic and international colleagues.

The rapid growth of remote work groups requires us to implement different kinds of disciplined work practices to maximize our efficiency as a team of geographically disconnected individuals. To facilitate teamwork and interoffice collaboration, we might take advantage of currently favored development cycle methodologies, such as agile software development, which involves working on small-scale units of a project rather than focusing on the larger project life cycle.

The need to create reusable content calls for topic-based authoring. We cannot continue to produce gigantic documents without at least opening our eyes to the trend toward minimalism. Our language must be controlled; we must conform to specifications; our work must stay within time and budget. And we must produce content that is accurate and relevant to our audience. Indeed, our credibility—and job security—hinges on our ability to communicate a deeper understanding of our subject matter.

Creative desktop publishing is fast being replaced by a manufacturing discipline that falls under measurement and performance scrutiny to ensure that the value of documentation is commensurate with the organization's investment. Information developers are now part and parcel of a competitive global environment, and outsourcing continues to remain a threat unless we can repeatedly prove that we add value.

So, where do all these changes lead us? They bring us to a present and a future in which we can play a bigger role in the technology world than ever before, earning well-deserved respect for our growing role in the development process. Our business savvy will ensure that we continue to grow and prosper in this new global world, now "flattened" due to technology advances. Companies will start to recognize the importance of our in-depth knowledge of the global customer base, and value our ability to communicate that knowledge effectively to all of our audiences, while adhering to the organizational standards, deadlines, and budgets specified for each project.

Check out Joann's latest book *Information Development: Managing Your Documentation Projects, Portfolio and People* (Wiley 2006).

Upcoming Meetings

This information listed below was correct at the time of publishing. Check the calendar <http://www.stcnymetro.org/events/events.htm> for further details and possibly updates to events.

Date	Location	Meeting Topic	Speaker
October 25	Arno's, NY, NY	Open Source Wikis: a new platform for tech writing groups	Peter Dykstra
November 13	Bridgewater, NJ	Best Practices for Indexing	Cheryl Landes
November 29	NYC, NY	Adobe FrameMaker 8.0 and the new Technical Communications Suite	
January 24	NYC, NY	Human Factors and Usability	