

The Independent Perspective

Newsletter of the Consulting and Independent Contracting Professional Interest Committee



Join Us On CompuServe!

-- Electronic Communication Comes to C&IC PIC

Scenario One

You've spent hours putting together a user guide. Your client wants laser page proofs at 8am tomorrow morning. It's 3pm and your software suddenly starts spitting out garbage. What do you do?

Scenario Two

Your client (a major player in the health care field) asks you to summarize (for an enormous sum of money) what has appeared in print about the health care industry in the last year. You're dreading spending hours in the library looking over a multitude of publications. Worse, the library probably doesn't have everything you need. What do you do?

Scenario Three

A hot new prospect asks you to bid on a documentation project that could turn into an on-going, prosperous relationship. You want your bid to be perfect. Should you quote an hourly rate, a fixed amount, or some other way? What rates are others using for similar work? How should you present the bid to maximize your chances? What should you do, and not do, to ensure the client comes back?

Answer: You can join your C&IC PIC colleagues on the CompuServe Information Service and use the service's many resources for help with these--and other--professional issues you may face!

C&IC PIC on CompuServe

As of April 15, the C&IC PIC is sponsoring a section on CompuServe. Located in the Working from Home forum, the Independent Writers section is available to PIC members, STC members, and all CompuServe users. The section enables you to communicate with colleagues around the country and around the world, creating a dynamic, global writing community and support network.

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The Call for Papers has gone out for the STC's 39th Annual Conference (Atlanta, GA; May 10-13, 1992). This is a great opportunity for C&IC PIC members to share their specialized knowledge in a non-threatening environment. Please consider proposing a presentation.

STC's 39th Annual Conference offers you the opportunity to propose presentations on subjects in any of the six conference stems (topic areas): Chapter Development; Education, Training and Professional Development; Management; Research and Technology; Visual Communication; and Writing and Editing.

The deadline for submissions is August 1, 1991. For more information, contact the Society office (703) 522-4114, or contact the 1992 Program Manager Constance L. Kiernan, STSC, Inc., 2115 East Jefferson Street, Rockville, MD 20852, (301) 984-5427.



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from CompuServe, page 1.

Whether the section works is up to each and every one of us. Fire up those modems and share your knowledge and insights with other members, exchange ideas, trade horror stories, and learn something new. CompuServe has set a 90-day period for us to demonstrate, by our use of the section, that we have enough interest in our group to support the section. By signing up today and using the section, you can ensure this valuable resource remains available for your use.

Mission

Our mission for electronic communication in the C&IC PIC is to serve as a focal point for people involved or interested in writing on a consulting or independent basis.

Goals

Our goals for the section include:

- Assisting and encouraging information exchange about the writing profession and conducting business as self-employed consultants or independent contractors.
- Providing an international networking and support forum.
- Promoting the pursuit of business as self-employed consultants or independent contractors in the writing field.
- Providing a quick and efficient means for distributing and exchanging information.
- Serving as a contact point for information about the Society for Technical Communication and the Consulting and Independent Contracting Professional Interest Committee.

Activities

We have a wide variety of activities planned for the Independent Writers section. You can participate in daily, on-going, user-guided discussions about current technical and non-technical writing trends and issues, business issues, and anything of import to independent writers. Second, you can

join us for periodic on-line seminars discussing independent employment issues and techniques and technical writing issues, strategies, and problems. Finally, you'll have access to information important to independent writers, including STC brochures and contact information (both local and national), C&IC PIC brochures and contact information, selected STC and PIC newsletter items, and more!

Solutions

So how can CompuServe solve the problems in the scenarios above? You could get some quick help from software manufacturers when you run into software problems. You could research health care topics on one of the over-850 on-line databases (see the separate story for more information about the resources available on CompuServe). And you could talk with and get free advice from other independent consultants and contractors at an instant's notice.

Help Wanted

Are you interested in helping out with this section? Do you have ideas for on-line seminars or some other use for the section? Please contact the Electronic Communications coordinator, Rob Reynolds, at (313) 486-1260, (313) 486-8786 fax, or 76216,2312 on CompuServe. You can also contact C&IC PIC manager Christopher Juillet at (313)449-0310 or on CompuServe in the Independent Writers section.

CompuServe Costs

For the benefits you'll receive, CompuServe actually costs very little. The sign-up cost is \$25, and you'll receive \$15 worth of connect time to try out the service. Connect time charges run \$12.95 per hour, with access to some special areas and databases extra.

For only \$10 or \$15 a month, maybe less, you'll get access to over 550,000 people, many of them peers in the technical communication profession, from around the country, and beyond. You may find

see CompuServe, page 3.

New Organization Supports Consultants

by Dave Young

There's a new organization in Rochester, New York, that may be of interest to STC's independent contractors and consultants. It's called Rochester Professional Consultants Network (RPCN).

Formed in 1990, RPCN is comprised of both practicing consultants (including freelancers and contract workers) and explorers (those exploring the possibility of becoming consultants). Although RPCN is very young (it will complete its first year on July 1, 1991) it already has 95 members (April 1991) and is growing rapidly.

RPCN is an all-volunteer organization with members from diverse backgrounds and expertise. Their bond is derived from "consulting," not "expertise." That is, they're all promoting their own businesses, but they're not all selling the same product.

Consequently, there is open networking about work opportunities and a great deal of sharing of information among members. Occasionally members team up to solve a client's problems, and sometimes members hire other members to help their own businesses.

One of the benefits of membership in RPCN is inclusion in their *RPCN Directory of Members & Services*. Each regular member may have a full page in this directory to describe his or her business. The directory is distributed free to businesses that hire consultants.

The Rochester Chapter has a New Business Committee that contacts selected businesses and personally delivers a copy of the directory to the person responsible for hiring consultants. The first copy is free; a low-cost subscription defrays the cost of updates at 6-month intervals. Though the directory is compiled and distributed by RPCN, clients are urged to contact and negotiate with the

see New Organization, page 6.

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

C&IC PIC
Post Box 1725
Ann Arbor, MI 48106

C&IC PIC Membership List Growing

Rob Reynolds, C&IC PIC Membership Coordinator, reports that the PIC's membership continues to grow steadily. "We have more than doubled our membership in the last year," Reynolds said. "We were at about 300 members last spring, and this spring we have about 750 members."

The membership team is in the process of a mail campaign to STC members who expressed interest in consulting and independent contracting on their STC applications. Approximately 2500 members expressed such interest.

"We have mailed notices to STC members on the East coast and received a tremendous response," Reynolds said. "We mailed out about 500 invitations and so far have received about 150 membership requests." Reynolds expects the membership committee to continue mailing invitations in small groups over the next several months.

C&IC PIC Manager, Christopher Juillet has been pleased with membership growth over the past year and expects membership to continue to grow through the end of the year. "We have a large group of potential members out there that we're just beginning to tap into," Juillet said. "They seem anxious to join once they hear about the PIC and the benefits of PIC membership."

Any PIC members who know of STC members who might be interested in PIC membership are encouraged to provide addresses to the membership committee at P. O. Box 1725, Ann Arbor, MI 48106.

From the Editor

Thank you to the many people who answered my ad for help with the IP! I received offers from about five times as many people as we currently need. Here's fair warning to the rest of you: I expect the IP to continue growing. I will be keeping all of your names for the future. It's great to see the enthusiasm for the IP.

Next, let me introduce the three people who will be helping on a regular basis: Kevin Sunderman as Copy Editor (Pittsburgh, PA), Susan Witter as Layout Designer (East Greenbush, NY), and Hugh Templeton as Production Coordinator (Detroit, MI). Welcome!

Charley McWha
304-291-0878

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Editor - Charley McWha
Copy Editor - Kevin Sunderman
Layout Designer - Susan Witter
Production Coordinator - Hugh Templeton

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Summer issue--June 30
Fall issue--September 30

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from CompuServe, page 2.

CompuServe easier to use and more valuable than you ever imagined.

Security

Accessing CompuServe will not put your computer, software, or data in jeopardy. The computer viruses you've probably heard about come only from downloading infected software or data files. Using the Independent Writers section involves reading messages and participating in conferences--all activities that keep your computer safe from virus infection. Your computer and its data remain as safe as ever.

What is CompuServe All About?

CompuServe is serving as C&IC PIC's electronic communication network because of the many resources it offers us. Besides becoming part of an established community of writers, you'll get access to almost immediate assistance from hardware and software manufacturers, a vast on-line publications library, and be able to exchange business and professional information with peers--STC members and non-STC members--around the globe.

The CompuServe Information Service is divided into over 2300 different forums, each devoted to a particular subject. Current forums include such topics as aviation, IBM software, Macintosh software, humor, rock music, auto racing, science fiction, and working from home (where the Independent Writers section is located).

Each forum is divided into three parts: a message board, libraries, and conference areas. The message boards and libraries are divided into separate sections that further narrow the scope of the forum. For example, the Working from Home forum has sections for new and general info, business/tax help, information professionals, getting business, publishing/DTP, and, now, our section for independent writers, to name just a few.

The message board lets you follow and participate in public conversations with fellow users. Each section of the message board usually has a corresponding library where reference materials can be stored for retrieval by users. The conference areas let you chat with other forum users on a real-time basis and attend on-line conferences and seminars.

The Working from Home forum was started in 1983. It is administered by Paul and Sarah Edwards, authors of *Working from Home: Everything You Need to Know about Living and Working under the Same Roof*. They co-host a national radio show on the Business Radio network called *Home Office* and are regular columnists for *Home Office Computing* magazine.

CompuServe is a vast storehouse of information. While we can't mention all of the resources in this article, the following list shows some of the highlights.

Computer Hardware and Software Forums

A source for tens of thousands of valuable public domain programs. You can also receive expert, direct support from such software manufacturers as Borland, Lotus, Microsoft, Aldus, Adobe, Ventura Software, 3Com, Acius, Ashton-Tate, Claris, Novell, Oracle, Symantec, WordPerfect, and many others.

Over 2300 Special Interest Forums

Attend on-line conferences (many with distinguished guest speakers), exchange information, and benefit from the expertise and enthusiasm of others who share a common interest.

Information Exchange

Over 760,000 users across the world, including many European countries and Japan. You can exchange electronic mail (with links to MCI Mail, fax, Telex, and Internet); hard copy delivery also available 24 hours a day, regardless of distance or time zone, almost instantaneously. CompuServe boasts the largest group of potential recipients of any electronic mail system in the world.

Reference Libraries

Over 850 bibliographic and full-text databases covering subjects ranging from business and technology to humanities and social science. Grolier's Academic American Encyclopedia (updated four times a year). Computer Database Plus, a comprehensive collection of computer-related article summaries and full text from more than 130 leading computer publications. Computer Directory, a collection of more than 55,000 listings of computer and communications products and their manufacturers. Database Plus, a collection of more than 119,000 full-text

articles from more than 100 general interest magazines. Phone*File, a searchable database containing the names, addresses, and phone numbers of more than 80 million U.S. households. And many, many more!

And More!

Airline reservations systems. Executive Service Option, which includes enhanced business data for the executive user; comprehensive financial information, including stock quotes and commodity information, major market and industry indices, historical market information, and national and international business news wires.

On-line brokerage. Electronic Mall, a shop at home service with over 100 merchants--order software, hardware, reference books, and office supplies on-line and, many times, at a discount. Play interactive on-line games. Use Consumer Reports articles to investigate major purchases.



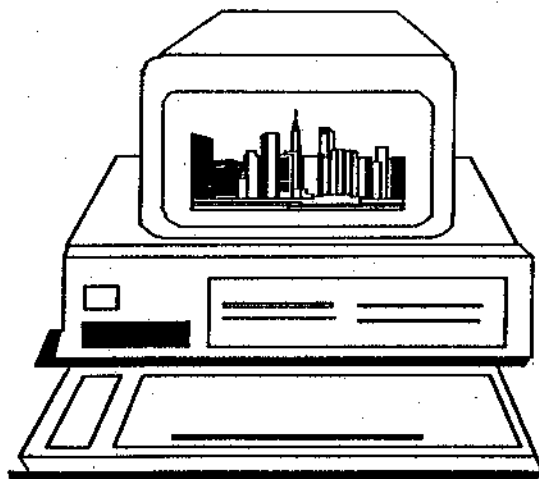
Help Wanted

The C&IC PIC needs your help. If you're a dedicated, driven professional who can do good work fast, for free and have a great time doing it, consider signing on as the PIC's Publicity Manager.

Responsibilities include publicizing PIC activities within STC by writing and issuing press releases to STC chapters. This should be a fairly light duty position.

For more information or to offer your much needed talents, contact Christopher Juillet at 313-449-0310.





Special Software Can Make Using CompuServe Easy

If you've never used an on-line information service before, it may be easier than you think. All you really need is telecommunications software and a modem. But you might find that the software packages below, for both the Macintosh and IBM-compatible platforms, make using CompuServe a breeze.

These packages streamline your use of CompuServe in two ways: by providing a graphical interface with windows and pull-down menus, and by letting you perform many tasks while you are off-line.

In the past, using information services may have been daunting to many people because of command-line interfaces and hard-to-master, and sometimes obscure, commands. With this software, CompuServe is no more difficult to use than any other Microsoft Windows-based or Macintosh software. This software makes the most of windows and pull-down menus to provide an easy-to-use interface.

These packages can also save you time and money by letting you compose and read messages and mark messages and files for retrieval while you are off-line. The software then automatically connects to CompuServe, performs the tasks, and disconnects. So you could set the software up to retrieve a summary of the messages in the Independent Writers section and log off. You would then mark the messages you want to read and have the software automatically retrieve them for you. It's as simple as that!

By working off-line to find and mark the information you want, you save valuable on-line time and charges. In one session, you can visit many different areas and get the information you need in just a few minutes--all without touching the keyboard while you're on-line.

see Special Software, page 6.

New York's Online Hit Parade

by Patricia Dorazio

Each International Technical Communication Conference (ITCC) offers participants exciting presentations, roundtable progressions, workshops, exposure to various exhibits, and social hours. However, this year's 38th ITCC, recently held in New York City, gave participants a chance to browse through a host of electronic documents, presentations, and training packages, all included in the Online Hit Parade (OHP). The OHP was presented on 14 different computers and applications, including OS/2, DOS, Macintosh, RISC 6000, UNIX, and VAX.

The OHP was an example of hypertext at its best. ITCC participants were given a chance to study, examine, play with, and enjoy entries from the following categories:

- Demo/Presentations
- Training
- Help
- Document
- Manual

Once participants found an entry related to their areas of expertise or interest, they were allowed total freedom to fully explore and learn about that topic.

Each application offered instruction sheets to new users. And after all, most of us are novices when it comes to hypertext presentation formats--but that did not stop any of us from enjoying ourselves and keeping the OHP occupied a good deal of the time. If, however, novices did get "lost in hyperspace" or just plain "stuck," an OHP attendant was readily available to assist. And when all else failed, the attendant rebooted the system. Sound like a typical new user reaction?

For those of us who attended the 38th ITCC, the OHP gave us a rare chance to see what the "hype" in hypertext is all about. It certainly signaled a new era in technical communication.



Pat Dorazio is Director of Technical Communication at SUNY Institute of Technology at Utica/Rome, NY. She also has her own consulting company, PATent Alternative, specializing in online information and hypertext design. She was an information developer with IBM, where she was responsible for designing online help facilities.

from *Special Software*, page 5.

CompuServe Information Manager (CIM)

-- for IBM-compatible and Macintosh Computers

CIM is credited as being developed with new users in mind. An integrated address book lets you store the names and IDs of people you interact with frequently. CIM costs approximately \$25 and includes a \$15 usage credit. Check your local or mail order software supplier.

CompuServe Navigator

-- for Macintosh Computers

Navigator features the familiar Macintosh interface, using dialogue boxes, pull-down menus, and icons. Navigator is Multifinder compatible so you can run it in the background while working on another application in the foreground. An integrated address book lets you store the names and IDs of people you interact with frequently. Navigator costs approximately \$50 and includes a \$15 usage credit. Again, check your local or mail order software supplier.

from *New Organization*, page 2.

consultants directly. RPCN is not a job placement service.

The group meets twice a month for internally focused discussions. These are considered "support" or "education" meetings. Some of these meetings are presented by the members themselves and some by outside experts. Speakers' topics have ranged from "How I Got Started" to "Dealing With Cold Calls" and (by a consulting psychologist) "The Consulting Personality."

Approximately six times a year the group holds dinner meetings. These have an external focus and are similar in format to our STC chapter's monthly meetings. The speaker is generally someone from a business which hires consultants, and the meeting provides an opportunity to get to know the speaker and his or her organization better.

For example, the speaker at the September meeting was the Manager of Business Development for the City of Rochester. He described how the City of Rochester hires and uses consultants and explained whom to contact to get started working with the city. We've also had speakers from Kodak and Xerox.

Dave Young, RPCN's Chairman of Publications, would like to hear from any other independent consulting organizations to exchange ideas for meetings, newsletters, newsletter articles, etc. We're curious how you started your organization, and would like to hear from others who might like to start their own consulting organizations or establish chapters of RPCN in their own cities.

For more information, contact: Rochester Professional Consultants Network, P.O. Box 18086, Rochester, NY 14618. Please mention *The Independent Perspective*.

Dave Young is a senior member of STC and is active in the Rochester, NY Chapter. He recently formed his own consulting practice after accepting an early retirement offer from Kodak where he had been an industrial photographer, industrial trainer, and technical-publications writer for 27 years.