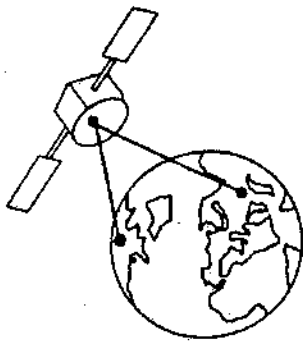


# INDEPENDENT PERSPECTIVE

Newsletter of the Consulting and Independent Contracting Professional Interest Committee Winter 1992/93



A federal management project called Flexiplace, which just completed its second and final year, has identified an extremely cost-effective means to increase the productivity, morale, and quality of results obtained by knowledge workers in the federal service.

myself, figured out his trick. He was working at home and managing his time intelligently by reducing his drives to the office; I was shoring up my position in the company by being physically at the office every day, whether I needed to be or not.

according to Wendell Joice of the Office of Personnel Management and Maxcine Sterling of the General Services Administration, authors of the draft conclusions that were distributed at a recent conference on travel reduction programs in the City and County of Denver.

## Telecommuting

The Flexiplace project was chartered by the President's Council on Management Improvement to observe the results of eliminating excess job-related travel from the schedules of federal workers. The principal time savings came from allowing participants to work at home for part of the week. The pilot followed similar guidelines used in earlier pilots in Los Angeles County (the largest in the US to date, with over 2,000 participants), in the Puget Sound region, and in Phoenix, AZ.

### Many routes

The word telecommuting, coined in the early 1970s, stands for a wide range of methods used to increase productivity through the reduction of job-related travel. It is often identified with telecommunications, but the essence of the concept is elimination of wasted time on the road, not the use of high technology, although network access clearly widens the range of possibilities.

Flexiplace project results exist only for work-at-home participants at this time. These participants perform their jobs in home offices anywhere from one to four days each week. The operative concept is flexibility—whatever works for individual offices, as long as regulations are observed.

**See Telecommuting, page 7**

**Staying competitive and committed to a healthy future**

by Steve Whitney

"Flexiplace" is fed-speak for telecommuting, and the recently disclosed results join a growing number of telecommuting success stories being reported nationwide. The impressive ratings given to Flexiplace by all 13 participating federal agencies is of special interest to publications specialists in general because a large number of participants fell into this job category.

I personally became interested in telecommuting a year ago when a fellow contract writer at a recent assignment consistently outdistanced me on a project we were doing together. I'm not downstaged easily in this field and, once over the defensiveness of apologizing for

The Flexiplace method was tested and its participants scrupulously observed, probably more than any other telecommuting group in history. In most cases, agency management was able to implement the program "on a shoestring."

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**See Telecommuting, page 7**

## Writers & Operators

I read David Brown's article with interest (*Writers—Not Computer Operators*, Fall 1992), but I think he missed the point. Most companies have invested heavily in

showing regard for the client's preferences and internal standards.

As a buyer of creative services, I have seen the disasters occasioned by consultants who did not deliver clean electronic copy on the grounds that the hard copy "looked fine." I have also met consultants who asserted that their ignorance of a particular kind of software would not hinder meeting deadlines that were already tight.

Clients are concerned that they may be asked to pay high hourly rates while you learn at their expense. They want to be reassured that you will be spending your time concentrating on the editorial product, not struggling with unfamiliar

*See Letters, page 6*

their corporate information systems, and in the information itself. As employers or as purchasers of an editorial product or service, companies have a right to expect that the writer/editor will deliver the product in an acceptable electronic form, not just in hard copy. "Acceptable form" means that the electronic version of the document will be clean,

## Independent Voices

Letters to the editor

## INDEPENDENT PERSPECTIVE

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## PERSPECTIVES

by Charley McWha  
C&IC PIC Manager

I've just returned from the third annual C&IC PIC conference in Oak Ridge, TN. I missed last year's and didn't realize how much until now. Independence does not have to mean isolation. It was wonderful to see old friends and make new ones.

Fred O'Hara coordinated activities: Thank you, Fred. From lining up

speakers to selecting the menu (and much more), you did a great job.

### Non-competitors

The day began with a breakfast meeting where it quickly became apparent that, while we all are in the technical communication field, we are not in competition with each other. We approach our practices from such

different perspectives that we can support each other's endeavors, sympathize with difficulties encountered, and share ideas and techniques freely.

Next year I'd like to see more of you at Oak Ridge. It's a great way to boost your spirits and learn more about the special concerns of independents.



From the editor

Welcome to our new look! Layout Editor Cal Callahan and I have been working to create a livelier format, just in time for a host of articles that seem to call for it. Let us know what you think.

The articles in this

issue about telecommuting and networking (with people) lay a good basis for a future issue about the C&IC PIC's bulletin board on CompuServe. If any of you would like to help, you are more than welcome.

We've received several letters, both comments on articles and open questions. Thanks for writing in. Sorry we couldn't squeeze them all into this issue.

Susan

518-477-2564

What happens when you're a writer craving contact with other writers but there are none in sight?

In Western Massachusetts (that's west of 128, 495, and Worcester, but not as far as Cali-

fessional support and networking. By making it a general group rather than a technical one, we could draw on a larger audience.

We were able to use a local college meeting room which was com-

to 9:00 p.m. and we make a point of starting and ending on time.

Our format is, we think, a bit unusual: at each meeting, we all have a turn to introduce ourselves and tell what we do. This opening part of the meeting assists the connections that are made during the networking later on. People can announce openings at their companies or look for subcontractors. Many interesting connections have been made through NetWorks.

### Show and tell

Another feature of our meetings is "show and tell." Once or twice a year everyone is invited to bring something he or she has been working on. We sometimes spend several meetings talking about the brochures, newsletters, manuals, proposals, and news releases (to name a few) that people bring. This also helps us find topics we want to explore further and people willing to lead the discussions.

In three years, some of our topics have been marketing, promotional writing, software demos, producing a video, assessment of our own writing, public relations, composition and computers, newspaper writing, public speaking, writing training, and publishing books

**See Networks, page 8**



## How to make professional connections when you live and work in the sticks

by Karen Wise Olander

fornia!), we don't have a lot of computer firms or technological companies, so there are not a lot of technical writers (or jobs) floating around.

Eileen Cahill and I, two senior members of the STC Hartford and Boston chapters, respectively, found that traveling to a meeting one or two hours away on a work night was difficult to manage on a regular basis. Although we participate in gatherings such as the Interchange Conference in Lowell, MA, and the STC Annual Conference, these don't provide the ongoing networking we were seeking.

Together with Jane Neumann, who says she is definitely not a tech writer, we decided to start our own monthly writing group for pro-

portable and inviting. Later, when liability concerns caused the institution to charge for the room, we had to search for a lower-cost alternative.

### The price is right

We finally discovered that a nearby mall had a public meeting room that can be reserved for free. It's central and easy to find, and, while not as cozy as the large-living-room atmosphere of the college meeting place, there's food, security, good lighting, and plenty of parking.

Meeting nights are set by consensus. Our first year we met on Tuesdays, this year it's Thursdays. We check with the group once or twice a year to see if the night is still workable. The time is always 7:00

My company, Communication Services, helps people in business and industry communicate better with their own employees and with

legal requirement that the entire contract be written as a single sentence!

If your contract is for a large project, and if you

official, so print the first page of the final copy on your letterhead and subsequent pages on matching blank stationery.

## How to Write Proposals & Contracts

*First in a series  
of hands-on  
articles about  
building  
contracts*

*by Dave Young*

their customers, generally through the printed word. And what could be a better place for good, clear, communication in your business than in your proposals and contracts with clients?

The contract is important because signing it initiates a legal, contractual relationship between you and your client. Any work you do prior to signing the contract is considered marketing; it's one of your overhead costs. After signing the contract, you're earning money, not spending it.

This article describes a generic proposal for consultants. If you write it properly, it automatically becomes a contract when both you and the client sign it. In other words, it's a proposal until it's signed; then it's a contract.

Contracts written in plain English are just as legal as those written in legal jargon. For example, it is not a legal requirement (though it is an insult to one's intelligence) to use both numbers and words—"payment is due within thirty (30) days"—in contracts. And it is not a

determine that the likelihood of not getting paid is great—like writing for a company that is nearly bankrupt—you may wish to consult a lawyer to be sure you properly protect yourself. Choose a lawyer who deals regularly with small-business contracts.

If possible, generate the contract in your word processor rather than having a pile of pre-printed forms. You will want to revise your contract several times before you are comfortable with it. Each project you work on will give you ideas to include in your next contract.

The proposal may be your first *written* contact with your client so you'll want it to represent you well. It should state your points clearly and concisely and make you look like the competent person you really are. Take the time to write it well.

### Introductory Remarks

Your proposal will be easier to compose and read if you divide it into sections. It should look

Start the proposal like a letter with the date and client's name and address:

Date  
Mr. XXX  
Client's Company  
Name  
Address

In place of the salutation, you may use a Subject line to indicate right away that this is *not* a letter but is instead a proposal. Nevertheless, it is addressed to a person, so you'll need to include the person's name and, if you wish, the person's company name.

**SUBJECT:** Proposal  
with quotation  
for *Individual's  
Name of client's  
Company Name.*

Some people begin by inserting a short explanatory letter here to the person who can obtain the approval, such as the chairman of the board or the owner. If you do this, keep it very short and formal. Or simply write a separate cover letter.

Then launch into the specifics of the proposal. Number the sections so you will be able to refer to items easily later.

**"The proposal may be your first written contact with your client so you'll want it to represent you well"**

### 1. Parties to this Agreement

This contract is an agreement between two parties. They are:

\_\_\_\_\_ (client) and \_\_\_\_\_ (consultant). To simplify the writing of this contract, we will refer to these parties as "The Client" and "Consultant's Name". The full name and address of The Client is given above. The full name and address of "Consultant's Name" is given at the end of this contract.

*Comment:* If you operate under a DBA (Doing Business As...), use your company name where it says *Consultant's Name* in the paragraph above. Your contract needs to include names and addresses of both parties in case things don't work out and you must go to court. Then, the more specific you are, the better.

### 2. Scope of Work

This proposal describes how *Consultant's Name* will help The Client accomplish \_\_\_\_\_.

*Comment:* This section should be a one-paragraph description of the entire project—an overview to set the stage for the detailed items that follow.

### 3. Project Description

*Comment:* Describe the project as it was described to you by the client during preliminary

meetings. You need to show the client that you understand his needs and that both you and the client agree upon what you are setting out to do. If you do not agree now, the rest of the contract is useless.

### 4. Dates of This Contract

This contract becomes effective on \_\_\_\_\_ (enter a specific date or "when both parties have signed and dated this contract") and ends on \_\_\_\_\_ (a specific date) unless either party cancels the agreement as described in Section 15.

*Comment:* Having a cut-off date protects both you and the client against being obligated forever.

### 5. Purpose of This Project

The purpose of this project is to make \_\_\_\_\_ happen by \_\_\_\_\_ under a given set of conditions.

*Comment:* The purpose of any project is usually to make a problem disappear. That may be reflected in several concrete ways such as reduced costs, reduction in employee turnover, increased sales. As a result of your contribution, change will occur. Be as specific as possible about the purpose of the project. For example, don't just set out to

reduce costs; reduce costs by 10% before year end using existing personnel and tooling.

You will also use this statement of purpose at the end of the project to measure your success or failure. "Were you successful?" = "Did you accomplish the purpose?" If you have not clearly stated the purpose, you may think you have achieved it and the client may not!

If you do not meet your objective, you will be able to say you achieved a significant percentage of the goal if you have a clearly stated goal in measurable terms. With a measurable objective, you can at least say you accomplished 80% of the goal. And if the stated limitations change (i.e., personnel and tooling) you can identify that failure to meet the goal was caused by outside influences, not by you.

If the objective is unclear, the amount of good you've done will also be unclear.

### 6. Constraints Upon This Project

Vendor will supply:

Client will supply:

*Comment:* List the agreed-upon contributions of both parties. For example,

"Consultant's name will supply: A typewritten report stating the results of the analysis. Client will supply: office space,

**See Proposals, page 6**

## Proposals (from page 5)

computer access, and access to the latest engineering data."

*Comment:* If you are working on a product that is still in development (typical of computer systems), ask for the most recent engineering specifications, etc. You don't want to be liable for writing a manual that describes how to operate Model B when engineering and sales, using the latest data, have begun shipping Model C. If your consulting is to be relevant, base it on current data.

Be sure to state that if the product (or situation)

changes significantly during the period of your contract, that this will be outside the scope of the contract and an addendum to the contract will be required.

### An example

You agree to write the instruction manual on a new computer-controlled drill press. As you near completion, the design engineer tells you that the original software has just been replaced by software written in another computer language (the result of a company reorganization) and that you will not only have

to rewrite all the instructions for the programming section of your manual but that, since the change was easy for them, they are shipping on schedule. You must redouble your efforts to meet schedule. If you've covered yourself in the contract, you'll get financially compensated for that extra effort. In other words, if *they* cause a problem, you will get an opportunity to renegotiate the price and schedule. **IP**

*(Continued next issue)*  
Dave Young is a Senior Member of STC and an independent writing, editing, and publishing consultant.

(If you can't wait for the next issue of IP, you can order this complete article in booklet form for \$4 from Communication Services, 210 Glen Ellyn Way, Rochester, NY 14618)

## Letters (from page 2)

**"It's true, we  
could be  
enslaved by  
our own tools"**

software. They want a product that will fit easily into existing electronic libraries without time-consuming additional cleanup. Dismiss these concerns out of hand, and you are telling the client that his concerns are at best trivial, and at worst, illegitimate.

It's true, we could be enslaved by our own tools, but it is up to us as consultants to stress our editorial and management skills in our sales literature and appointments. Moreover, I think it is highly appropriate for the modern technical writer to have functional knowledge of at least two major word-processing packages and one desktop publishing/page layout package. To these skills,

you may add the knowledge of some file conversion software.

I have found that if the client is convinced that we can handle his editorial problems, and if we are respectful of his concerns, then he will be more flexible on technical issues.

Yours sincerely,  
Bruce Madole, President  
Bruce Madole +  
Associates, Brampton,  
Ontario

### Long-term Backups

We have been in desktop publishing for about 4 years using a Macintosh-based system. Over the years, the complexity of our work has increased to the point that files are now massive.

What is the consensus on how long to store

the data before erasing it? When we were writing instruction manuals, letters, and simple black and white projects, we could store a great deal of data on a floppy disc. A typical 4-color brochure now requires 60 megabytes.

We started out storing clients' projects on floppy discs, then went to Syquest removable hard discs and now use magneto optical storage, which is costly for long term storage. Do we bill the client for storage on a monthly or yearly basis, or not at all? We would like views from other independently employed professionals.

Mel Berman  
Mel Berman Associates,  
Industrial Advertising  
STC Southwestern Ohio  
Chapter

**Telecommuting**  
(from page 1)

**"Telecommuting  
is one of the few  
readily available  
means for an  
individual to  
positively affect  
the future of  
the globe "**

Flexiplace is restricted to excellent performers. According to Joice, such programs function best when the work-at-home option is granted as a reward to trusted high performers. Joice emphasizes that Flexiplace "is not an entitlement in the federal system."

Flexiplace corroborates similar findings accumulated for the last 10 years in state and local jurisdictions and in unpublicized private sector programs. The specific gains in productivity vary with the participating organizations and managers, but the return on investment is consistently very high.

Among the specific findings in the Flexiplace report: More than 90 percent of the supervisors and 95 percent of the employees judged that Flexiplace job performance was either improved or as good as before; and over 90 percent of the participants, both supervisors and workers, judged that interpersonal communication with the rest of the office was at least as good as before the pilot, with many reporting improved communications.

### **Impressive results**

The results are all the more impressive given that participants were required to have job performance ratings of *exceeds fully successful*. In other words, high per-

formers got even better.

Organizations that implement telecommuting programs get an important bonus in making headway toward compliance with upcoming state and federal rules designed to reduce job-related travel. Automobile emissions created by commuters traveling to and from work are one of the main targets of new federal clean air legislation.

### **Or virtual war?**

At a recent conference sponsored by the Bell Atlantic Corporation on federal clean air requirements, the likelihood of a virtual war against commuter traffic was compared to the positive benefits delivered by telecommuting programs.

Forced parking restrictions, HOV lanes, and car/van pools—all of which have positive results but increase worker stress and time on the road—pale in comparison to the benefits reported by managers such as Bell Atlantic Vice President James Young, whose telecommuting program has improved employee retention, increased productivity, and enabled continued contribution from employees during pregnancies and convalescence.

At this same conference, Ed Weiner, Senior

Policy Analyst at the Department of Transportation, predicted that pressures on companies and government agencies will be eased if they pursue telecommuting programs.

### **Let's get started**

Telecommuting is one of the few readily available means for an individual to positively affect the future of the globe and receive an instant dividend. Writers everywhere, whether contractors or in-house staff, stand to gain significantly from practicing it, and at the same time render a service to their employers.

Strategies for introducing the concept to a company are worth developing collectively, and I invite any interested participants to call me at 301-270-4679 to join me in this work. You can sit back and wait for the results but then miss the enrichment of the development process. My initial thought is to set up an electronic bulletin board with America Online or CompuServe for this purpose.

*(Editor's Note: There is some C&IC PIC activity already on CompuServe. Stay tuned for more information in future issues.)*

For information on Flexiplace, call Dr. Wendell Joice, Research Psychologist, Office of Personnel Management, at 202-606-0860. **IP**

**"we find  
new ideas for  
meetings  
and sharing  
information"**

and articles. Offsite meetings at computer sales offices were arranged so that members without computers could obtain information about what to buy.

Once a year we have a purely social meeting, where we roll up our sleeves, kick off our shoes, and just have a good time. Even then, business cards are exchanged and we find new ideas for meetings and sharing information.

Our business part of the meeting is short, collaborative, and informal — the three of us take turns with note-taking, announcements, and refreshments. We also share the task of sending meeting notices.

Money is not a major issue now that we have a free place to meet. People who plan to attend fairly regularly are asked to pay \$10; others can pay \$5 for the "mailing list only." Dues are

primarily to defray the cost of monthly mailings. We ask for a new round of dues only when the treasury gets low. Our aim is to avoid large expenses like room rental or paid speakers, for that would raise dues and might limit membership.

### **Resource file**

Members fill in an ID sheet which we use as a resource when looking for someone willing to do a presentation or to refer us to a speaker. We plan to publish a directory of all who want to be listed.

Out of about forty regular members, we usually have fifteen attending a meeting. Our current membership includes technical

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writers, development writers, publishers, editors, graphic designers, independent writers, data processing managers, system analysts, journalists, public relations specialists, trainers, consultants, grant writers, and desktop publishers.

Recently, we went "public" and advertised our group in several local papers. The turnout was gratifying.

Organizing and running a group has been an interesting experience for the three of us. We are delighted with the level of commitment and responsiveness of the group, and the diversity and wealth of resources we have been able to tap into. **IP**

*Karen Olander, a Senior Member of STC, writes and edits computer user manuals and other business materials. She has taught courses in business, technical writing, and computers.*