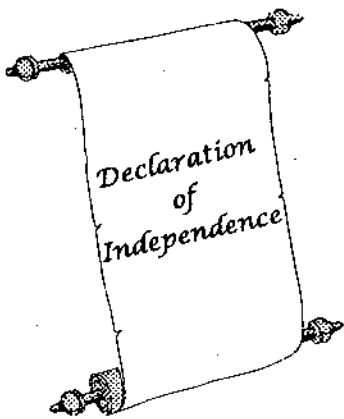


INDEPENDENT PERSPECTIVE

Newsletter of the Consulting and Independent Contracting Professional Interest Committee

Fall 1993



Some possible solutions to "Another Taxing Decision"

by Evelyn True

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The article by Jim Stirewalt (*Independent Perspective*, Spring 1993) on the US Supreme Court's decision in favor of the IRS definition of a consultant couldn't have been more timely. We of the Pittsburgh Chapter's C&IC PIC had a discussion meeting in early May which addressed this very topic. The reason: we were already feeling the effects of the controversy and uncertainty over what a bona fide Consultant is. In the past several years, large corporations in particular began refusing to hire consultants unless they came through an agency. We all know what that means to us in terms of income tax deductions and the hourly rate we can command. So we came up with some good solid suggestions for maintaining our independent status in the eyes of both the IRS and our clients. It's not that we haven't been independents. It's just that now we have to prove it and adhere to that more detailed definition. We don't claim to be tax lawyers or accountants. But our collective experience has shown that by

taking these steps, we can maintain our independent status in the Pittsburgh area.

1. Obtain an Employer Identification Number (EIN). Having one means that only you are responsible for your taxes and insurance. Simply call your local IRS office and ask them to send you Form SS-4. It in no way obliges you to hire anyone now or in the future. But it is a first essential step towards reestablishing yourself as an independent consultant. In any event, it's a good idea to have an EIN in case you do decide to hire in the future.
2. Give your company a name. You may not be required to register that name if you use your own: for example, Smith's Technical Writing.
3. Remember, you are a professional business person. So, if you haven't already invested in business stationery with your company's letterhead, do. By the way, having a fax machine is not only useful but is another way of declaring to the world that you are, in-

deed, conducting an independent business.

4. Get your company listed in the phone book. If you're just starting out, try a two-liner in, let's say, the Donnelly Directory. It's less expensive.
5. Join local business associations such as the Chamber of Commerce or a small business organization. Although there is often a membership fee (sometimes a high one), joining gives you a great opportunity to network, to boost your profile, and to learn more about the business end of consulting. Some organizations even offer excellent comprehensive health insurance coverage at a reasonable price—coverage you would probably not be able to qualify for as an unaffiliated individual.

We strongly suggest you investigate how effective these steps would be for you in your area.

Evelyn True is an STC Senior Member and chair of the Pittsburgh chapter's C&IC PIC. As principal of True Writing Services, she prepares proposals, reports, and manuals. **IP**

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"Working from Home" homes in

We appreciate your welcoming corrections

Independent voices

A full bag of news & views

to the information provided in the spring issue devoted to the world of BBS, because we have a doozy. Whoever provided the comments on the Independent Writers Section of the Working from Home Forum apparently found their way to some other part of CompuServe—perhaps the Literary Forum—because the statements about the forum were off-base.

Contrary to the assertion that most of the writers "are would-be poets and the like, looking for agents and kindred spirits," in our over ten years of managing the Working from Home Forum we have never encountered anyone who has identified him or herself as a poet. We're sure some of the writers who join us have poetry in their hearts, but they earn their livings in the more sober world of business and technical writing.

The day we received the newsletter—May

15—we checked the messages in the Independent Writer Section (#10) to see how relevant the forum was on that day to technical writers. Following are some of the topics of conversation on the message board:

- indexing work as a freelancer
- research techniques for writers
- whether to incorporate one's business
- self-publishing
- whether a program called Mac-In-Dos works
- advice on proofreading, and
- how to's of book order taking.

Under another topic, "Tech Writer Needs Help," a technical writer related how he was able to get significantly higher rates marketing himself as a "business consultant;" another related how he "made a small fortune teaching engineers to use the folks who write the user manuals as a debugging aid."

These were the messages on one Saturday. The speed of our forum is such that within a few days there is a different set of messages, but given the business and technical

writer membership of the forum, we don't think we'll be seeing much discussion of poetry. Come check us out! Cordially,

Paul and Sarah Edwards,
SysOps, Working From Home Forum

(See *Letters*, page 6)

INDEPENDENT PERSPECTIVE

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From the editor

I'm overwhelmed! Much of this issue consists of reader responses—letters (edited for brevity) about our Electronic World spring issue, suggestions on our tax dilemma, a

hearty reaction to the "favorite books" request. In addition you'll find a review of a book on the Internet and a revealing article on the exciting things the Manitoba

chapter is up to.

To make space for all this, I'm signing off. Hats off to vocal members, and happy reading!

Susan

The Consulting & Independent Contracting Professional Interest Committee generally promotes the interests of

just over two years ago, when Chris Juillet invited me to act as the PIC's Area Coordinator in Manitoba. I told some

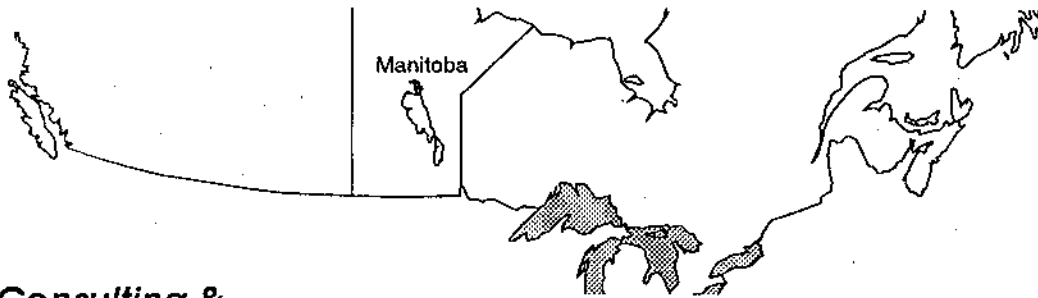
the work: the chapter's monthly dinner meeting. Often our chapter wants to invite speakers to a dinner meeting not so much because we want to listen to them, but because we feel that they ought to know about *us*. The trouble is, this forum gives the invited guest a chance to speak, but the opportunities for the chapter to inform the guest about our profession are often limited.

Inviting a business or government person to an informal C&IC PIC lunch is an entirely different matter. On one occasion Ken Emmond invited an official from the Canadian federal government to attend a lunch meeting. Somewhere along the way the government official asked C&IC PIC to extend an invitation to the Manitoba chapter itself to attend an exploratory meeting on a government-sponsored project on technical communication.

At this point the PIC bowed out of the picture and the chapter Administrative Council took over. As a result the chapter submitted a proposal (which was accepted) for a \$138,000 research project that spans the western provinces and that promises to put our chapter and our Society on the map. The project will turn up a wealth of information that will be useful to

(See *Focus*, page 4

PIC focus: Manitoba



Consulting & independent contracting in the Great White North

by James Conklin

independently employed STCers. In Manitoba, however, the PIC has traveled far beyond its mandate. I like to think of the local C&IC PIC as the *point man* for the chapter: the PIC is out there in the community, scouting out opportunities for technical communicators, and bringing the chapter into contact with interesting people and organizations.

The most dramatic example of our C&IC PIC's initiative is the TeCiWeC project. This unlikely acronym stands for "Technical Communication in Western Canada," and it is the name given to a \$138,000 research project currently being managed by the Manitoba chapter. Without the local C&IC PIC, I cannot say for certain that this project would have gotten under way. In short, our C&IC PIC is putting the STC on the map!

Our C&IC PIC started

of my consulting friends about this, and one of them—Ken Emmond—began to pester me about calling a meeting with other local PIC members. I finally did so, and we began to hold monthly lunch meetings for informal shop talk and also to explore some areas in which we might cooperate.

Ken Emmond started to bring friends and acquaintances to our meetings. He brought a writer for a local computer paper. He brought government officials and representatives from business organizations. Things started to develop—not just for the PIC, but for the entire chapter.

The Manitoba chapter has been working hard to establish technical communication in the minds of local business leaders as an important business discipline. The chapter has one obvious vehicle for spreading

Focus (from page 3)

"And all of this came about because our C&IC PIC was acting as point man."

technical communicators throughout North America.

And all of this came about because our C&IC PIC was acting as point man.

On another occasion, Ken Emmond invited a representative from Winnipeg 2000—a non-profit organization that promotes Winnipeg's commercial development—to join the PIC for lunch.

Natalie Tarkpea of Winnipeg 2000 had lunch with us, proposing a role technical communication consultants might play in the development of quality assurance documentation. The chapter's program manager was at the meeting, and he invited her to address the entire

chapter. When she spoke before the entire chapter, the ensuing question period uncovered the possibility of Winnipeg 2000 sponsoring some workshops on the documentation side of ISO 9000. We are still developing this new relationship with Winnipeg 2000.

Our chapter has acknowledged the importance of the C&IC PIC by formally recognizing the PIC in its bylaws. The PIC's chair is included in our slate of nominations at the chapter's Annual General Meeting, and s/he occupies a non-voting seat on the Administrative Council. The chapter also gives a small budget to the PIC chair to help cover some post-

age and phone costs.

For the Manitoba chapter, the benefits of having an active C&IC PIC work both ways. The PIC certainly benefits from a vital chapter that recognizes the important contribution made by independently employed technical communicators. Equally important, the chapter benefits by having an innovative and entrepreneurial C&IC PIC.

After all, a technical communications consultant will thrive in an environment where the discipline is recognized and respected. This makes the C&IC PIC a natural ambassador for the Society. Here in Manitoba we are all benefitting from "PIC diplomacy." **IP**

If you'd like to meet some of your STC compatriots, plan to attend the 4th Annual Practical

will run from 8:30 to 4:30 and includes lunch. Fee for the post-conference is \$40; for the PCOC, \$100. Contact

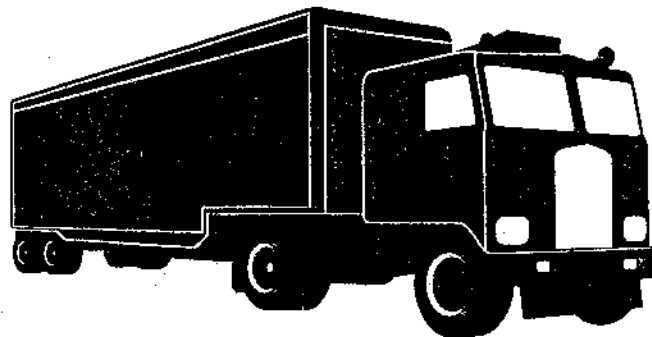
Michelle Berkes, conference coordinator, at 615-576-2352. Registration deadline is October 11. Don't miss it! **IP**

Independents' PCOC post-conference set

Conference on Communication (PCOC) in Oak Ridge, TN. Besides the regular conference on Nov. 4 and 5, PCOC features a full-day post-conference for independents on Nov. 6.

The single-track event features C&IC PIC personalities Chris Juillet, Fred O'Hara, Charley McWha, and Tallin En-sley, among others. It

Moving? Let us know post haste.



If you have a new address or phone number, please let us know right away. Send complete information to:

C&IC PIC, P.O. Box 1725, Ann Arbor, MI 48106

Here's our first list of books recommended by C&IC PIC members. Responses to a letter in the Spring *Independent Perspective* have supplied us with not only a respectable start at an

Readers' favorites

**A compilation
of best books
for independent
professionals**

by Susan Witter

independents' bookshelf, but also a hands-down best seller. That honor goes to Herman Holtz, for *How to Start and Run a Writing & Editing Business*. But more on that later. For now, thanks very much to Bob Bly (Writers Profit Catalog™, New Milford, NJ); Laurel Cook (A Way with Words, Sausalito, CA); Karen Wise Olander (Florence, MA); and David Venzke (Petersburg, MI).

Do you have others? Send your annotations to *IP*—we'll maintain this list! (We're trusting you for complete bibliographic information.)

- Robert W. Bly, *Secrets of a Freelance Writer: How to Make \$85,000 a Year*. 1988: Henry Holt and Company. ISBN 0-8050-1192-7.

Explains how to make money doing commercial writing: the writing that businesses need to promote products, services and ideas. Includes hundreds of how-to secrets and strategies.

- Paul and Sarah Edwards, *Working from Home*. 1990: Jeremy P. Tarcher.

The mechanics of working at home. Space, equipment, time management, legal considerations, personal management, and marketing.

- Herman Holtz, *How to Start and Run a Writing & Editing Business*. 1992: John Wiley & Sons, Inc. ISBN 0-471-54831-6.

Presents a lot of information for anyone in or entering the write-for-hire business—how to tap into the huge market for writing services needed by business, industry, government, and non-profit groups. Lots of examples of all sorts of written materials, plus lists of resources. Recommended by three different respondents!

- Peter Kent, *Technical Writer's Freelancing Guide*. 1992: Sterling Publishing Company, Inc. ISBN 0-8069-5836-7.

Covers all the bases, from how to get started in technical writing, getting freelance work, to tips on taxes, insurance, and other important issues that confront the freelance technical writer.

- David R. Eyler, *Starting & Operating a Home-Based Business*. 1990: John Wiley & Sons, Inc. ISBN 0-471-51036-X.

Covers the pros and cons of home-based work. Summarizes technology options, describes how to sell

services and products, outlines marketing strategies, includes tax and insurance tips. Several pages of resources for additional information.

- Claude Whitmeyer, Salli Rasberry, and Michael Phillips, *Running a One-Person Business*. 1989: Ten Speed Press. ISBN 0-89815-237-2.

Provides a wealth of information for running your own business. Everything is covered, including bookkeeping, financial strategies, time/information management, emotional support systems.

- Thomas A. Williams, *How to Make \$100,000 a Year in Desktop Publishing*. 1990: Betterway Publications, Inc. ISBN 1-55870-160-5.

Packed with detailed instructions on profitable desktop publishing projects. Tells desktop entrepreneurs how to make money with hardware and software they already own.

- Writer's Profit Catalog™

Not a single book; rather a collection of nearly 40 books and reports. Some are written by Mr. Bly, some by other authors. Subjects range from freelancing in a recession to promotion and public relations. For more information, write Bob Bly, 174 Holland Avenue, New Milford, NJ 07646. **IP**

Letters (from page 2) **The right address**

Another interesting article about communicating electronically appeared in the April 1993 issue of the *Intercom*, entitled "Contracts, Advice, and Discussion Available through Internet, BITNET via Electronic Mail." I tried to follow the instructions to sign on to the discussion forum, but struck out. Finally, I sent an e-mail message to the author of the article. As it turned out, the *Intercom* editors and staff made several typos in the article, rendering the instructions incorrect.

Below is the e-mail message sent to me by the author of the article, in case any of you had similar problems. Sincerely,

Debbie Eisenberg
Ann Arbor, MI

Hi Gang,

STC made a couple of errors when transcribing my article for *Intercom*. First, the name of the list is: TECHWR-L. The address is: LISTSERV@VM1.UCC.OKSTATE.EDU To subscribe, send a message to: LISTSERV @VM1.UCC.OKSTATE.EDU

The previous two statements should be typed on a single line with no spaces. Leave the subject line blank, and include on the first line of the message: SUB TECHWR-L
firstname lastname

For example,
SUB TECHWR-L Eric Ray

I think this should get you all fixed up. If you

have any other problems, please don't hesitate to contact me. Please pass this along to anyone else who might be interested.

Eric
elray@okway.okstate.edu

E-mailed?

I just got the spring issue of *Independent Perspective*. I had a very different experience with America Online, which is why I now subscribe to CompuServe.

I thought AOL offered a good deal, and I liked the ability to try it free. So I had them send me the software. When it arrived, I installed it—or so I thought. It prompted me through all the steps and then left me at the main menu. As far as I knew, installation was complete. I then composed and, I thought, sent, an E-mail message over Internet. I closed everything down, believing all was well, and eagerly awaited a response.


The next day I happened to call their Help line, which was fortunate because I found out I was not really registered. AOL had no explanation why the registration process aborted, nor why it gave me no indication it was doing so. As for the E-mail that I supposedly sent: apparently the system lets you compose mail offline to save money, but it didn't tell me that was what was happening. And if the process was all taking place off-

line, why did the system let me think I had sent the mail? If they really wanted to create a helpful user interface, it would have been easy enough to signal the user in such a situation.

I tried to explain my concerns to the help technician, but they fell on deaf ears...The possibility that the system itself had malfunctioned—and that the user interface wasn't all that it should be—was not something she was even willing to consider.

That same afternoon I bought the Windows version of the CompuServe software. I had no trouble at all installing or using it. It's also a pretty good deal in terms of cost. After the first month you pay \$8.95 per month, and you receive 25 free hours of CompuServe's extended services. Best of all, when you do have a question, the Help technicians are friendly, courteous, and knowledgeable—quite the opposite of my experiences with AOL.

I'm sure that the installation experience I had with AOL was some sort of fluke. But I can't excuse poorly designed software that doesn't let you know when something is going wrong, nor unhelpful product support people. From my perspective, CompuServe is a much better deal all around.

Carol Watts,
Bellevue, WA 

The heritage of the spring issue's focus on electronic communication for me, the *IP* editor, is a heightened awareness of the power of electronic networking and a voracious appe-

different people. Beginners look for encouragement, experts for tricks. Somehow, author Ed Krol manages to supply enough information to satisfy. Though I thought the book closer to ex-

section on how to translate addresses from other networks—often a stumbling block for me.

Also included are sections on sending binary data as ASCII; on Archie, a system which allows searching for files available on public Internet servers; Gopher, a user-friendly version of search software that gives you menus to choose from; the Wide Area Information Servers (WAIS) indexed databases; the World-Wide Web (WWW), a hypertext-based tool for Internet prowling; and of course much much more.

The book includes a 50-page catalog of electronic newsletters, journals, discussion groups, and other information organized by subject matter. A notable appendix is the one on getting connected and on Internet Service Providers.

I certainly might have missed something in this delightful book that would be of interest to another network user. But I found everything I was looking for.

Ed Krol, *The Whole Internet User's Guide and Catalog*. 1992. O'Reilly & Associates (Nutshell Handbooks), Sebastopol, CA. ISBN No. 1-56592-025-2. **IP**

The Internet unveiled

by Susan Witter

"Networking in general, and the Internet in particular... mean different things to different people."

tite for more informational resources. When I attended Interchange '93, the regional conference of the STC Boston chapter, I heard about a book on the Internet. I managed to procure a review copy, and I'm delighted.

First of all, the book itself is a treat. Layout is more than professional: it's alluring. The cover and each chapter are decorated with illustrations reminiscent of old-time wood engravings, lending perspective and minimizing intimidation. Still, there are many conceptual diagrams of technological concepts, as well as examples showing terminal sessions along with explanations (where needed) of each step.

But the value goes far beyond the face. Networking in general, and the Internet in particular (if the Internet could be called particular), mean different things to

pert than novice, there were thorough explanations of basic topics like getting connected, electronic mail, moving data around, and what the Internet is about.

For the more advanced it may be hard to put the book down. I looked for, and found, a

You know who you are...

The Dallas meeting of C&IC PIC was a resounding success, with one small exception: some folks who volunteered to coordinate regional consulting seminars didn't get their names and telephone numbers to us so we could follow up. (Very clever, people.)

So, since **you know who you are**, please do contact either Charley McWha (C&IC PIC manager) at 304-291-0878 or Tallin Ensley (C&IC PIC conference coordinator) at 904-454-4745 and get signed up.



Make time work for you

by Bob Miller

Be sure to rewrite your personal and professional goals every three months. As things change, your goals should change too. If you keep them before you, you are more likely to work on those things that are important and to say no to requests that interfere with these goals.

Some other tips:

Results count; activity doesn't. Be sure you are investing your time on the important things.

Schedule at least one hour of uninterrupted time each day to work on your top priority activities. Pause to ask yourself: "What is the most important thing I should be doing right now?"

When interrupted in your office, stand up. The other person will not sit down and get comfortable.

Let people know that you will always be available at a certain time.

This will discourage them from bothering you at other times.

When a co-worker begins talking about non-work-related items, change the subject back to work-related items.

Source: "1001 Tips to Increase your Effectiveness," by Bob Miller, 1560 Curtis St., Dubuque, IA 52001. Appeared in *Technically Speaking*, Fall 1991 (newsletter of the West Virginia chapter of the STC). **IP**