

The Independent Perspective

Newsletter of the Consulting and Independent Contracting Professional Interest Committee

STC Society for technical communication

A True Focus at the Second Annual Consulting and Independent Contracting Conference

A small but intense group of people from all over the country attended this year's C&IC PIC conference day. The conference was held in late October, in Oak Ridge, Tennessee. All participants were seasoned consultants/contractors, and they cut right to the heart of several issues.

Fred O'Hara discussed the importance of creating and contributing to a retirement plan—so easy to shelve when business and immediate living expenses seem to be more pressing. He discussed three basic types of plans—Keogh, SEP, and IRA.

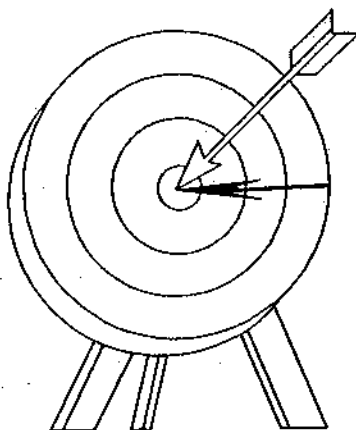
Tallin Ensley, in her talk entitled "Get a Life!" spoke on the conflicting roles in the life of an independent. The general consensus: know what your roles are, accept that one may need to take precedence at a given time, but don't forget the other roles. Make a decision to bring "latent" roles back into focus when needed.

Joyce Woods gave sound advice on creating a business image. She included aspects as diverse as how you dress, your letterhead and advertising material, written material in general, and dinner etiquette (including who pays!).

Finally, Judy Glick-Smith delved into a topic close to all of our hearts: staying motivated. She talked about developing a

business plan, and widened the scope so that it became a life plan.

The group did a lot of brainstorming during the sessions, and participation was rampant. We plan to continue the sub-conference next year, of course for the full gamut of people interested in independent work: those thinking about it, those starting out, and those who have tested the waters and found them appealing. If you need a means to focus your energies and lift your spirits, look for the announcement next year!



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New Marketing Booklet

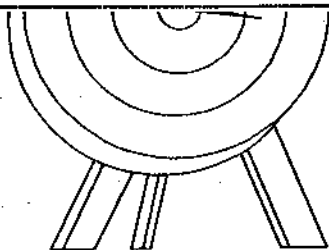
STC is offering a new publication of special interest to C&IC PIC members: *Marketing Yourself as an Independently Employed Professional*. This booklet covers everything from finding and tracking leads to what to do once you've gotten an appointment.

Marketing Yourself... was edited by our own Therese M. Ensley, C&IC PIC Conference Coordinator. It's the result of a panel discussion at the 1989 ITCC featuring six noted independent consultants discussing related but distinct topics. Chapter titles include: "Getting Yourself on Paper," "Finding and Tracking Leads," "Cold Calling," "The Corporate Consultant," "Qualifying Prospects," "Making Your Current Client Your Next Client," and "The Appointment."

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SIG Focus: Pittsburgh

Impressions by Alma Bucher

It's scary to leave a full-time job and become a "consultant". No matter how frustrating or annoying the work may be, a regular job is always there, along with a paycheck. And there are the people we work with, sometimes helpful, sometimes exasperating, but at least available when we need to confer or complain. As an independent, I have so many questions and so few people to supply answers. The Independent Consultants' Special Interest Group (IC SIG) of Pittsburgh STC has helped to answer the questions and to furnish support.

One pleasant surprise (to me, perhaps not to others more experienced) has been the willingness of professionals in other fields

From a Tax Accountant:

- Business expenses apply to anything that generates business, including over-night lodging and mileage.
- Meals are deductible only if at least one other person is present and you pay the entire tab.
- It's easier to say you're independent if you don't work on-site for the company, but if you must work on-site, mileage to and from the company is deductible. (This surprised me.)
- To make deductions easy and accurate, have a separate credit card for business expenses; keep a log

If you're discouraged about your progress as an independent, joining the C&IC PIC and an independent consultants' special interest group can help you through the barren times.

to take the time to speak to our group. Is it simply good public relations for them to spend time with us (without pay), is it professional courtesy, or is it an indication of the respect they have for STC? It may well be a mixture of all these.

So what are some of the answers and ideas we've gained from our speakers?

From a Marketing Supervisor:

- Find out who is in charge of choosing the writer/editor.
- Try to give the presentation or sample in person.
- Letters should be mailed to arrive mid-week.
- A follow-up call should be made ten to twelve days after the letter is sent.

(Some of these suggestions seem obvious, but it wouldn't have occurred to me that mid-week is the best time for a contact letter to arrive.)

of mileage; keep receipts for postage, entertainment; have a separate bank account for business expenses.

- In order to be deductible, a business phone must be specified as "business" in the white pages listing.

And...

From a designer: colors give messages. For example, blue and grey look professional.

From a headhunter: The '90s will be the decade of the independent consultant, with more and more demand for our services. (Reassuring!)

For a neophyte such as me, the supportive atmosphere of the PIC has been heartening. When I commented that non-profit agencies were much more enthusiastic about my volunteer work than businesses were about paying me, I was assured that volunteer writing was a valuable step in developing a portfolio. When a company expressed interest in my work but didn't contact me again, even to

say they didn't want me, I heard about similar experiences from other members of the group. Any question, even any complaint, has been received empathetically. If you're discouraged about your progress as an independent, joining the C&IC PIC and an independent consultants' special interest group can help you through the barren times.

There have been some projects that are of practical help. For example, each of us has a directory listing hardware and software used by members. If we have questions about the capabilities or intricacies of a particular computer or program, we know who can help.

The main topic of our group discussions has been marketing. Those members who have had success with a particular strategy have shared their ideas; we have also been open about problems and frustrations. Recently, several of us have decided that we would like to get together to develop a marketing brochure. This will not be an activity of the SIG, but a cooperative effort of people who feel able to work together as a result of our experience in the group. As these plans have progressed, we have had advice and input from informed members of the STC, as well as from the more experienced members of our interest group.

We hope that the speaker who told us that we're into the decade of the consultant was right; we hope that predictions of the end of the recession are accurate; we hope that our marketing will be a smashing success. One thing we're sure of is that we're glad to be part of an interest group where independent writers and editors can exchange ideas and offer support.



After a career of teaching high school English and writing for a women's clinic, Alma Bucher became an independent technical writer in 1990. She has been a member of STC, the C&IC PIC, and the Pittsburgh Chapter's IC SIG for one year.

Perspectives

by Christopher Juillet
C&IC PIC Manager

With this issue of *The Independent Perspective*, we achieve a milestone of sorts, entering our third year of continuous publication.

In December of 1989, when I wrote the copy for the first issue, I must admit I wasn't really sure whether this little newsletter would survive, or even be read. The response, while not overwhelming, has been generally favorable.

It seems many of you actually *read* this publication and find the content interesting and useful. It seems as well that the leaders of our parent organization, the Society for Technical Communication, believe that your C&IC PIC is providing a valuable service to a significant portion of STC membership.

For my part, I've enjoyed being able to share my observations and views on the group and the profession in general. It's not lost on me, however, that as consultants, a big part of our job is to listen to our clients, help them to determine their needs, then work with them to fulfill those needs.

Since you are, in a sense, clients of C&IC PIC, I'd like to learn what you think about our group, our profession and our prospects for the future. Not just "You're doing great" or "You're doing lousy," but your real, honest, constructive thoughts on how well (or whether at all) this professional interest committee is meeting your needs and how we can meet them more effectively.

In short, I'd like *your* perspective as to ways we can make this PIC the very best it can be. Write to me at:

Communication Professionals
8109 Fair Oaks Drive
Whitmore Lake, Michigan 48189

or call me at 313/449-0310 (days). I'm looking forward to hearing from you soon.



Winter 1992

New STC Publication

Marketing Yourself as an Independently Employed Professional

This publication is intended for the technical communicator who has either moved to a new area and needs to establish connections or for the technical communicator, who after a few years in the field, has decided to become independent. It covers everything from finding and tracking leads, to what to do once you've gotten an appointment.

STC Member - \$15 Nonmember - \$25

Order your copy today!

Send a check and the completed form below to:

STC - Publications
901 N. Stuart St., Suite 304
Arlington, VA 22203-1822
(703) 522-4114

Please send _____ copy(ies) of **Marketing Yourself as an Independently Employed Professional (144-91)**

Total amount enclosed \$ _____ (Canadian members add 10%)

Name: _____

Address: _____



From the Editor

I'd love to start a "Letters to the Editor" column. Are you interested? I've been covering what I think we need, but my opinion is only representative of one person—me. I'd really like to read and print your opinions.

If you have an opinion about what we're covering, or not covering, please write. If you have a pet peeve or an idea you'd like to test on the group before you try to market it, please write. If you have suggestions for projects you'd like to see us tackle, please write. This is your newsletter as much as it's mine. My goal is to print as many of your thoughts as possible. PLEASE WRITE.



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Desktop Publishing as a Business: Wise Words from *Ventura Professional*

by Susan Witter

The May 1991 issue of *Ventura Professional* (official magazine of the Ventura Publisher Users Group) is a gold mine of practical information for the self-employed neophyte. It also contained a few useful nuggets for the more experienced. And the principles presented lend themselves very well to areas of endeavor other than desktop publishing.

"Starting Your Own Ventura Business," by Lisa Labrecque, is a good think piece for someone about to take the leap. She doesn't uncover everything about working for oneself; she arms you with a few points to consider from the vantage point of outside looking in. Do you have enough clients to make the jump? Do you know the industry? Can you take risks? In her answers to these and other startup enigmas Labrecque guides you along the

passage from Corporate America to being on your own.

Felix Kramer and Maggie Lovaas tackle the art and science of developing a pricing structure in a very comprehensive article: "Pricing and Bidding." They start with a sensible goal statement: to "figure out a way to price your work well, so potential customers decide to hire you, you feel good about doing the jobs, and your clients feel they're getting their money's worth." They present some modest financial goals, reasonable assumptions, and easily divisible numbers. From these they develop a general list of costs (startup, operating, expenses/supplies, income). The idea is to lead you away from thinking of financial needs in terms of salaries (the employee's standard) and toward an optimal hourly rate. First and second year strategies refine that magic

number. Kramer and Lovaas look at six possible ways to charge:

- per hour
- per day
- per head
- per project
- flat rate; and
- retainer fee.

Some astute tips about developing a bid (such as "never bid on the spot" and "take your time and keep note of your assumptions") exhibit the authors' sound experience with this often nerve-wracking facet of self-employment. Vagaries of

See *Wise Words*, page 6



publication production—consider the range in usability of copy provided by the client(ASCII file, typed paper, barely decipherable scrawl)—carry their own price tags, and a number of them are discussed. A sidebar lists a baker's dozen of books on small business and working at home.

In "So You're Ready to Start Your Own DTP Business...", David Walker offers a look at some of the realities of the arrangement, concentrating on that most mystifying reality: the client. His tongue-in-cheek conclusion: "You can take heart in the deepening gloom that your competition is woking with the same clients as are you."

Finally, in "The Pitfalls of Consulting," Bob Moody focuses on two of the most prevalent problem areas for independent consultants: managing your time and getting properly paid, on time, for the work you do. To manage time, Moody presents what he calls the 30-60-10 rule of consulting. According to this rule, you need to spend:

- 30% of your time searching for work;
- 60% doing the work; and
- 10% getting paid for the work.

This rule was a little hard to swallow for me at first—as a neophyte free agent I had set a goal of 75% of my time spent in billable hours—but it makes sense and allows for the behind-the-scenes effort we **must** do.

Moody gives some refreshing ideas for marketing your skills and generating business. His comments on quoting a job are **very** specific to just the desktop-publishing phase, but still useful if that's part of what you do. Final advice on contracts, schedules, and invoicing serves to emphasize that as a small or one-person shop, getting paid for the work you do is a matter of life and death!



Susan Witter is an independent writer, trainer, and desktop publisher working primarily in the Albany, New York, area. She's been doing this as her sole means of revenue for about one breathtaking year. She is also layout designer for the *IP*.

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