

The Perspective

Newsletter for the STC International Consulting & Independent Contracting Special Interest Group

10 Steps to Create Your Personal Training Plan, Part 1

by Rob Houser

Have you created your personal training plan for 1999? If you haven't, are you planning to work the year after that? Keeping your skills current is the only form of job security you can count on in today's workplace. No company can promise you continued full-time employment. No contract will last forever. Even if you like your job and the people around you, you should always think of yourself as on the market, because one day you will be, and you don't want to be unprepared for that time.

Creating a personal training plan is one way to keep yourself on track with your professional development and to give yourself peace of mind about job security. Every technical communicator, full-time or part-time, should have a personal training plan. Here are some suggestions on how to create one.

Step 1: Know what tools and skills are in demand

It is important to know what tools and skills are in demand now as well as what may be hot in the next few years. When potential employers search resumes (and resume databases), they look for certain keywords like RoboHelp or GUI design. This procedure has implications for your resume design—especially if you don't have the abilities they need. Without the proper tools and skills, you won't even make it through the initial screening.

Unfortunately, many companies are making the mistake of equating tools with skills. They assume that people who know RoboHelp know how to design usable online help, or that people who know PhotoShop have the same skills as a graphic artist. You not only have to learn the hot new tools, you must acquire new skills, because while the tools quickly become outdated, the skills make learning other tools easier.

To find out what tools and skills are hot, keep an eye on the job listings in the paper (and in the "Employment Opportunities" section of the STC office Web site at <http://www.stc-va.org>). Even if you're not actively looking for another job, see what kinds of tools and skills employers are seeking. Pay special attention to the salaries offered for candidates with different abilities so you can see which ones result in the best pay. Also, make sure you read the trade magazines and journals in technical

Continued on page 11

IN THIS ISSUE

Feature

10 Steps to Create Your Personal Training Plan, Part 1, **cover**

Special Pull-Out Section: The Independent's Guide to the 46th Annual STC Conference, **7**

Columns

From the Editor: Thoughts and Thanks, **2**

From the Manager's Front: 1998 CIC SIG Survey Results, Part 2: Employment Types, **3**

Book Review: *Poor Richard's Web Site*, **4**

A Humorous Slant: Translators-R-Us?, **5**

The Computing Consultant: Dealing With the Dark Side of the Internet, **12**

News Briefs and Announcements, **back cover**

Thoughts and Thanks

by Kelly Burch

Each time I go through this “birthing” process of putting together and publishing a newsletter, I forget the pain as soon as I see it in its final form. Granted, it’s not a literary masterpiece, but it is something that over 2,000 people receive in their mailbox—and perhaps read a few pages of each issue—four times a year. That’s a neat feeling and one reason I continue doing this editor-thing. Another is that I get a sense of accomplishment from seeing a project through from beginning to end that I don’t always get from my day-to-day work.

It does become a struggle at the end sometimes. I forget how many details there are and how long it takes to make (or attempt to make) a perfect issue. Sometimes I just want to throw in the towel and get back to that paying project instead. But, I know that the CIC SIG manager and all of you are depending on me to get this thing out and that keeps me going—sometimes late, but I get through it. And, I hope you appreciate the results.

By the way, this Spring 1999 issue wraps up our STC publishing year and the next issue, scheduled to come out July 1, will begin the ‘99 - ‘00 year. [*Or should we always spell it out? ‘99 - 2000? 1999 - 2000? I see another writing dilemma on the horizon.*]

With this “ending” I wanted to take a moment to mention those that make this newsletter possible. I have very faithful columnists and want to thank them publicly for their time and contributions. One of the hardest parts of putting together a newsletter is

acquiring the right contents for each issue. I know I can always depend on them to provide informative, witty, and inspirational columns. Thank you Ken, Tom, and Jodie.

I also want to thank my very good friend and colleague (a.k.a. right arm), Margaret Doss. There are times that I honestly don’t know what I’d do without her. Thank you, Margaret, for your support. I sincerely appreciate it.

I don’t want to forget to thank the CIC SIG manager, Tommy Barker, for his continued support of and contributions to this newsletter. You can see in each issue that he takes his job as manager very seriously, and we’re all the better for it. Thanks, Tommy.

Lastly, I want to thank Jo Byrd for her efforts and support with final production of the newsletters. She has been a huge help in getting them “out the door” and into your mailbox. Thanks, Jo.

With all these thank you’s, I don’t have room for my usual mention of the interesting contents of this issue. Please look through the entire thing and see for yourself what it offers—a little something for everyone, I hope!

I will point out the special “pull out” centerfold, “The Independent’s Guide to the 46th Annual STC Conference.” Those of you lucky enough to attend, please pull this section out and take it with you to the conference. It will make your decisions of which sessions to attend much easier.

Well, no more room for my rambling, so I’d better sign off. Enjoy. Until “next year...” ❖

Independent The Perspective Spring 1999 Volume 9, Issue 4

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

Managing Editor: Kelly Burch

Copy Editor: Margaret Doss

Production Coordinator: Jo Byrd

SIG Manager: Dr. Thomas Barker

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

We encourage you to send comments, suggestions, and opinions regarding *The Independent Perspective* or the CICSIG to the editor at the address below.

REPRINTS

Reprints of any of the original material herein are permissible with the proper attribution (source, including date of issue; name of author). Please send a copy of the publication in which *The Independent Perspective* material was reprinted to the editor at the address below.

ADVERTISING

We welcome advertisers whose subject matter is relevant to technical communication, or of interest to SIG members. For rates, please contact the editor at 214/360-9677 or kburch@dallas.net.

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 or Word format to Kelly Burch at kburch@dallas.net.

1998 CIC SIG Survey Results, Part 2: Employment Types

by Dr. Thomas Barker

Independent,” “contractor,” “freelancer,” “consultant.” Members of the CICSIG are familiar with these words that identify “what we do.” But among newcomers to independent work and old timers looking to advance professionally, these words can raise questions. “When can I call myself a consultant?” “If I quit my permanent job, am I an independent or a contractor?” “How come some ‘independents’ work for contracting firms?”

The 1998 CICSIG Survey results contain information that can answer some of these questions in the following ways:

- reality check (to see what the “other” members are up to)
- market reinforcement (if other members offer a particular service then I can too)
- what works (ideas from other independent writers with businesses)

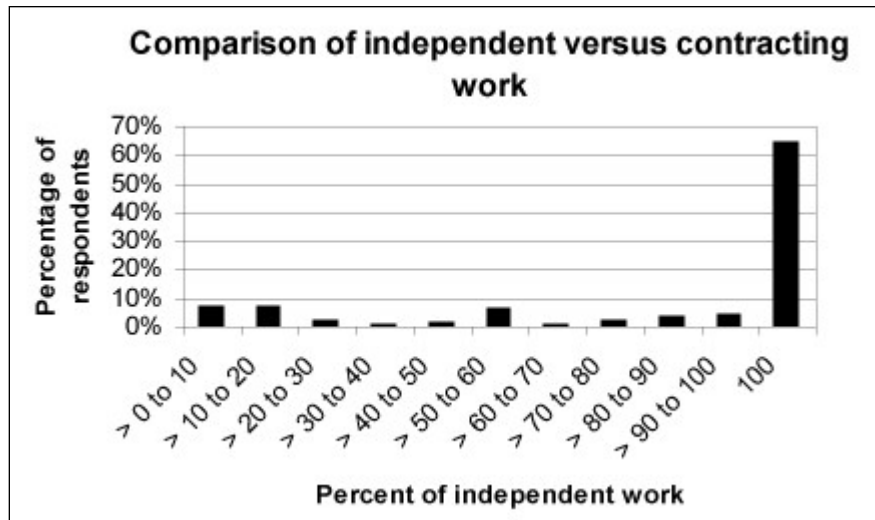
Independent Versus Contractor

The survey asked respondents to answer questions based on the following important distinction:

Independent: Your employer does not deduct taxes from your pay.

Contractor: Your employer does deduct taxes from your pay.

Tax status, clearly, is one way to sift out the distinction between these key job



labels. The results from the survey indicate that 65% of respondents do 100% independent work.

Many CICSIG members do some “contract” work, but the results seem to imply that most CICSIGers are independents communicators who run their own businesses, as opposed to contractors who work for a contracting agency and are essentially lone employees moving from job to job but essentially employed. They might work for companies like Metamor Documentation Solutions, Inc. (formerly COREComm) or Berger & Co. Inc.

The survey results also show that 65% of members of the CICSIG own their own companies, either as sole proprietorships or some other type of structure, such as a corporation. As the following table shows, most respondents fall under a business structure and don't work for contract companies.

Table 1: Types of Independent Businesses

Type	Number of Respondents
Sole proprietorship	87
Corporation	30
Partnership	3
Other	2
Limited liability company	1

Considering, then, that most of the survey respondents are independents with businesses to run, the question remains: “What kinds of work do these independents do?”

Focus on Consulting

As a way of answering the question of the nature of work, I'd like to focus on the distinction between contracting (not in the sense identified above as “working for a contracting agency”) and consulting work. The difference

Readers may wish to view the charts of the results of the 1998 CICSIG Survey at the following URL:

<http://english.ttu.edu/gscic/survey98/results.htm>

Continued on page 6

Poor Richard's Web Site: Geek-Free, Commonsense Advice on Building a Low-Cost Web Site

a review by Margaret Doss

Poor Richard's Web Site: Geek-Free, Commonsense Advice on Building a Low-Cost Web Site

by Peter Kent
Top Floor Publishing
Copyright 1998
ISBN 0-9661032-8-9

Do you need to create a Web site? Chances are that if you don't now, you will have the opportunity to do so soon. Maybe you want to promote your business, maybe your client wants to sell their products, or maybe you need to promote an organization or event. These days, chances are pretty good that consultants will be called upon to create a presence on the World Wide Web. So where do you get started on this monumental task? Peter Kent knows, and he shares his knowledge in his book *Poor Richard's Web Site*.

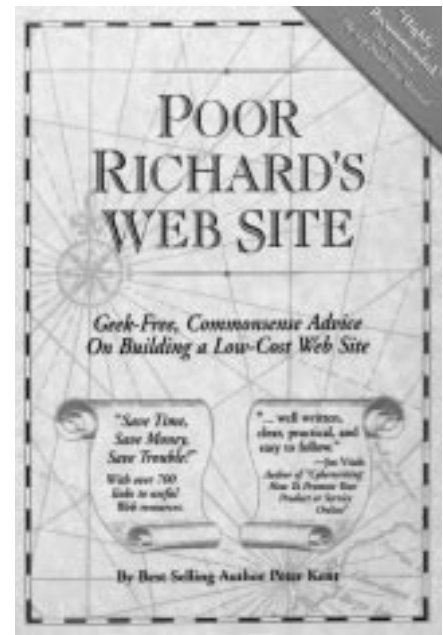
I know what many of you are thinking at this point—“Great, another HTML book to add to the pile that I already have.” But, this book is different. There are scores of books out there on HTML right now. But as many of you have already discovered, there is a lot more to a Web site than the coding and pretty graphics. Subtitled “Geek-Free, Commonsense Advice on Building a Low-Cost Web Site,” this book is a comprehensive guide to designing, launching, and maintaining your site on the Internet without needing an advanced technical degree and, more importantly, without breaking the budget. Mr. Kent is a familiar name to many—he is the author of over 30 books, including *The Ten Minute Guide to the Internet*, *Making Money in Technical Writing*, and *The Technical Writer's Freelancing Guide*.

In his introduction, Mr. Kent compares the World Wide Web to the printing press that Benjamin Franklin used to publish his *Poor Richard's Almanac*. Through the printing press, Benjamin Franklin “was able to communicate his thought to hundreds of thousands of people in many countries.” Mr. Kent shows us how to do the same with the Internet and the World Wide Web.

Benjamin Franklin delivered a world of wisdom, information, and good common sense in *Poor Richard's Almanac*. Like Mr. Franklin, Mr. Kent provides a wealth of information in a book that is humorous, useful, and full of plain common sense. It is this common-sense approach that sets this book apart from the rest of the books on this subject. The first chapter sets forth the almost heretical notion that not everyone needs a Web site, and the book is peppered with statements like “Forget cool, Think useful” and other pithy quotes that are so different from the “Ain't it cool?” philosophy that dominates the World Wide Web today. It is a refreshing change to read a book that teaches Web designers to use the available technology judiciously and effectively—not just because it is there.

The book is divided into three sections: Preparation, Creation, and Promotion. The Preparation section covers everything you need to plan your site, such as choosing a Web host and obtaining a domain name. The Creation section explains how to best design the site for your audience and create a Web site that works with interactivity and flare.

Finally, the Promotion section teaches you how to research your audience and bring them to your site. There is a lot of



information here, but Mr. Kent delivers it in a simple, jargon-free way that is easy to read and follow. Best of all, there is a companion Web site to the book at www.poorrichard.com, where you will find links to more information, such as relevant discussion groups, and many free or low-cost utilities mentioned in the book.

Creating a Web site can be a complicated business. With *Poor Richard's Web Site*, Peter Kent makes it a lot simpler. ❖

Margaret Doss is a contract Technical Writer/Editor in the Dallas/Fort Worth area. A devotee of all things "cool" and "useful," she is quite entranced by innovations like pizza delivery, grocery shopping, and bookstores via the World Wide Web and may never leave home again. Her e-mail address is margaret.doss@usa.net.

Translators-R-Us?

by Jodie Gilmore

Translation is the buzzword of the 90s. Every time I read an STC publication, like *Technical Communication* or *Intercom*, I see several ads for translation companies and translation jobs. English to Japanese, Swahili to French—it's big business.

But why the fuss all of a sudden? Technical writers have been performing several varieties of translations every day of their working lives!

First, there's translating into useable language the perhaps technically correct but definitely totally incomprehensible jargon that engineers often provide us with. For instance, a recent project of mine included the following sentence: "For each corner in each removed face T_i , its opposite corner in its neighbor face must have the removed face T_i specified as its neighbor face." Got that?? Even the engineer, when queried, couldn't figure out the antecedent for each of the "its"!

Then there's the translation involved in project management. For example, when a client comes to me and asks "When can you have this done?" What he or she REALLY means is "My boss asked for it last month, I forgot until yesterday, and we need it tomorrow." Talk about a loaded question! Or, there's the standard response one gets from software developers when you query about a feature that doesn't perform according to the specification: "Well, it should work that way." Reading between the lines, this translates to

"The spec we wrote two years ago (before we did any research) says that is the way we want it to work, but we've never actually been able to get the code to run. It will probably be fixed two releases from now."

Then, when we finally get the text in readable form and figure out the esoteric behavior of all the features—and bugs—(and get it done in two weeks), we submit the document for review. As our reward, we get back comments like "This is wrong." Does this translate to "Delete this section" or to "You have the wrong value for the second option listed in this section"? How much of the description is wrong? What would make it right? Or, perhaps you, like me, often see comments like this: "(((((((These reviewers should have been doctors! I've gotten comments in faint pencil, which is a tricky translation job. And the worst are the comments in red felt pen that subsequently get wet...

And of course, we technical writers are also users—we use tools every day to accomplish our tasks. And as users, we must translate the sometimes less-than-perfect efforts of fellow technical writers.

So, the next time a client asks you if your technical writing expertise includes translation work, I think you can safely say "Yes!" ♦



Jodie is a freelance technical writer in the Portland, OR area. In addition to being a part-time writer, she's a full-time mom and a part-time farmer in the foothills of the Cascade Mountains.

continued from page 3

between contracting and consulting work is important to independents because it relates to their services, their rates, and their level of business and professional maturity.

What distinguishes *consulting* from *contracting*?

According to the definition supplied by the Independent Consultant's Alliance, the key ingredients in a consulting practice are:

- to create value for a client
- to sell expertise as a product
- to create "lasting organizational change"

The last part of the definition (creating "lasting organizational change") implies a number of characteristics of consulting work: measures of performance, responsibility beyond one project, a process of growth for client companies, and, finally, the temporary nature of consulting work itself. The "ways" in the definition suggest publications processes as well as development or internal management processes, as opposed to the performance of documentation tasks.

Consulting in the 1998 Survey

The definition of consulting suggests that independent consultants fill an important niche. They don't just *do* the work, but affect both how the work is done as well as the clients' management or process environment surrounding the work. In question 21 the survey defined consulting as... "giving expert professional advice" and in contrast to independent contracting or "performing writing and editing tasks."

What is Consulting?

"The essence of consulting is to help a client create value by providing information and advice, which leads to lasting organizational change in a variety of ways including development of new strategies, accounting systems, information systems integration, quality management, process redesign, marketing, distribution channel development, logistics, leadership training, cost control, productivity enhancement, leveraging technology, activity-based costing, competitive analysis, human resource strategy and value management."

The survey results indicate that independents do "consulting" work on the average about 20% of the time. This means that roughly one day of a five-day work week is devoted to training, project management, advising, meeting with developers and clients, and other process-related activities. While the survey does not show that independents charge more for these services

(the correlation with "hourly rate" was only 50%), there is every reason to believe that these services should demand a higher price from clients.

Kinds of Work Independents Do

The 1998 CICSIG Survey allows us to refine further the picture of services independents offer, whether those services be of the consulting or contract-writing variety. Question 20 of the survey can illuminate the kinds of projects independents perform for their clients. The question offered respondents 23 "project types" and asked respondents to check "all that apply." The results of the question are presented in the table below.

Table 2: Kinds of Work

Type of Work	Percent	Number of Respondents
editing	77	103
software manuals	66	88
technical reports/documents	60	81
training materials/training	57	77
policies/procedures	53	71
desktop publishing	50	67
online documentation	41	55
project management	39	52
hardware manuals	34	46
publications production	33	44
Web pages	32	43
marketing/advertising	31	42
indexing	29	39
graphics design/illustration	28	37
copy writing	25	34
newsletters	25	33
magazine/journal articles	24	32
corporate communications	21	28
other	16	22
public relations	14	19
business plans	13	17
multimedia	11	15
textbooks	11	15

Continued on page 13

The Independent's Guide to the 46th Annual STC Conference

by Dr. Thomas Barker, CICSIG Manager

I have compiled this guide to the conference with the explicit needs of the beginning and advanced independent consultant and contractor in mind. In selecting sessions to recommend I looked for topics pertinent to the concerns of our SIG members: business and growth concerns, diversity of work environments, work methodologies, and new products and services for independents. I also looked for sessions with nationally known speakers who would cost you hundreds of dollars to see at a seminar. I also followed, and recommend, the "Consultant and Contractor Stream" recommendations made by the program committee. (See my disclaimer on page 10.)

--Thomas Barker

Recommended Path:



CICSIG Business Meeting

Sunday, May 16
3:30 PM, Room 233

This meeting gives you the chance to get involved in the CICSIG. Discussion will cover the following topics:

- CICSIG-L mailing list
- CICSIG newsletter (new openings for editors there)
- CICSIG 1999 Survey (online this year)
- CICSIG online book *Getting Started in Consulting and Independent Contracting*
- CICSIG Client/Consultant List Web site

Please plan to attend and get to know your hard-working CICSIG leaders. You can become one yourself!

MONDAY, 10:30 - 12

MG 2J



From Independent to Business Owner
— The Road to Your Presidency

Consulting and Contracting stream recommendation. Always a sure bet.

MG 2B

Working with Difficult People

Break out of that cabin psychology and learn how to deal with strangers.

MG 2T

Managing Projects

I bet you'll find a fountain of information about project management for independents at this session. Get all the handouts.

MG 2X



Stalking Information (in Its Natural Habitat)

This session looks like it would help independents communicate with onsite employees and managers.

MONDAY, 12:15 - 2
LUNCHEON

Networking Luncheon

Exhibit Hall C

Get a ticket to this luncheon and look for topics related to independent work: management, knowledge management, business processes, freelancing, consulting.

MONDAY, 2 - 3:30

MG 3J



Preparing for an Overseas Job

A useful session for independents wanting to work abroad.

TR 3T

Usability Progression: Catching the Main Currents in Usability, Part I

This session contains the cream of the academic crop. Independents can learn the process efficiencies of usability testing, how to market usability testing, how to conduct onsite testing on the client's dollar, and how to adapt testing strategies for multiple environments. A must see.

WE 3X

How to Write Successful Direct Marketing Letters

Gem is an active member of the CICSIG and her insights into letters can improve anyone's marketing profile. Shine on!

Continued on page 8

continued from page 7

MONDAY, 4 - 5:30

MG 4E

Strategic Planning for Information
Development Organization, Part II

Learn the kinds of management structures that top independent consultants recommend to their clients. Get tips on how to market pubs management skills.

TT 4D

Using Tools in a Fast-Cycle, Flexible,
Technical Communication
Environment

This session can help independents improve client and colleague communication. Clearly! Add these tools to your kit (and product line).

WE 4Y

Expand Your Income by Writing
for Magazines

Independents can use the skills in this workshop to help create income-generating marketing materials. Sell your consulting practice by adding magazine articles to your portfolio.

TUESDAY, 8:30 - 10

MG 5A

Benchmarking: How and Why
to Compare Your Organization
with Others

Leave this session with the tools to offer a publications process analysis service to your clients. Boost your consulting practices by learning from these two seasoned professional consultants. Just right for the advanced audience.

MG 5X

Project Management 101: Plan Your
Work and Work Your Plan

This session, featuring the energetic Sarah Hauslinger, CICSIG member, will be a definite eye-opener for the independent. These skills form the backbone of any contracting service. A must see for any beginner.

WE 5I

Secrets of Journalism Revealed! Part I

This session can provide background for independents wishing to add the ability to write technical journalism to their skill set. Use these principles to score contracts with government scientific agencies.

TUESDAY, 11 - 12:00

MG 6A

Go Home! An Introduction
to Virtual Officing

Consulting and Contracting stream recommendation. This session can help make your home office more efficient.

MG 6V

Freelancing Success: Smart Marketing
and Building Skills

Consulting and Contracting stem recommendation. This session can help beginners find ways to create a steady stream of contracts so that you pick your work instead of your work picking you.

ID 6F

Don't Keep Us in the Dark—Mystery
Novels and Technical Communication

Come hear Karen Steele, former CICSIG Manager and inspiring speaker, hold forth on hidden meanings.

TT 6J

The Technical Communicator's Role
in the Implementation of Knowledge
Management Systems

Learn all about a hot area for independents: knowledge management. Explore the topic with a pro who knows her stuff. Learn how to offer knowledge management services to your clients.

TUESDAY, 12:15 - 2
LUNCHEON

SIG Networking Luncheon

Exhibit Hall C 12:15-2 PM

Plan to attend this luncheon and build your colleague network. This is the once-a-year opportunity to chat and chow with other independents. Did someone say "free t-shirts?"

TUESDAY, 2 - 3:30

MG 7A

Strategies for the Lone Writer

Contracting and Consulting stream recommendation. Independents need to know how to make themselves effective in clients' organizations where frequently they are... the lone writer.

MG 7T



Topics in Consulting and Independent Contracting

This session is a must see for all beginning and advanced independents.

TUESDAY, 4 - 5:30

MG 8V

Creating an Effective Business Plan

Learn ways to strengthen your sole proprietorship or communication corporation.

TT 8B



Writing and Analyzing Requirements

Independents need to be able to read requirements from a range of development environments. This workshop can give you tools to boost this aspect of your contracting and consulting practice.

WE 8P

Writing Successful Requests for Proposals

Expand your independent's service portfolio by offering expertise in RFP writing. Here's where you can get an overview of this aspect of consulting work.

WEDNESDAY, 8:30 - 10

MG 9A

Promoting the Technical Communication Profession

Get the organizational view of technical writing services. See what corporations value in technical communication service providers and how you can make your clients see the value of your work.

The full-length version of this Conference Guide is available at the following URL:

<http://english.ttu.edu/gscic>

Click on the Conference Guide link.

NOTES

Continued on page 10

continued from page 9

WEDNESDAY, 10:30 - 12

MG 10A

Stop Writing Documentation—Start Writing for the Customer: A Customer-Focused Strategy for Publications Organizations

This session, presented by one of the best, can help you see ways to develop the quality orientation you need in your contracting practice.

MG 10H

Determining the Right Rate for You

Consultants and Contractors stream recommendation. There's no such thing as an independent from the point of view of the industry within which you work. See how to capitalize on and profit from an industry-wide orientation.

MG 10L

Project Management: The Documentation Plan and Process

If you're not into managing projects or offering management as a service, then this session is for you.

WE 10M

Write a Winning Technical Book Review

Learn how to increase your visibility as an independent and get a free book.

WE 10R

Branching Out: Apply Your Skills in New Arenas

This session can help independents in the constant struggle to offer new services as the market demands them. Learn how to be flexible.

WEDNESDAY, 2 - 3:30

MG 11V

Build Your Portfolio in Your Spare Time

This session can help beginning independents plan their breakout.

Disclaimer

Many of the recommendations in this guide reflect my own impressions of the attendees' needs based on my experience as Manager of the CICSIG. But...I offer no guarantee that any one of these sessions will be less of a bore than another. If a session is a bomb, please don't blame me because you had to sit through it. I'm just going by the preliminary program and my personal experience with the speakers and topics. If you're wise you'll use the "get the handout and sit in the back" strategy. See you there.

--Thomas Barker

NOTES

continued from page 1

communication as well as those in your area of specialization. What abilities do they say will be in demand for the next five years and beyond?

Some of the specific skills I've seen listed in "help wanted" ads include the following:

- * RoboHelp
- * Doc-to-Help
- * RoboHTML
- * Visio
- * Framemaker
- * Visual Basic
- * Windows NT

For a long-term perspective on how the profession of technical communication is evolving, you may want to read "Future Travels of the InfoWrangler" in the September/October 1998 issue of *Intercom*.

Step 2: Assess your own abilities honestly

Before you can develop a training plan, you have to know what you already know and what you have the aptitude to learn in the future. Make a list of the tools and skills you use on the job (and the ones you may not be using). Next, go back through the list and rank each ability with a category such as: Know very well, Know well, Know enough to get by, Barely know, and Don't know at all. In determining the rating for each ability, ask yourself how you would fare if you had to take a job where the ability was the primary one required to be successful in the job. You don't have to share this list with anyone—it's just for your self-evaluation. Figure 1 is an example of such a list.

Ability (Tools & Skills)	Know Very Well	Know Well	Know Enough to Get By	Barely Know	Don't Really Know at All
Usability Evaluations		X			
HTML		X			
Contextual Inquiry	X				
Computer-based Training				X	
Web-based Training					X
Facilitating Meetings		X			
Negotiation				X	
Conflict Resolution				X	
User Interface Design		X			
Performance Support				X	
Java Scripts			X		
Active X					X
RoboHTML	X				
RoboHelp	X				
Doc-to-help		X			
Authorware			X		
Macromedia Director					X
Frontpage	X				
Visio			X		
PhotoShop		X			
Framemaker			X		
Visual Basic			X		

Figure 1. Tools and skills inventory

If you're a full-time employee, you should know that most contracting agencies will require you to fill out a form like this before they will place you in a job.

Step 3: Decide where you want to go

Decide what direction you want your career to take. Do you like technical information? Do you think it would be

fun to program? Do you like to design? Do you like managing? Do you like the industry you are in enough to learn more about it? How are your people skills? How well do you do with public speaking, facilitating meetings, or training others? Are you interested in human factors or quality or customer support? Do you want to continue

Continued on page 14

Dealing With the Dark Side of the Internet

by Tom Lenzo

I was working on their technology business plan, when my client's President handed me a printout of an R-rated cartoon and said "This was in my printer tray. Find out how it got there and stop it." Working with the MIS Department, we discovered the source of the cartoon (an employee was sending it to a friend), and why it was printed on the President's printer (MIS was doing some network tests). We also found lots of examples of non-work related use of the company's computers and Internet connections. We also realized that the company had no policies regarding such use. My project was expanded to create and implement those policies.

For the purpose of this article, let's define Internet pornography as anything displayed on the computer that can be considered offensive to others. That broadens the scope of what shouldn't be seen on company-owned computers, but we are trying to prevent a hostile work environment, decrease sexual harassment lawsuits, and not waste employee time and corporate computing resources.



There are four ways you can deal with pornographic Internet content: 1. You can write policies for your clients;

2. You can install blocking software on their computers; 3. You can install tracking software; and, 4. You can create training. That's four ways to make money via pornography, and you can use this information in your home.

1. Policies should prohibit the use or display of anything on company computers that is not work related, although you will need to define what is "work related" as per your company. You'll also have to work with corporate human relations and legal regarding any applicable laws in your state or country. If policies are created, they shouldn't just exist in the corporate manuals; they must be enforced.
2. Blocking software prevents computer users from accessing specific sites based on databases created by the blocking software vendors. A message is displayed stating that "access to the requested site has been denied." SurfWatch, Cyber Patrol, Kid Proof, and Net Nanny are software programs that block pornography, while HateFilter software is aimed at hate sites. There are a couple of problems with this type of software. First, it won't block all pornographic sites because new ones are created daily and are not listed in the databases. Then there's the argument that computer users can't research topics such as breast cancer because sites would be blocked due to the word "breast." A solution to the blocking would be to teach the surfer to go to sites such as the National Cancer Society. Finally, there are Web sites that teach how to disable blocking software.

3. Tracking software can be installed on the PC or at the server. This software shows who is using the Internet, which sites are being accessed, for how long, and if the computer user turns the software off. Two programs are Net Snitch and WorldSecure/Web. Research via tracking software has shown that at some companies "recreational" Internet use far exceeds business use, but notifying employees that such software is in use not only decreases non-business Internet use, but also causes productivity to increase. Some people don't like this type of software because they feel like Big Brother is watching and wonder if tracking the number of keystrokes per hour is next.
4. Train employees how to do research on the Internet. Here are two points regarding avoiding pornography: 1. More than 25% of the pornographic sites put brand names and innocuous phrases in the meta tags that the search engines review. Those tags get users to visit the site and the site owner collects royalties from the advertisers. 2. Some pornographic sites have Internet addresses that are very similar to non-pornographic sites. For example, while the site www.whitehouse.gov is the real site, the sites with addresses ending with .com and .org are pornographic, and the www.whitehouse.net site is a parody.

There's a line in the movie "You've Got Mail" about taking solitaire and other games off computers because the employees weren't doing any work. Your

efforts can be expanded to cover e-mail, games, screen savers, and other non-essential software. One of my clients calculated that half of the calls to their help desk in December were due to problems caused by a holiday screen saver. Regarding e-mail, remember what happened to Oliver North and to Microsoft when old e-mail messages were reviewed in court.

While the Internet and e-mail have changed the way we do business, they've also introduced some problems into the work place. Here's your chance to solve those problems for your clients. ❖

Tom Lenzo is a training and development consultant with more than 25 years experience in high technology environments. He is also the Employment Manager for the San Gabriel Valley STC Chapter. He can be reached at tlenzo@worldnet.att.net.

As the table on page 6 shows, only one of the "kinds of work" relates explicitly to consulting work: "project management." Of the respondents, 39% said they offered this service. Of course, as all technical communicators know, project management is something one does on all projects. All independent writers plan, hold meetings, follow a process; it's part of being a professional. But some of these independents have found ways to market their management expertise. I highlighted some "kinds of work" that suggest consulting work: "training materials and training" and "publications production." Frequently clients consider "training" as a consulting service and "publications production" suggests work as a managing or coordination editor. Both these kinds of activities suggest that the independent offers unique publications-related expertise that is specific to our profession.

Whatever a CICSIGer calls him or herself—independent, contractor, consultant, freelancer—the work is important. One person may enjoy writing manuals and help, and may not enjoy the politics and stress of management consulting. On the other hand, it may be that pay rates would encourage independents to explore consulting as part of their career development. As we have seen, the 1998 CICSIG Survey can provide insights for members about the extent of consulting work offered by their colleagues. ❖

continued from page 11

working for the same company? Do you want to remain in the same city or state? Would you rather be working at home? (For more thoughts on this subject, see “Taking Control of Your Goals” in the September/October issue of *Intercom*.)

You may find that you like where you are and want to ensure that you can stay there. You may find you need to make some changes in the near future to end up where you want to be. Regardless of what you decide, you have to know where you want to go before you can make any progress. As the Chinese philosopher Lao Tsu said: “What is the use of running if you’re not on the right path?”

The important part of this step is identifying the direction you want your career to take. Don’t let it just happen. Employers may pigeonhole workers in an area or job function because it’s expedient for them and because it does not involve the investment in additional training. If you take more than two jobs in the same industry, people may start to view you as a specialist in that industry. This situation can be good or bad, depending on what you want. The key is controlling the direction of your professional development.

Write a mission statement for your career. An example of a focused mission statement would be the following: “I want to continue developing online help and computer-based training for the financial industry, eventually working my way into a management position in a publications and training department.”

Step 4: Set long-term and short-term performance objectives

Performance objectives are measurable accomplishments. You are responsible

for setting your long-term objectives—broad goals achieved over a period of years that may influence your career. Your manager usually works with you to set short-term performance objectives—the specific tasks you are expected to complete over a clearly defined interval.

Long-term objectives mean goals to be achieved roughly five years from now. Planning beyond five years is difficult to do because so much changes every year. But it is important to have long-term direction for your professional development. Setting long-term performance objectives allows you to evaluate your progress yearly to see whether you are moving toward your goals. It also helps you take small steps toward a change you can’t make in one step. Finally, following long-term performance objectives will show up in your resume, demonstrating to potential employers that you have direction and drive.

List your long-term performance objectives as single-sentence, bulleted items. Limit the list to three to five objectives. Prioritize the list in order of perceived benefit to you in your present job as well as any possible future jobs. At this point, you should not be concentrating on tools or skills as much as what kind of projects you want to be able to complete and what advances you would like to make in your career.

The following are examples of long-term performance objectives:

- * Develop subject-matter expertise in the financial industry (terminology, process, resources, trends)
- * Move closer to product development to create integrated user assistance
- * Increase my leadership abilities and opportunities

- * Establish a reputation as a leader in the areas of online help and CBT design and development

If you are a full-time employee, ask your manager during your performance review what accomplishments (short-term performance objectives) the manager would like to see you achieve over the next year. Make sure you get concrete answers, at least three to five performance objectives. If your manager can’t think of any objectives immediately, follow up with an e-mail message and additional meetings until you get some. Seize the opportunity to let your manager know what kind of objectives you would like to set for yourself to increase your contribution to the department. Confirm these objectives with your manager through e-mail as soon in the year as you can, so you can be sure you’re working toward the right goals. Save the e-mail, because you’ll want to take it with you to your next performance review.

If you work for yourself, set short-term performance objectives based on the type of projects you would like to do in the future. Make sure you are working toward goals that will advance and strengthen your career.

Examples of short-term objectives include the following:

- * Performance Objective #1: Complete a project using alternative training delivery methods such as computer-based training.
- * Performance Objective #2: Represent our team at the product release meetings.
- * Performance Objective #3: Strengthen our ties with Engineering by getting involved with the user interface design of a new product.

Step 5: Identify learning objectives

After you have established performance objectives, you are ready to identify learning objectives. Learning objectives are tools and skills you can learn to help you accomplish your performance objectives. The tool or skill need not be completely new to you; you may need to improve an ability you already have. The important point is that you choose learning objectives that move you in a particular direction. You don't just take classes because someone sends you a flyer in the mail—you take them to advance your career. For instance, if your performance objective is to create an *HTML Help* project, your learning objective might be to learn *RoboHTML* or more generally to learn how to design effective online help. You may be able to address multiple performance objectives with a few learning objectives.

When identifying learning objectives, you should attempt to choose objectives that are aligned with the goals and objectives of your company or department. Start by identifying one or two tools or skills you can learn to help you accomplish each performance objective. If the performance objective from your manager is vague, use your long-term objectives to make it more specific. For instance, in the example included in this article, my manager set this performance objective: "Complete a project using alternative training delivery methods such as computer-based training." I can combine that with my five-year objective to obtain "Learn to create computer-based training using *Macromedia Director*." The learning objective would be to "Learn to use *Macromedia Director*," which satisfies the requirements of my manager as well as my long-term objectives.

All of your learning objectives do not have to apply to immediate projects. As long as the tools and skills fit into your long-term objectives, you can use one or two of your learning objectives to prepare yourself for future projects. For instance, you may not be responsible for Web page development now, but you may have set a five-year objective to develop Web pages for your department. Setting a learning objective to learn Web design and FrontPage would be a good move. If you can create one learning objective that covers more than one performance objective, then you open up more room to pursue tools and skills for future projects. Also, if you do not need to learn anything for one or more of your short-term objectives, you may be able to focus on your long-term objectives. Figure 2 below shows

learning objectives that could be used to support performance objectives.

Once you determine your objectives, you can then start to implement your plan. The implementation process is described in Part 2 of this article, which will appear in the Summer 1999 issue of *The Independent Perspective*. ❖

This article was reprinted from the December 1998 issue of CommLink Online, the electronic version of the newsletter for the STC Atlanta Chapter, and with permission from the author.

Rob Houser is a founding partner of User First Services, Inc. (www.userfirst.net), which specializes in designing and creating user assistance. Rob is President of the STC Atlanta Chapter. You can reach him at rob@userfirst.net.

Targeted Learning Objective	Supports Performance Objective
Learn to use Macromedia Director.	#1: Complete a project using alternative training delivery methods such as computer-based training.
Learn more techniques for resolving conflict.	#2: Represent your team at the product release meetings.
Learn to create prototypes in Visual Basic.	#3: Strengthen our ties with development by getting involved with the user interface for a new product.
Learn more about Active X.	Long-term: Learn to extend the capabilities of HTML Help using Active X.

Figure 2. Learning objectives supporting performance objectives.

Independent The Perspective

Society for Technical Communication
c/o Thomas Barker
Department of English
Texas Tech University
Lubbock, TX 79409

Bulk Rate
U.S. Postage
PAID
Dallas, Texas
Permit No. 00910

CHECK IT OUT !

1998 CICSIG SURVEY
RESULTS, PART 2 —
EMPLOYMENT TYPES

AND

SPECIAL PULL-OUT
SECTION —
A GUIDE TO THE STC
CONFERENCE

INSIDE !

NEWS BRIEFS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

Wanted! Proofreaders/Copy Editors, Columnists, and Contributors

The new STC publishing year is just around the corner and we need to add some volunteers to *The Independent Perspective* staff. We can always use article contributions, so if you have ideas or experiences to share with the CICSIG membership, please send us your ideas. We'd love to hear them!

We are also still looking for another columnist, preferably in the marketing area. If you have some expertise in marketing your business, or can put

columns together by contacting other experts for information, we'd like you to join our staff. Other column ideas are also welcome.

And last, but certainly not least, we need help with proofreading and copy editing each issue. You will need to have access (usually on the weekends because that's how it always seems to go) to a fax machine and e-mail and can provide quick turn-arounds.

If you'd like to volunteer for any of these positions, please send an e-mail to kburch@dallas.net. ❖

Attention:

Columnists and Contributors

The copy deadline for the
Summer issue is **June 1**.