

# *Independent* / PERSPECTIVE

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## STC Consultants Directory in the Works

by Thomas Barker  
CICSIG Co-Manager

This past Fall and Spring, volunteer members of the CICSIG have been doing interaction development work on the first ever STC Consultants Directory. The idea began last year at the SIG meeting in Nashville. The STC Consultants Database was unveiled this year at the CICSIG Business Meeting, May 20, 2003 at the 50<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference in Dallas, TX.

About 15 members of the STC CICSIG-L took the time to respond to ques-

tionnaires that established the requirements for the client and the consultant interfaces. Out of this interaction design work came the main goal of the site: to get jobs for CICSIG members. This work also identified the client interface as crucial, because most clients would not spend more than 15 minutes posting and searching.

The application features the ability for consultants—CICSIG members—to create a profile of their skills, tool knowledge, and products, and to list their contact information.

Client users can post jobs, view consultant profiles who meet the project skill set, and then push an email to all consultants who qualify.

The application will run on the CICSIG web site and members will be welcome to the site for the first year. After that, the CICSIG membership requirement will be increased to cover the cost of the database. The database contains a maintenance interface; however a manager of the database has yet to be selected.

## Independent Perspective Welcomes New Editor

by Thomas Barker  
CICSIG Co-Manager

We are pleased to welcome Robin Jackson as she takes over the managing editor position previously filled by Margaret Doss. I want to take this opportunity to thank Margaret for her valuable assistance with our previous issues. Thank you, Margaret.

A brief introduction to Robin...

Robin Jackson is president of Ghostwriters, a communications company she founded in 2001. Excelling in all areas of written communication, Jackson has done everything from taglines and technical manuals to marketing materials and screen plays.

Combining a great writing talent with skills in

business and people management, she has put together a portfolio that covers documentation, marketing, and training. Jackson has created value for such companies as Lotus, Compaq, cnbc.com, and wallstreetcity.com. She is now focusing her time and talent at helping startups and small businesses make the most of their message.

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## Competitor? Or Community?

by Robin Jackson  
CICSIG Editor

These are difficult times to be an Independent Contractor.

I don't normally begin an article with what appears to be such an uninspiring line. I chose just to come right out and say, "Hey folks, times are tough!" for one reason—to validate what many of us are experiencing. These are times where job opportunities in IT and Technical Communication are posted much less frequently than 3 or 4 years ago. And the number of applicants for these jobs (be they 1099 or W-2) is astounding.

In this job market, there is a tendency to view other independent contractors as competitors and not colleagues. This may feel justified on first glance, but I believe Independent Contractors are in more need of community now than ever before. Why?

**We can't all offer identical skill sets, therefore, we can't truly be competitors.**

No one else has had your exact career path. Therefore, no one else can bring to the table what you can. Since you're not exactly the same as any other Technical Communicator, no hiring manager can compare you to another candidate side-by-side and find you both equal. For example? That year of Freight Forwarding you completed back in college may make you perfect for a job with a client who ex-

ports their products. Does that make all the other candidates "unqualified" because they spent that same year writing documentation in the Healthcare or Petroleum industries? Absolutely not. The next project may even prefer some experience in Healthcare. Does that make you unqualified, unskilled, or unprofessional? No way.

**Who else is going to understand?**

I am blessed to have many friends and colleagues in the STC community. Most of them are W-2 employees. While we face many of the same challenges as writers and project managers, a W-2 employee may not relate to the challenges of running a small business.

For example, I could say to practically any member of STC, either employee or independent contractor, "My SMEs are not responding, yet my client wants the project completed yesterday." Nearly every head would nod in agreement, and many people would murmur sympathetically. Several folks would offer practical advice.

However, imagine me saying to a group of W-2 employees, "I have 2 "major project" clients, and several "1 small project" clients. Major Client A pays my invoices almost always on time, and sometimes pays 1 day early. Unfortunately, Client A just sent all senior management and SMEs overseas

for a 5 month assignment. So I'll see no more work from them for a long while. Meanwhile, Major Client B keeps me busy on new work and edits, but is very slow to pay." I might get a sympathetic murmur, but I might also get several blank stares. Or worse, a comment like, "But you're still getting your salary, right?"

It's even possible that someone in the group has past experience as an independent contractor, and might say, "Oh! I sympathize! That's why I became a W-2 employee instead." Would I experience any of those comments as helpful? No, not really.

Bottom line, folks, we Independent Contractors need each other. As W-2 employees, we often had a team with peers and a mentor. Now, as Independents, we have to recruit to fill those roles. We can hire subcontractors to fill the peer role. (But then technically, we're the boss, not their peer.) Or, we can build those peer relationships in the CICSIG.

And the mentor role? We need someone who knows our craft and knows small business. Perhaps one person can't know both well enough to mentor, but again, the CICSIG is a great place to look.

In 2003, let's embrace the roles of colleague, peer, mentor, and encourager. No doubt, we'll want to be on the receiving end this year.

*It's even possible that someone in the group has past experience as an independent contractor, and might say, "Oh! I sympathize! That's why I became a W-2 employee instead." Would I experience any of those comments as helpful? No, not really.*

## Job Hunting in Difficult Times

by Thomas Lenzo  
Independent Consultant

*This is based on speeches I gave to local chapters of STC and ASTD. The contents apply to contractors, consultants, and permanent employees.*

**The bad news:** There is no one step or magic bullet that will get you a great project or job. Job hunting is a full time job that can be depressing and frustrating. It is a job for which most schools do not prepare us.

**The good news:** Job hunting is a skill you can learn. This time of economic difficulty will end. It is not a stigma to be out of a job. It is OK to tell people you are looking for work. It probably has happened to them and they might even be able to help you.

There are four aspects of job hunting: **Resume, Reputation, Rolodex, and Resources.** These are not steps. They are an inter-related continuum.

Job hunting is a very individual effort based on your skills, professional level, personality, and other factors (such as having dependants), so apply these contents as appropriate.

**RESUME:** there are two facets of your resume: Contents and Format.

**1. Contents:** "The skills and results you can confidently and concisely brag about."

All companies are in business to make a profit.

How does your resume show that you helped your clients make a profit?

Your resume contents must be quantitative and qualitative. For example: Cut call center training costs 25% while de-creasing call lengths 10%. Managed a tech writing team that helped client deliver a new product three months ahead of their competitors.

Read the help wanted ads to identify what you need to know to get hired. Evaluate where you are with your skills. Take classes to improve your skills. If necessary, do volunteer projects to apply those skills.

Take a class in how to write a resume. You should work hard, get critical feedback, and come out of the class with the tools to create a good resume. Of course you will customize that resume to the individual job or project you are seeking. But the class will teach you that.

Don't lie or exaggerate on your resume. Many people lie on their resume due to the tight job market. As a result, many companies are doing background checks on all applicants.

**2. Format:** There are three Formats for your resume, paper, verbal, and business card

a. The paper resume format: Is your resume scannable? Ask for the company's parameters such as key words. Will they accept an e-mail at-

tachment due to viruses and firewalls? Know how to save your resume in the file format the company requires, such as DOC, HTML, or PDF.

When sending your resume via e-mail, don't advertise others. Hotmail, Yahoo, and other free services put ads on the bottom of their e-mails. You're selling yourself, not them.

b. Your Elevator Pitch or self-introduction is a verbal resume format: Maximum of 16 seconds long; Showcases your uniqueness; Phrases your skills in terms of benefits to the listener that they understand, with no jargon.

c. Your Business card is a resume format. It tells people what you can do, and enables them to remember and contact you. You can have multiple cards with appropriate terms for different audiences.

### REPUTATION:

Who can swear publicly about you and about your work? Does your name come up as an expert or as someone who has the answer to questions? Be the answer to the question, "Who do you know that can...?"

At your clients, give more than you contracted for. At the professional level, be active: do the tasks that are needed for the organizations to function. In private, be active in your neighborhood, social, or religious organizations.

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*There is no one step or a magic bullet that will get you a great project or job. The good news is, job hunting is a skill you can learn.*

## Job Hunting in Difficult Times (cont.)

Be intelligent about making sure people know that you are good.

When I received the Torch and the Distinguished Service Awards from ASTD, I sent e-mails to recruiters and other professionals I know. When I was quoted by PC World on how to use e-mail, I sent copies to those people.

Finally, what is on the Internet about you? Type your name in a search engine and see what the world sees. Is your name associated with presentations, organizations, or boards?

### ROLODEX:

These are the contacts you maintain in your professional and personal spheres of interest; and the contacts that maintain you in their spheres of interest. Here the term Rolodex means your network and refers less to how they are stored such as software or paper Rolodex.

Networking is a learned and applied skill. Take a class or read a book. I recommend Dig Your Well Before You're Thirsty: The Only Networking Book You'll Ever Need by Harvey Mackay

It takes time to develop a network. It requires developing a connection or a rapport. It is embarrassing for me to meet someone for the first time and they give me their card and ask for referrals. That is not networking.

Networking goes both ways:

don't only network to ask. Network to share and to check in. When you're networking and get a lead, report back on how it went.

Relating job hunting to networking: do the people in your Rolodex/network know and understand what you do? Do the people in your Rolodex know you are looking? Finally, a Drake Beam Morin study, published in May 2001, said that in spite of the economy, 50% of professionals find work through networking.

### RESOURCES:

(in alphabetical order)  
Alumni offices; employment help and training.

Beware of any resource that guarantees you a job.

Chocolate: to reduce stress and depression.

Churches and other places of worship for employment help and for solace.

Dale Carnegie training and books.

Franklin-Covey materials and training; Franklin Planner and books: 7 Habits of Highly Effective People by Stephen Covey.

Gym: while you might be able to network at the gym, make fitness and stress reduction your priority.

Internal Revenue Service/IRS: publications regarding writing off job hunting expenses.

Libraries: sources of newspapers, magazines, books, and workshops.

Mastermind Group: a group of people who regularly get together to help each other succeed.

Meeting/networking kit: Sharpie marker pen so your name badge will stand out or bring a professionally made name badge; a case with your business cards; a couple of pens; a professional looking notepad; and a small, clean calendar. If you don't have a kit, create one.

Newspaper: read it to see what companies need and where they are going. Only 11% of Americans read a daily newspaper.

Toastmasters: if you want to sharpen your speech giving skills.

Web sites: PC Magazine (May 21, 2002) recognized [www.execglobalnet.com](http://www.execglobalnet.com) as one of the best executive job search sites.

What Color Is Your Parachute: the Job Hunter's Bible; published annually, [www.jobhuntersbible.com](http://www.jobhuntersbible.com) is the on-line supplement.

### About the Internet as a resource for job hunting:

In 2001, 6% management-level job hires occurred through Internet sites versus 61% hired through networking. Of nine big public companies that hired a total of 62,000 people in 2001, only 16% of those hires were via the corporate web sites. As for the job boards such as Monster, the percents of hires companies made via the biggest 4 boards total 2.4%. The bottom line: use the Internet to research companies and careers.



*Job hunting is a very individual effort based on your skills, professional level, personality, and other factors (such as having dependants), so apply these contents as appropriate.*

*All companies are in business to make a profit. How does your resume show that you helped your clients make a profit?*

### Job Hunting in Difficult Times (cont.)

**Other suggestions that don't fit above:**

There are many ways to look for a job: responding to ads, working with recruiters, cold calling, networking, speaking, writing, etc. It is important to not do too many of them as that will spread you too thin.

Read for enjoyment as well as for professional growth, and take those classes you don't have time for when you're putting in long work

weeks.

Update your computer equipment with patches and the latest versions of software. Back up your files and correctly label the disks.

Practice interviewing: work with others as interviews can be stressful.

Turn off your cell-phone and pager while in interviews. NEVER answer your cell phone during an interview.

It is OK to ask what the dress code is at a company or networking event to which you've never been.

Remember that there are others who are worse off than you. Share your technical skills, and your ordinary time and labor.

I hope you these resources and tools help you in your job hunt and in the development of your career.

### Independent Perspective Welcomes New Editor (cont.)

After working in technical communications for 10 years, she considers the 5 years with STC her most productive.

She served as a speaker at the 2001 Region 5 Conference in Houston. Her workshop, *The Newly-Promoted Team Leader: Shifting Your Focus from Products to People* apparently met the needs of many participants. She is amazed at the enthusiastic response she continues to receive. Robin wants to continue to deliver practical and encouraging coaching to STC members and clients.

Robin was appointed Interim Planning Director by the Houston Administrative Council in 2003. She looks forward to serving the Houston Administrative Council again this term.



Robin Jackson attended Azusa Pacific University with a major in English and Biology. She lives in Houston with her husband, Kevin and son, Austin. In her (very small) amount of free time she enjoys reading, entertaining, and singing.

Let's support Robin in her editing endeavor by submitting articles, suggestions, and help.  
-TB



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*The Independent Perspective*, published four times a year, is the official newsletter for the International Consulting & Independent Contractor Special Interest Group (CICSIG) within the Society for Technical Communication.

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#### **LETTERS TO THE EDITOR**

We encourage you to send comments, suggestions, and opinions regarding *The Independent Perspective* or the CIC SIG to the editor at [rjackson@ghostwriters-inc.com](mailto:rjackson@ghostwriters-inc.com).

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#### **SUBMISSION**

Articles and news items should be submitted to the editor by the first of the month prior to the month of publication. Please submit files in either text (RTF) or Word format to Robin Jackson at [rjackson@ghostwriters-inc.com](mailto:rjackson@ghostwriters-inc.com).