



Canadian SIGnals

Newsletter for the *STC Canadian Issues Special Interest Group*

A voice of our own

by Alexa Campbell

If you, like me, are a communication junkie, then you will welcome STC's new Canadian Issues Special Interest Group (SIG). It's an unprecedented opportunity for Canadian STC members to communicate with each other throughout the country. Without sounding tremendously hokey (an un-Canadian thing to do) I cannot express my gratitude enough to the STC board for approving this SIG, and to all of you who signed the original proposal to make this SIG a reality.

How did all this come about? In the early 1990s, I was approached by Jack McFadden from the Southwestern Ontario chapter, to become the Manitoba representative in a new STC venture, the Canadian Issues Committee. I welcomed the opportunity to participate. As its first task, the committee surveyed Canadian colleges and universities to determine the extent of educational opportunities for technical writers in Canada. The results were dismal.

When Laurel Simmonds took over as chair a few years later, the committee identified education as the prime issue for Canadian STC members and made significant progress in determining some firm goals. The committee also developed a "model curriculum" which we presented at the Annual Conference in Toronto in 1997.

The Canadian Issues Committee ceased to operate a couple of years ago. However, several of us felt that we needed something to keep the profile of Canadian members in STC internationally. Hence this SIG.

The existence of this SIG is STC's way of acknowledging that Canadian members have different issues, in education, taxes, employment, insurance, culture, football, and politics, and that they need a forum to discuss these issues.

I hope Canadian STC members will use the CI-SIG to share information about courses and upcoming events in their own communities. I hope we can share experiences in contracting and employment, in working in other countries, in books we have found useful, in obtaining insurance.

Please send us articles, ideas, questions, and information you think would benefit Canadian STC members.

This introductory issue of *Canadian SIGnals* is being mailed to all Canadian STC members. Subsequent issues will be sent only to SIG members by email. We urge you to join the SIG and become involved with other Canadian STC members. I would add that ANY STC member can join this SIG. You don't have to be Canadian.

If you want to discuss the new SIG or any of the information in this issue, you can reach me by email at acampbell@rrc.mb.ca.

How to join

There are two ways to join.

- Simply check-off the Canadian Issues SIG box on the 2002 Annual Dues Invoice, add \$5.00 and mail it to the STC.
- Visit the STC's website, stc.org, check-off the Canadian Issues SIG box, add \$5.00, and click.

Why join?

There are a couple of thousand reasons to join the Canadian Issues SIG because there are a couple of thousand—2,035—Canadian members in the STC and each probably has at least one reason to join. Examples of reasons to join range from insurance, the state of the job market, and where to find training to legal issues, out of country assignments, and contracts.

Our website, www.stcsig.org/canadian/index.htm, is under development to list links of interest to technical communicators in Canada, SIG contacts, schools, and job opportunities.

Our newsletter, also a work in progress, will feature reports on topics such as working in other markets and the training of technical communicators. In the next issue of *Canadian SIGnals*, Toronto consultant, Carolyn Watt, reports on her recent experience of working in the US under NAFTA.

Introducing your SIG management committee

Alexa Campbell:

SIG Manager

Alexa Campbell, our SIG manager, is from Winnipeg. She has a B.Sc. from McGill University and a B.Ed. from the University of Manitoba. She has been a technical writer for many years and an STC member since 1986. She was the founding president of the Manitoba Chapter in 1989, and was a member of the Canadian Issues Committee during the 1990s. She currently teaches technical communication at Red River College. She is also working on her Masters' degree in Adult Education from the University of Manitoba. She became an STC Fellow in 2001.

Tracey Ellison:

Membership Committee Chair

Tracey's mom wanted her to grow up to be a rock star, but Tracey rebelled and became a technical writer instead. After completing the Journalism program at Carleton University, Tracey decided journalism wasn't what she wanted to do, and decided to write about computers and electronic equipment. Tracey has been a technical writer for five years. Tracey has worked on several projects for international markets, leading to an interest in the problems and issues involved in writing for small and specialized markets. She decided to explore the issues closer to home with the Canadian Issues SIG.

Eric Elstone:

Newsletter Committee Chair

Eric has been writing and editing aerospace engineering documents since 1997 in what has become Honeywell. In 1999 he completed Humber College's Technical Communicator's certificate program and is half way through an editing program at another community college. Eric brings to technical writing, experience in writing, editing, and photographing for

newspapers and other publications as well desktop publishing. He is a member of the Editors' Association of Canada.

Renka Gesing:

Newsletter Committee

Renka Gesing, a resident of Windsor, Ontario, for the past five years, has been a freelance writer, editor, special events organizer, etc. (after a short career of teaching the French language), for the past 18 years. She is now enjoying the challenge of branching out into technical communication, mostly through her part-time contract position as technical documentation coordinator across the border at Huron Valley Steel Corporation in Belleville, Michigan. A member of the STC's SE Michigan chapter, Renka was their webmaster for a couple of years. For her enjoyment, Renka writes business articles for a couple of local publications.

Lorin Ledger:

Website Committee Manager

Lorin Ledger is a senior member of the STC, and lives in Vernon, BC (at the top of the Okanagan). He has worked as a Technical Writer for nearly ten years, starting his career at Hughes Aircraft of Canada. Lorin has worked on a variety of projects across Canada. He is now in the throes of starting a Web Site Development business, just for the challenge. You can see an example of his work at the Canadian Issues SIG web site: www.stcsig.org/canadian/index.htm

Lois Marsh:

Newsletter Committee

Technical communication is Lois Marsh's third career. Ten years as a professional soprano soloist taught her how to reach and engage an audience. Her second career was managing people and automated processes in service organizations. Lois is now a business analyst and

technical writer in the financial services industry in Toronto. Her output includes software user guides, business requirements for software tools, and standard operating procedures. Lois has been editor of *Ops Talk*, a departmental newsletter, for the past three years.

Robert Price:

Newsletter Committee

Robert Price, a graduate of the University of Toronto's Professional Writing program, works as a freelance writer from his home in Toronto. Before setting out on his own, he worked as a content developer at Mosaic Perform. Robert developed training materials for CIBC, Labatt, and Honeywell. After graduation, Robert wrote scripts for HRDC-funded educational software programs. While studying at university, he worked five years as a writer and editor of a campus newspaper. Robert has freelanced for many Toronto-area newspapers. His writing has appeared in a U of T writing textbook and U of T sociology textbooks. Robert's creative writing has won several university awards and private writing competitions.

Carolyn Watt:

Member

Carolyn is the president of CWA, a firm of clarity consultants who specialize in turning the complex into clear for their clients. A professional communicator for over 20 years, she is also a specialist in workflow simplification. Active in the Toronto chapter, Carolyn has held almost all offices, including a two-year term as President. She has been a judge and a speaker locally and internationally. She was the Management Stem manager for the 42nd annual conference. She is an Associate Fellow and served on the international board as the Assistant to the President for Professional Development.

Forum

messages from the listserv

As most others have written, I joined the list so I can better understand the issues that Canadian Tech Writers face. Unfortunately, many US members are experiencing job losses and long periods of unemployment. As I read their postings I often wonder what is happening with the market here. Although my own job is fairly secure, I am toying with the idea of consulting. I am hoping this list will give me the information and courage I need to do that in the Canadian market.

Nancy Lee Martin
Toronto, Ontario

I've joined this list to get a better idea of what Canada-specific concerns, issues, ideas members have. In other words, issues specific to Canadian members, ideas that work in the Canadian work environment, with Canadian financial or tax regulations, or with the Canadian legal system.

Conversely, I'd also be interested to know where the frustrations lie for Canadians. What in STC doesn't translate for Canadians?

I'm also interested in hearing about studies, web sites, projects, etc. with Canadian content, that can be used as resource material.

Rahel Bailie, Senior Member
Canada West Coast Chapter

I joined the list (SIG) in order to publicize events that I'm working on. Specifically, I am currently negotiating with an insurance company to better publicize insurance for contractors that is available for STC members across Canada.

Ted Edwins
Guelph, Ontario

My reasons for joining the Canadian SIG are similar to those mentioned by other members so far, basically:

get a better understanding of what issues writers in Canada face that are different from the US (trends, industries, business climate etc.)

- find more information and resources available to Canadian writers in Canada
- provide Canadian answers to business issues such as insurance, financial & tax issues

- "meet" more Canadian writers online who don't work in the same city I do (via conference & website etc. I have come to know some US writers, but I don't know Canadian writers, other than ones in my hometown). Would love to know more about what's happening in e.g. Calgary, Toronto, Montreal, East Coast, etc.

Inge Zegel
Documentation Solutions & Training
Victoria, BC

Although I do attend Toronto STC meetings from time-to-time, I personally find it very hard to network in that setting. I felt that this SIG would be a good place to discuss general concerns among Canadian Techwriters:

- the state of our job market
- writing for our larger US market or writing for Canadians
- issues of writing primarily for a foreign market (I don't know about the rest of you, but my jobs in the corporate world have been for companies with a mostly US customer base)
- Canadian takes on issues important to all tech writers (credentialism, freelancing, etc.)

Michele Marques
Toronto, Ontario

I am an American, a Landed Immigrant in Canada, happily married to a Canadian citizen. As a "Canadian" with membership in a professional organization headquartered in the States I am painfully aware of how USA-centric an organization like this can be. We need this SIG to explore options available to us, and to pursue those opportunities we discover, based on our unique perspective.

Don Guillod
Burnt River, Ontario

Insurance issues are a big one for me. I haven't been able to find any supplementary insurance that is both worthwhile and affordable for my very small company. Would be nice to have worthwhile dental coverage, for example. So far I've been disappointed to find that there's only STC group insurance offered in

the US.

Other than that, I joined the Canadian Issues SIG because I live and work in Canada. I don't get to my local STC meetings nearly enough due to time constraints and organizational overlap so it's a chance for me to talk to the folks I know and don't yet know in my area and in the rest of the country.

Dee-Ann LeBlanc
Computer Writer, Linux Specialist
North Vancouver, BC



Three schools offering technical writing programs



Algonquin College
by Tracey Ellison

Algonquin College in Ottawa offers a 40-week, two-semester technical writing diploma.

Students follow a program of approximately 60 per cent writing course, 30 per cent technology courses, and ten per cent writing tools courses. Technical writing, on-line documentation, documentation planning and management, telecommunication networking, and Adobe FrameMaker are some of the courses that students take.

At the end of the two semesters, students spend an additional eight weeks completing a final writing project at a local company or organization.

Entrance requirements are rigorous. Potential students must possess a university degree or a three-year college diploma, both with a strong showing. Potential students may also enter the program by demonstrating communication skills learned through workplace experience.

Contact: www.algonquincollege.com/technicalwriter/



George Brown College
by Eric Elstone

George Brown College, in Toronto's downtown, offers a part-time program for a Technical Communications Certificate. "A minimum grade of 'C-' for each of the four compulsory courses and three electives leads to certification." according to the community college's calendar. The four compulsory courses are applied psychology of technical communications, two technical writing courses, and Adobe FrameMaker (or another computer software course with graphic capabilities such as QuarkXPress). The electives include On-line Documentation, Indexing, Logic and Persuasive Reasoning, Grammar and Punctuation, and Speaking with Confidence.

Contact: www.gbrownc.on.ca



kalamalka institute
for working writers
kalwriters.com

Kalamalka Institute
for Working Writers

by Lorin Ledger

Kalamalka Institute for Working Writers (KIWW—Kalamalka is the name of a popular and beautiful lake in the region) offers a Certificate in Commercial Creative Writing through the Okanagan University College in BC. There are many writing courses offered. Those interested in Technical Writing may be interested in the following: Research Skills, Proofreading/Copy-Editing, Editing, Reviewing, Writing for the Web, Technical Writing, and Writing Computer Software Manuals.

Contact: www.kalwriters.com



Canadian
SIGnals

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Canadian SIGnals, published four times a year, is the official newsletter for the Canadian Issues Committee Special Interest Group within the Society for Technical Communication.

What you are holding is a collector's item because this edition of *Canadian SIGnals*, is the only one that is to be on paper; all the following editions will be electronic. One purpose of this edition is to introduce the SIG's website address:

www.stcsig.org/canadian/index.htm

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Printing and Distribution:
Renka Gesing

Letters to the Editor

We encourage you to send comments, suggestions, and opinions regarding *Canadian SIGnals* or the SIG to the editor at erice@eol.ca or through the post to 12 Connaught Ave. Toronto (Willowdale) Ontario M2M 1G6.

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Lorin Ledger – Website
Renka Gesing, Lois Marsh, Robert Price, Eric Elstone – Newsletter
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