

INDEPENDENT PERSPECTIVE

Newsletter of the Consulting and Independent Contracting Professional Interest Committee

Fall 1994



As freelancers, our survival depends on managing projects and organizing time, appointments and lists of contacts. Buying special-purpose software for each of these needs, however, can push you into bankruptcy: \$200 to \$500 for project management software, \$100 to \$200 for an appointment calendar, and up to \$300 for a personal organizer. Of course, we wouldn't

processor not only for words, but for managing my projects. Here are a few tips on how you can do the same:

1. Run the software automatically when you turn on your computer. If you use a Mac, make an alias of the word processor's name and drop it into the "startup items" folder; if you use DOS, add the program's name to your AUTO-EXEC.BAT file. In Windows, add the program to your "Startup" program group.

2. Make your word processor load important files automatically. (We'll come to these in a moment.) On the Mac, drop aliases of these files into your startup items folder; for DOS, add the names of the files on the same line of the AUTOEXEC.BAT file as the name of the word processor; for Windows, add the files to the Startup program group. Most word processors also let you run a macro (a recorded series of keystrokes) whenever the program starts; for example, the macro is called "Onstartup" in WordPerfect, whereas in AmiPro, you create the macro yourself and add its name in the "run

macros/program load" part of the user preferences dialog box. The advantage of using a macro is that you can quickly reload the files whenever you need them by running the macro.

To-do with coffee

What files do I load? My appointment calendar and my project tracking list. I load the tracking list first because this way, the calendar ends up on top of the window for tracking once the program finishes loading. A small point, but when I return with coffee, my "to-do" list is staring me in the face. Details of the files:

1. I keep my tracking file simple, although I've developed elaborations for various purposes. Each entry in the file is a client's name, followed by the name of the project. The first line after that, indented, is the most recent status of the project (e.g., "sent second draft to client for review"). When there are deadlines to meet, I add the dates as indented points beneath the status line. For more elaborate tracking, and sometimes for invoicing, I add the actual date I finished each (See *Making do*, page 4)

Making do with what you've got

© 1994 by Geoff Hart

be freelancers if we didn't have a certain amount of the "do it yourself" spirit, and you'd be surprised at how much you can do yourself with the tools at hand. Take the word processor, for instance.

Managing words

Each of us owns a word processor, and we probably spend most of our time using it. Each management task I listed above is really nothing more complicated than managing lists of words, and what manages words better than a word processor? For my own freelance work, I rely on my word

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Make plans now to attend the fifth annual Consulting and Independent Contracting Workshop held in conjunction with the 18th Annual Practical Conference on Communication (PCOC).

5th annual C&IC Workshop slated

The conference will be held November 3 and 4, with the CIC PIC Workshop following on Saturday, November 5, in Oak Ridge, TN. PCOC is sponsored by the East Tennessee Chapter of STC. And you are all invited to attend.

Presenters will offer tips and tricks for both contractors and consultants. There will be information for everyone from the seasoned professional to the folks who are just thinking about getting started.

The \$40 registration fee covers a full day of

networking and presentations, from 8:30 am to 4:30 pm, with lunch provided. Presenters and topics include:

- Bill Horton: Growing a Consultancy
- Chris Juillet: Keeping the IRS Away from Your Door
- Mac Katzin: Professionalism, Marketing, and Required Knowledge
- Fred O'Hara: Plan Your Retirement Now
- Karen Steele and Judy Glick-Smith: Getting Started in a Profitable Way (or, How to Make Money as a Contractor)
- Linda Bell: Freelance Editing: Making it Pay
- Karen Steele: Guerilla Marketing (or Keep That Business Rolling In)

This is the only time the PIC as a whole is invited to get together, other than the annual conference. While we hope to offer more sessions for members in

other areas of the country next year, PCOC will be the event for 1994. To register, call Michael Morrison, PCOC 18 Manager, at 615-483-6195, or E-mail him at mmorrisn@utkx.utk.edu.

If you would like to sponsor a CIC PIC session or progression at your Regional conference, contact Karen Steele at 214-495-3458 to explore the possibility. **IP**

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From the editor

The transition from East to West Coast has been exciting but not altogether smooth. That's why this issue of *Independent Perspective* is so late!

I apologize for throwing the schedule off; rest assured I'm working to get back on schedule for the next issue.

I occasionally have trouble digging out what news you have, so I'm putting out another formal call for informa-

tion. What's going on in your sector of the country? Please let me know. Any burning issues you want to "discuss" via the IP? Send them in—we'll solicit responses. Any comments you have on the content of recent issues, or comments in general? Write a letter!

And again I thank all of you who have contributed. You make this newsletter what it is. **IP**

Susan

Whether you're working as a consultant or an independent contractor, you'll always be looking for ways to enhance

Enhancing Your Marketability through Certification

by
Donald S. LeVie, Jr.

your marketability as a technical communicator. You want to be the best value-added resource you can be for your clients.

Expand your horizons

You can achieve those goals by expanding your professional horizons through certification and professional designation.

The type of certification and professional designation I'm talking about concentrates on areas peripheral to your central focus, but within your professional experience. It's not likely that being a "Certified Technical Writer" will give you the key to the execu-

tive washroom; however, being a "Certified Refrigerant Recovery Specialist," in addition to communications talents, will certainly do wonders to establish yourself as a viable piece of intellectual property to a client in that particular industry.

Here's a real-life example. My background is geology/geophysics (B.S.), communications (B.A.), and geochemistry (M.S.). I toyed with the idea of earning another advanced degree (in Environmental Management), but instead am working on certification as a Hazardous Waste Materials and Environmental Management professional. It's much cheaper than another master's degree and will accomplish nearly the same result; namely, enhancing my marketability as a technical communicator with additional expertise within the environmental sciences.

Not glamorous

I just received a certificate in Wastewater Laboratory Procedures and one in Water and Wastewater Management (Class D) from a local community college. It's not as glamorous as saving whales or endangered salamanders, and

I don't ever plan to operate a wastewater facility (and can't with at Class D certificate). But I'll know how these complexes function when my technical communications experience is required for a project in this industry.

Put it to work

Now, all of this certification and professional designation won't do you any good if you don't go out and promote yourself and your skills. Whether you want to use your new certification as leverage for charging higher fees, or whether you want to use it to expand into other fields, you can't be shy about letting the right people know of your special value-added talents.

Take inventory of all your professional experience and discover how certification or a professional designation in those peripheral areas can broaden your horizons! **IP**

Donald S. LeVie, Jr., is president of DSL Technical & Scientific Communications in Austin, Texas, specializing in high technology manufacturing, industrial automation/process control, and the Earth/environmental sciences.

Making do
(from page 1)

**“my frugal
system has
worked well
for my simple
needs”**

task, the time required to do so, and the cost. If you can build tables with the “table editor” of your word processor, you can use the table’s column headings as your checkpoints. This also lets you use the table’s spreadsheet features to track times, costs, and so on. This is too structured for my taste, and generally too complicated for my needs, but the information may be important to you.

2. My to-do list calendar is even simpler. I type the names of each month in a large, bold font, then add dates and tasks under these headings only when I take on new chores and establish new deadlines. If I have nothing to do on April 1st, no number 1 appears under the heading for April. When I first created my list, I added birthdays and other occasions that occur every year at the same time. Now, when I come to the beginning of a new month, I copy the text for the entire month and paste it at the bottom of the file before I start adding new appointments to the original copy. This way, I don’t

have to retype the repeating events every year.

Finally, to ensure that I don’t leave anything until the last moment, I add a reminder one or more weeks before the actual date. For example, on March 24th: “First draft of OMNR edit due in one week; do I need an extension?” Every item in my tracking file can be added to the to-do list calendar simply by switching windows, copying the text, returning to the calendar, and pasting the text at the appropriate point.

Noteworthy

3. My contacts file is an alphabetical list of names, along with addresses and other important notes (e.g., “this client won’t tolerate split infinitives”). When I need an address, I open this file, then copy and paste the required information elsewhere (e.g., into a reminder letter). If you’re ambitious, you can create a mail-merge file from this information and use the word processor’s mail-merge function to sort the list, select a specific name using a macro, and perform several other tricks.

Color it priority

Most word processors now allow you to colorize text, and this makes it easy to label entries in red for high priorities and leave the rest in black on white; more sophisticated color schemes are also possible.

None of these tricks work as well or as efficiently as dedicated software. Project management software tracks complex projects much more effectively (e.g., it handles resource requirements and constraints), and automates reminders and deadlines for you with little intervention.

Personal information managers integrate addresses with your word processor and FAX/modem, for example. But my frugal system has worked so well for my simple needs that I’ve never been tempted to buy additional software. I’m a jack of all trades, working on mastering one, and this approach fits my style better. It could work for you too. **IP**

Geoff Hart is a technical editor and information designer who specializes in working with research scientists and engineers.

CONSULTING AND INDEPENDENT PROFESSIONAL INTEREST COMMITTEE CALL FOR INFORMATION

The C&IC PIC is compiling information about our group to help us answer questions from those who are interested in becoming "independent." Please complete the following questionnaire. The more information you provide, the more useful the results of this survey. To ensure confidentiality, do *not* sign your name. Please return the questionnaire by **February 15th**.

Years of experience in technical communication: _____
 Years of experience as an "independent:" _____
 Are you currently working as an "independent?" Yes No
 Percent of work performed outside commuting distance: _____ %
 Percent of work performed onsite: _____ %
 Percent of work for which taxes are not withheld: _____ %

Hourly rate as an "independent:" \$ _____
 Hourly rate as a subcontractor: \$ _____
 In which STC Region are you located? _____

If you work directly for your clients:

Percent of all work performed as fixed contracts (one price for the job): _____ %
 Percent of all work performed as hourly rate contracts: _____ %

In addition to your independent work, do you also have a regular job? Yes No

Areas of Expertise:

| | | | |
|--|--|---|--|
| Technical Writer <input type="checkbox"/> Hardware <input type="checkbox"/> Software <input type="checkbox"/> Human Resources <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____ | Editor <input type="checkbox"/> Hardware <input type="checkbox"/> Software <input type="checkbox"/> Human Resources <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____ | Industries (list) _____ _____ _____ | Translator (list languages) _____ _____ _____ |
| Trainer <input type="checkbox"/> Hardware <input type="checkbox"/> Software <input type="checkbox"/> Human Resources <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____ | Training Developer <input type="checkbox"/> Hardware <input type="checkbox"/> Software <input type="checkbox"/> Human Resources <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____ | Illustrator <input type="checkbox"/> Mechanical <input type="checkbox"/> Medical/Sciences <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____ | Miscellaneous <input type="checkbox"/> Management <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____ _____ _____ |

What tools do you use?

Hardware: _____

Software: _____

What areas would you like to see addressed by the C&IC PIC? _____

(fold here)

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postage
here.

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(fold here)

What do clients really want?

Research on
the big question
by STC's Western
Canada Chapters

STC's Western Canada Chapters conducted a 2-year research study to

find out how, why, and when clients use our services—and whether they know they need us at all. Then they rounded out the study by asking members of their own STC chapters who they were, what they did, and how they

responded to clients' needs.

The results are compiled into three reports:

- *Understanding the Western Canadian Market for Technical Communication Services;*
 - *Study and Report on Current and Desirable Standards for Technical Communication in Western Canada;* and
 - *Clear Communication—Your Competitive Edge.*
- A quick write-up doesn't do justice to

these reports, so we're hoping for a more intensive treatment in the future from one of the study partners themselves. You may remember the article by James Conklin in *Independent Perspective*, Fall 1993, which described the genesis of the project.

If you can't wait for the more in-depth article on these reports, you can obtain them for \$20 each. For inquiries, call 204-237-0747. **IP**

—Susan Witter

Independent voices: Tele the world!

To: Multiple recipients of list TECHWR-L <TECHWR-L@OSUVM1.BITNET>

From: Elaine Winters <ewinters@NETCOM.COM>

About 2 weeks ago I posted a notice indicating my interest in Telecommuting. As yet, no jobs; I did find this information—and I'm posting for those who might want to follow up. Elaine

++++
From: vicw@cix.compulink.co.uk ("V J Woolnough")

Subject: TELEWORKING

TELEWORKING is set to become International in the future! Country, location, sex, age, or disability should not be a barrier to employment potential. The INTERNET is global and therefore anyone who has a service to offer can contact any company that has an INTERNET connection, to offer their particular services. If you are interested in TELEWORKING, now or in the future, and have a skill or service to offer which is practical using a modern link, and may wish to be entered into an International Directory of Teleworkers, please Email your NAME, Email ADDRESS, and SERVICE offered, to:

vicw@cix.compulink.co.uk

Please send one line only if possible, e.g.

John Smith jsmith@provider.com PC Programmer C/C++

Janet Brown jbrown@bbs.org Translations In French/German

There are many other suitable skills, here are just a few examples, but there will be many other possible services.

Technical Writing, Desktop Publishing, Local Marketing Information, Market Research, Proof Reading, Various forms of Consultancy, Software Support, Training Services, Technical/Specialists Translations, CAD, Programming and Database Development

If the response is sufficient, a directory will be compiled and made available to any company or business requesting a copy, free of charge.

See *Teleworking*, page 6

This piece of electronic mail was passed to us from Karen Steele and is reprinted as closely as possible to the way it appeared on the Internet.

Teleworking (from page 5)

The term "teleworker" includes both individuals and companies offering a service via a modem link. No charge is incurred nor any commitment made by registering your interest at this time, but there will be a small charge per annum if you subsequently request to be entered in the Directory on being notified that it is being compiled. No other charges will be made.

Any company interested in receiving a copy of the International Directory of Teleworkers, free of charge, when available, should register their interest by Emailing their Company NAME, Email ADDRESS, and Nature of Business plus the words "Directory Request" to:
vicw@cix.compulink.co.uk

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IP

Cynthia Kolnick: In Memoriam

Not long ago, I learned that long-time STC and C&IC PIC member Cynthia Kolnick had died, taken much sooner than seems right. Cindy was a good friend and a founding member of the C&IC PIC, among other things. When I heard of Cindy's untimely passing, I asked her friend and colleague, Andrew Davis, to write of her for this issue of *Independent Perspective*.

Thank you, Andrew, for your comments. Thank you Cindy, for your friendship, professionalism, and especially for your spirit.

—Christopher Juliet

Those of you who knew Cynthia Kolnick will be saddened to

hear of her passing. You will remember her consistent and selfless efforts to nurture the careers of dozens, perhaps hundreds, of technical writers in the San Francisco Bay Area during the late 1980s. I met Cindy before I ever heard about STC. She hosted a gathering of contract technical writers called Writers Online in Berkeley, an ideal forum—although we met face-to-face and *not* over the Internet—for us to mingle and share war stories and job leads. In particular, Cindy's generous assistance set the tone that inspired everyone. She made us feel valuable and worthy, and she helped us become more effective

professionals as well as happier ones.

Cindy ran Kolnick Consulting Services, doing state of the art CD-ROM-based work for Apple and other clients. In the last four years of her life, Cindy lost touch with many of her friends from Writers Online. In her last months, as many of us learned that she was dying (of AIDS complicated by diabetes), we reached out to her and let her know how grateful we were for her impact on our lives. She reportedly was very touched by this, and certainly knew at the end of her life how valuable a contribution she had made to so many. She is much missed.

—Andrew Davis

Who ever heard of a consultant needing a consultant? We should be able to answer every

Organizations that help individuals

Where consultants can turn for advice

by Susan Witter

question we can think of for ourselves as well as for all of our clients, right?

Wrong. If you find yourself falling into this super-hero school of thought, go take a cold shower. You need advice from experts just as much as those to whom you dispense advice-- maybe more.

Running your own business is hard, and the path to success is strewn with obstacles. As my husband says, "If it were easy, everyone would do it!" And everyone would. How many times have you encountered people who said wistfully, "I've always wanted to work for myself..." from the safety and security of their corporate cubicles? Most of them are still there, and you are here.

So where do you turn for advice when you need it? Try some groups on this list of organizations that make it their business to help those in business for themselves. Some tend to be affiliated with universities; some with municipalities or the state; some are funded by the Federal government.

Small Business Development Center

I list this first because I find it by far the most directly helpful. SBDCs are usually found at local colleges or universities, and are sponsored by the Small Business Administration (see below), by the university, and by state and local government.

The SBDC's purpose is to provide high-quality, low-cost (usually free) counseling to prospective and existing business owners. SBDCs often provide training and other types of assistance as well. You can obtain a lot of good advice about whether and when to make the jump, get extensive help writing a business plan, find good advice on financial assistance, or receive a boost in ideas for your marketing efforts, just as a sampling. SBDC counselors are very good at pinpointing exactly where you are and what will help you the most, and are also receptive to you coming to them with specific questions and needs.

Small Business Administration

This federal agency sponsors many state and local efforts, and also joins with other organizations to provide direct services. One I'm familiar with is a low-

cost, full-day seminar for those thinking of going into business—business plan development, legal issues, business structures, financial issues, and a reality check. This seminar was the first time I heard the famous statement that the great majority of businesses that fail, do so NOT because they couldn't deliver a quality service or product, but because they couldn't cover all the bases that are necessary.

SBA publishes a wealth of very helpful guides for going into business, from small pamphlets to bibliographies to very targeted technical reports; and, among its many other services and affiliations, maintains a number of different loan programs for those needing startup capital.

Service Corps of Retired Executives

SCORE is a program offering the volunteer services of retired business executives to small businesses seeking assistance. SCORE is partly funded by SBA, and the types of services offered differ tremendously. One-on-one counseling is generally a staple, but some SCORE members conduct business seminars as well.

see *Help*, page 8

Help (from page 7)

State Economic Development Program

These are called various names, and are usually funded jointly through the state and the SBA or other federal monies. They generally offer assistance for those wanting to expand their business: exporting consultation, lists of Requests for Proposals, other contracting and subcontracting assistance, etc.

The group often publishes a directory of large companies in the state or region it covers.

In some states, you can obtain minority- or women-owned business certification if you are qualified, with the help of your state Economic Development Program.

Your Community College

Always a good vehicle for reaching the community, the local commu-

nity college usually offers a series of continuing education courses that can range from computer tools to exporting tips to small business marketing assistance. The courses tend to be short in duration and non-credit.

There are many other organizations that offer assistance. Some are unique to your area; others are ones I've simply overlooked. Do you have any to add to the list? Please tell us all. **IP**