

The Independent Perspective

Newsletter of the Consulting and Independent Contracting Professional Interest Committee



38th International Technical Communication Conference



New York City
April 14-17, 1991

C&IC PIC Progression Announced for 38th ITCC

The 38th International Technical Communication Conference (ITCC) in New York will include the first C&IC PIC Progression. Conference progressions offer a series of roundtable presentations covering the latest information on an area of technical communications.

The big news for the C&IC PIC is that the 38th ITCC will present an entire progression dedicated to the concerns

of consultants and independent contractors. The progression will address a variety of independent-employment topics but needs your help and experience to succeed. If you are willing to lead a roundtable discussion and give a five minute presentation followed by a question-and-answer session, please contact: Christopher Juillet, 313-449-0310 (days).



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Tough Times call for Total Package

by Michelle Hutchinson

In tough economic times, many technical communicators have difficulty finding jobs--you may find yourself in this position. Here are some helpful tips from the Toronto Chapter's October meeting of their Contract and Consulting Special Interest Group.

Tap the Hidden Market

Although our chapter's Job Bank is still an excellent source, you will also find that the contacts you make from STC are at least as valuable. As most of you know who have looked for jobs, it's the hidden market that is so important to tap.

So, tell your friends and previous work associates what you are doing. Join other associations and an area of your specialty (desktop publishing, a computer group, a medical association, etc.).

Some of your contacts will surprise you as have mine! My bank manager invited me to a business symposium in the City of Scarborough where I met many small to medium size companies who could benefit from my services. Before this, I never considered my bank manager as a source of leads.

Tell the Truth

One point the SIG all agreed on was that a resume should be realistic and believable and not fantastic. Remember, the astute interviewer will check references that you provide as well as with their own contacts within the companies you list.

But, it's not enough any more to have a good resume. You must have a total package.

Dress to Fit In

For any interview you must be professionally attired from head to toe--including clean hair and shiny shoes. It is surprising how many people still overlook this basic job search requirement.

Dress for the interview like you will fit in if you get the job. In a downtown office, a suit is still your best bet for the first interview. If you know that you are going to a lab or manufacturing environment, a more casual look may be in order. The important thing to remember is that you must have a reason to select the clothes you wear to the interview. As the saying goes, "you only have one chance to make a good first impression."

Portfolios That Enhance

Present your work in a way that best shows off your talents. Special portfolios can be purchased from any office supplies or art store to enhance the look of your newsletters, brochures, or fact sheets. For manuals, why not include before and after pages and present the binders separately.

Top Notch Proposals

To win those choice assignments you will need a topnotch proposal. Address the benefits your client can expect of quality documentation. A good way to get this information is to call researchers and to read journals from relevant associations such as IEEE, STC and Human Factors. Identify the specific

needs that your product/service will address. Some companies may receive numerous support calls or, their system may be complex and require specific trouble shooting expertise. Whatever their requirements, be sure to highlight how your documentation will help.

A positive attitude, a professional portfolio, and a topnotch proposal will go a long way to beating those recessionary blues!

Michelle Hutchinson is a senior member of STC and a member of the Toronto Chapter. She has had her own consulting company, Hutchinson Communications Ltd., for over two years.

Help Wanted

The Independent Perspective needs your help. If you love to do newsletter layout (IBM-compatible/Ventura Publisher), if you have that intuitive sense of how much text will fit where, please apply. Or, if you get special pleasure from copy editing, if you always know where that comma belongs, please apply.

The pay is great: personal satisfaction. The fringe benefits are unbeatable: the IP will improve noticeably and you will receive the editor's undying gratitude. Please write or call: Charley McWha, 27 Kings Rd., Morgantown, WV 26505, 304-291-0878.

Perspectives

by Christopher Juillet
C&IC PIC Manager

As I write this, young men and women are fighting, or preparing to fight, half a world away. Some, possibly many, will die in the weeks and months that lay ahead. Not many of us do not have someone--parent, child, cousin, friend--who is part of this newest war. A part of each of us is there, with them, as they do their jobs in this nasty piece of business.

Two of our colleagues are also in the thick of it, or at least they were when I last heard from them at Christmas. At that time (and, I assume, still), C&IC PIC members Lee and Pat Griffith were on assignment for Aramco in Dhahran, Saudi Arabia. I thought of them as I watched CNN reporters rush to the

rooftops to watch the most recent Iraqi missile attack on that city.

The letter they sent was fascinating. While too long and, in some ways, too personal to be printed here, it tells of the tension in the air as Iraq and the Allies moved steadily toward open warfare. Dated last December, they tell of the weather ("balmy and nice") and of watching the "best international air show in the world" as F15 jets prepare for what we now know has come to pass. It's as if they are trying to make the best of the worst possible situation in which they could find themselves.

I do not know if Pat and Lee are still overseas. I hope that they are not, yet fear that they are. I plan to write to them tomorrow morning, to tell them that we here in relative safety still think of them and pray for them. I am sure they would like to hear from others in our group.

Their address is:

Pat and Lee Griffith
c/o Saudi Aramco
Dhahran 31311
Saudi Arabia

I hope that you, too, will write to Pat and Lee, even if you send nothing more than a postcard, just a "Hello" from home. I hope even more that your card comes back to you marked "Return to sender, addressee has returned to the world."

Mostly, I hope that all who read this who have loved ones in the Gulf conflict see the speedy return of their own, happy, healthy and whole.

From the Editor

Our last issue was delayed due to a series of misunderstandings between the Post Office and me. Please accept my apology. I sincerely hope I have now ironed out the difficulties and that this issue will appear in your mailbox when it should!

In the last issue, I introduced three columns. SIG Focus continues in this issue, but the other two do not. I hope the lack of enthusiasm for AC Forum and for Plans and Schemes has more to do with the delayed deliveries than with the columns' content. I'm keeping both ideas on the back burner and will gladly revive them if I receive contributions.

Lastly, I have a new address. The IP's address remains the same, but if you want to contact me personally, please phone, or write to me at 27 Kings Rd., Morgantown, WV 26505.

Charley McWha
304-291-0878

The Independent Perspective is published quarterly by the Consulting and Independent Contracting Professional Interest Committee (C&IC PIC) of the Society for Technical Communication.

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Christopher Juillet

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Do you have a new address or telephone number? Let us know by sending it to:

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Ann Arbor, MI 48106

SIG Focus

Pittsburgh, Pa Chapter Launches Independent Consultants' PIC

Well, we did it! After discussing the idea with our Executive Committee and holding two planning meetings with interested members from our Chapter, we, in Pittsburgh, will hold our first "bona fide" Independent Consultants' PIC meeting on January 30, 1991. How did the idea begin to manifest, and what went into the planning?

The Idea Evolves

I, for one, was tired of feeling cut off from other tech writers. After over ten years of freelancing, I still felt at times as though I were on my own little island often wondering: "Now what do I do? Is this the way to do this or that? Is what I'm experiencing 'normal,' or is there something wrong with my approach?" But the idea to start a PIC still didn't dawn on me until three things happened. Chris Juillet started the C&IC PIC, and I joined; I noticed that another professional society had special interest groups on the local level; I quit feeling unique and decided there were probably other independents in our Chapter who felt as I did. So I brought the idea to John Clark, PA-Area Coordinator for C&IC PIC, who said, essentially, "run with it!"

The first step was to find out how many would be interested in being active in such a committee. We announced at our regular September meeting that we were considering an independent consultants' PIC and asked those who wanted to join to sign the sheet for that purpose. The response was encouraging: roughly fifteen signed up. Since the interest was

obviously there, the key, then, became to move as quickly as possible while enthusiasm remained high.

The Planning Phase Begins and Ends

Within four weeks, we held our first planning meeting. I had talked to Chris Juillet who assured me there was little precedent to go on: no rigid policies and procedures except for obvious ones such as, one must not profit materially from doing work for the committee. I was relieved to hear this, since it gave us the freedom to make this committee truly our own. With this sense of freedom, we went into the meeting with five goals in mind:

1. To let the group dynamics, not preconceived ideas and wooden procedures, determine the flow.
2. To let everyone be involved, not only in the planning, but in subsequent activities by giving each some responsibility.
3. To avoid getting bogged down with trivia, such as place and time of meetings, statements of committee philosophy, or the "what ifs" (always good for another 10 or so planning sessions).
4. To establish a precedent of going with the flow, that is, of being attuned to approaching changes and not resisting, but meeting them with fresh, creative ideas and action.
5. To ensure this committee would meet the needs of its members and, in the process, be a driving force in

their carving out successful, prosperous careers.

We chose, I believe, the most efficient way to deal with issues surrounding the mechanics of future meetings. We handed out a preference questionnaire which covered everything from the time to the type of meetings (speaker, discussion, etc.) preferred. Everyone who attended completed the questionnaire, and we chose an ad hoc committee of four to meet, tally the responses, and come up with recommendations at the following meeting.

Also on this questionnaire were two items unrelated to mechanical issues: "Topics of Interest to You," and "Reasons for Wanting a PIC." Together, they formed the backbone of our discussion and two of the ingredients of the adhesive for our group: common interests and goals.

Coming up with topics was no problem at all. There is so much most of us want and need to know that, in no time, we had an initial list of close to forty. The topics cover marketing, business issues, continuing professional development, and more. Many of them justify ongoing discussion.

As to reasons for wanting a PIC, several exciting concepts emerged from our discussion. Yes, we do want the group to function as a support group; yes, we do want it to function as a forum for sharpening our technical and business savvy and skills; and we want it to function as a marketing and resource network. But even more exciting, at least to me, was that we can do things as a

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group which we cannot do as well or as economically on our own.

What things?: group marketing, group purchasing at a discount, banding together to bid on a major project. Who knows what other opportunities may present themselves? Who knows who in our group might come up with a creative idea for meeting a new challenge in the marketplace? All these things are made possible in a group--if there is trust.

Trust among members is the third and most essential ingredient in the adhesive which binds a group. As one member pointed out, you cannot function as a healthy organization without it. "How many of us," he asked, "have said we were doing great when we were really worried about how to pay next month's bills?" And I thought about the times I'd done that, plus a few other things I'd rather not mention, merely because I feared instead of trusted. We spent a good part of our first meeting discussing trust and some of the reasons we found that difficult.

Trust cannot be forced. That's why we intend to create an atmosphere within our group which is nonjudgmental and noncompetitive, one which is safe and enables us to risk openly sharing our feelings, ideas, experiences, and knowledge. How will we do this? By example: by each one of us, in his or her own time and way, taking that risk!

Second Planning Meeting

At the second planning meeting, we voted on the ad hoc committee's recommendations concerning meeting mechanics. We stressed that no decision made that night was "written in cement"

and that our policy for all things is: if it works, fine; if it doesn't, change it.

Now I've got to recant and say there are two very important exceptions to the above. The first is, that to be a member of the group, one must also be a member of *STC*. The second is, that although we may change our name, we will always use the acronym, *PIC*, because it has the word, "committee". Both policies underline the fact that we are an integral part of our international and local organizations, and this must be understood by all.

We plan to meet once a month through May, alternating between Tuesday and Wednesday nights. Meetings will have either discussion or speaker/discussion format and will be held at Carnegie Mellon University where we regularly meet (our Chapter will cover the room cost). A different member from our group will co-chair each month and will select the topic and the type of meeting, arrange for a speaker (if needed), and preside over the discussion.

The final decision for the evening was to appoint our acting chairperson and recording secretary as our official officers and ad hoc committee members to the Steering Committee.

Planning is ended, at least for now. Some things remain to be decided. Others which we have not anticipated will inevitably crop up. However, our experience has given us the confidence that we will have no problem addressing and resolving them, one issue at a time.

Looking Ahead

The speaker for our first meeting is Roger Kirk, Senior Associate with the Kovac Group, Inc., a national executive

search firm serving the commercial real estate sector. His presentation, "The 1990s: Decade of the Consultant," will cover cross-industry trends, reasons firms hire consultants versus employees, formulas for setting consulting rates, networking techniques specifically for the consultant, and that all important factor--trust. Mr. Kirk agrees with many other authorities that there is and will continue to be an enormous growth in consulting opportunities. So, an aside to Chris Juillet: The statement you saw and paraphrased in October's *The Independent Perspective*, that "independent consulting could well be the growth career of the 1990s," is probably right on target!

It's been tremendously satisfying having a key role in forming Pittsburgh's Independent Consultants' *PIC*. I look forward with enthusiasm to the opportunities unfolding for those of us who are independents. It won't be all smooth sailing, but the rewards could be greater than most of us imagine. Really, it does feel good to be at the right place at the right time!

Evelyn True is a Senior Member who joined the Pittsburgh Chapter of *STC* in 1972. She turned to consulting in 1976, when the Westinghouse division, where she was Senior Technical Writer in charge of the Publications Department, was phased out. Ms. True has her own firm, True Writing Services, specializing in proposal, report, and manual preparation for hi-tech and environmental clients. She has held offices in her local Chapter and has won several awards from *STC* and other organizations for her manuals and reports.

Our Next Speaker . . .

by Joan Regen

Have you ever been asked to prepare a speech for a colleague only to discover that you would be addressing the audience? Speech preparation and presentation skills can be difficult or easy. I know because after trying to absorb the helpful hints and guidelines in at least half a dozen *how to deliver a speech like a pro* books, I was ready to cancel my own presentation. Then, I remembered what a communications professor once told me: "Speak on the topic, answer your audience's questions, thank them for inviting you, and sit down." I have added a few tips that I hope will make speech writing and presentation easier and more enjoyable for you.

Preparation

Do your homework. Find out what your audience needs to know so that you do not waste anyone's time. You owe your

audience quality, whether you are a volunteer or a paid speaker.

Obtain previous speeches on your subject so that you do not repeat what they have heard already.

Find out what your audience should not be told so that you do not discuss sensitive or confidential issues.

Verify your facts, especially dates and expenditures.

Put notes on small index cards. They are very convenient and they reduce paper shuffle.

Practice! If you cannot find a practice audience, stand in front of a mirror and use a tape recorder. Pay attention to how you look and to how you sound.

Presentation

Go to the presentation location before you are to speak. Be sure there is a coat rack, a table for handouts, sufficient chairs for the audience, a dais for your

notes, and a working microphone. Test all needed audio/visual equipment.

Distribute handouts at the end of your presentation. Ask for business cards from those who must leave early so that you can send the handouts. This reduces confusion during your presentation.

Stand up straight. Do not grasp the podium as though you were going to fall. Put your notes on the paper rest and glance down only to follow your outline.

Speak in an even tone so that everyone can understand you. Have a glass of water nearby to avoid a dry throat.

Give your entire presentation before you take questions from the audience.



Joan Regen holds an M.S. degree in Financial, Technical and Medical Journalism. She has written for the engineering, computer, technical medical, management, and architectural industries.
