DocQment

Quality SIG Newsletter

Volume 5, Number 2
Spring, 1997

Look inside to...

Quality SIG Mission:

To help members learn more about quality processes and quality assessment to improve their technical communication and to share knowledge of these improved processes with other technical communicators worldwide.

Quality SIG Meeting on Sunday, May 11 in Toronto

Lori Fisher, Quality SIG manager

The annual Quality SIG meeting is the one chance each year for SIG members to get to meet each other and discuss topics of common interest face-to-face. This meeting will be fun and social, as well as informative! All Quality SIG members are encouraged to plan their travel arrangements so they can arrive in time for our meeting on Sunday, May 11 from 3:30 - 5pm in the Sheraton Hotel. Look for directions to our meeting room when you arrive at the Sheraton.

Topics for the meeting include updates from each of the Quality SIG subgroup leaders on their workgroups: Metrics, ISO, Processes and Techniques, and Electronic Communication. We will distribute copies of the Quality SIG bibliography at the meeting. The SIG manager will also lead a discussion on goals for the SIG in 1997, future directions for the SIG, and how we can work together to achieve these goals and directions.

We hope to meet as many of you as possible on Sunday!

Quality progression on Tuesday

Again this year, the Quality SIG is sponsoring a progression session on quality topics. This year's session is scheduled for Tuesday, May 13 from 2 - 3:30pm (session PD 7V). Each subgroup within the Quality SIG is sponsoring a discussion table, with additional topics of special interest to technical communicators. The topics have been selected based on their timeliness and practical value to a broad range of technical communicators.

The 90-minute progression session is structured into three half-hour rounds. During each round, seven topics will be presented simultaneously. (Each of the seven presenters gives the same topic three times, once for each round.) You can choose which of the seven topics you wish to participate in for each round. During a single round, the topic leader will present a ten-minute summary of key points, findings, or positions on their designated topic, followed by twenty minutes for discussion and questions within the topic group.

The seven topics are:

- Documentation and the Three P's of Quality for Software
- Measuring Document Quality: What Works and What Doesn't
- In-Process Quality Metrics: Measuring Before It Is Too Late
- How to Make it Happen: Quality Practices and Procedures
- Usability Testing in the Quality Process
- Quality on the Information Superhighway
- ISO/9000, Quality, and You

See "Toronto" on page 3

In the trenches

Adding value

To add value, developers of online Help need more than good writing skills.

If you're a technical writer developing context-sensitive, online Help for Windows software, then recent technology changes are going to affect your Help system, both the technical implementation and information design. However, just how these changes will affect your Help—and whether they're positive or negative—is up to you to determine. That's where a good technical writer can add value.

Here's my current situation. I work for an "in-house" software development group (read: limited resources compared to market-driven software companies). Our customers are "internal", working at company locations worldwide. We have a suite of Windows-based, 16-bit applications that we are re-releasing this year with two new applications. However, for several reasons, we will not be converting the 16-bit applications to 32 bit for this release. What does this mean for the Help system? It means we can't use the new version of WinHelp because our 16-bit applications can't call the 32-bit Help engine.

What does that mean for the Help design and implementation? Plenty. Most importantly, it means I can't count on most of the new WinHelp features such as the ability to search across Help files, a feature critical to my Help design. Does that mean I'm going to completely scrap

See "Trenches" on page 8

New News: our PIC is now a SIG!

Shirley Hancock, AP for Professional Interest Committees and Manager, PIC Advisory Committee

Since its beginning in 1983, the PIC program has become one of the hottest areas of the Society, providing members with forums for sharing information and questions on day-to-day work issues internationally, especially through PIC newsletters and presentations at the annual conferences. The PICs help us keep on the leading edge of where our profession is going and appeal both to new as well as seasoned professionals. Being part of a group of kindred spirits also provides a feeling of empathy and emotional support.

What's in a name?

However, many people don't understand why STC uses the term professional interest committee when special interest group (SIG) is understood and accepted in the greater business world and other professional organizations. STC has had a mixture of groups called PICs at the Society level and PICs or SIGs at the chapter level, with only a general sense of the groups' relationships.

Beginning immediately we will use the more widely understood and accepted title special interest group (SIG) for the Society-level program and encourage chapters to adopt the same name to signify the evolving alignment between the two tiers of the program. The Annual Conference in Toronto will have a number of events that make our name change visible, including the SIG Networking Lunch and individual SIG business meetings. In this article, I will only use the term SIG from this point forward to represent both the old and new program.

Currently, although many members would prefer a conceptually aligned program at the chapter and Society levels, the two tiers are completely separate, with only the beginnings of more cooperative efforts. The current structure is unclear and confusing to new as well as established STC members.

SIGs at both levels ultimately derive from enough member interest to create them, and SIGs at both levels ultimately depend on individual STC members to accomplish their activities. The widely dispersed locations of members in Society-level SIGs is one of these SIGs' greatest strengths, because of the diversity, as well as one of their greatest challenges. It's difficult to manage diversified groups across long distances, so the Society-level SIGs often become groups with many chapter members that are hungry for knowledge and shared ideas, and a few dedicated workers at the top who try to coordinate activities. Those who ultimately provide the input to be shared, however, are individual members.

Some chapters start local SIGs, but many chapters end up either without enough interested members in their chapter/region to start a SIG or without willing leaders. Likewise, many members don't have a chapter affiliation or live so far from a chapter that working with a Society-level program becomes the way to meet their special interests.

Two-tier plan approved

The STC Board has approved a conceptually unified, Society-wide SIG program with two recognized tiers: Chapter and Society level. This plan brings people with special interests together and encourages activity,

See "PIC name" on page 8

Documenting business processes

Don Lenk

Our semi-annual ISO 9000 audit is fast approaching, so we're reviewing all the process documentation in our logistics support organization to make sure it's up to date. In doing so, it occurred to me that besides satisfying the ISO audit requirements, there are good business reasons for documenting our processes and keeping those documents up to date.

Written processes help others understand what we do and help new employees learn the job. But most of all, documenting your processes will make you take a close look at how you produce your products. That ultimately affects the quality of your products and the efficiency with which you produce them. Documenting your processes becomes sort of a self-examination; you may be surprised what you learn.

You may find unnecessary steps, or a key action that is missing, or a better sequence, or some steps that can be done in parallel to save time. Sometimes documenting a process raises the question, "Why are we doing this, anyway?" The answer may very well be that it is duplicated elsewhere, or that the business no longer requires it. But more likely, the answer will be that the process is a good one and still is needed, but can be improved.

In the last year, we have found one process that is no longer needed (we don't do that work any more) and that several processes have changed because the nature of our business has changed (for example, from paper to electronic tech manuals). Some of our processes have been combined because of greater efficiencies and changes in direction for system architectures (for example, reliability, maintainability, and availability analyses are now part of the same process).

How to begin

OK, Mr. Process, I've decided to document my process. What now?

Step 1: Draw it. Use a visual device such as a flowchart to show the sequence of events. Draw it as you actually do the job today.

Step 2: Write it. Describe each block in the flowchart. Use the classic model of input-process-output for each block.

Step 3: Revise it. You'll probably see areas for improvement. Incorporate those changes into your process and it's description.

Step 4: Follow it. A process description is just so much fodder for the recycle bin if you aren't going to use it.

Step 5: Review it. On some regular schedule, haul that process document out of its file and read it. Remind yourself of the importance of each step and give yourself an opportunity to take a fresh look at what you do and why you do it.

Writing process

Some hints for writing and using process descriptions:

- Avoid too much detail. You may be tempted to describe every minute detail of your process, but unless it involves nuclear safety, excruciating detail is not necessary. Quit describing the process when you get to the level where anyone trained in the subject knows what to do without further instruction.
- Don't be too general. If you don't include enough detail, others won't be able to understand your process, and you won't examine its steps in enough detail to reveal any areas where it might be improved.

Some suggestions

OK, Mr. Contradiction, it shouldn't be too detailed, and it mustn't be too general; just

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"Toronto" from page 1

SIG networking luncheon on Wednesday

In addition to the annual Quality SIG meeting on Sunday and the quality progression on Tuesday, the Quality SIG is sponsoring several tables at the SIG Networking Luncheon on Wednesday, May 14 from noon to 2pm in Sheraton Hall. Come join other members of the SIG for lunch and open discussion on quality topics. A member of the Quality SIG will facilitate discussion at each of our tables.

Quality is everywhere!

Quality will be everywhere at the 1997 Annual Conference in Toronto. We hope to see you there!

Membership report

Mickie Ryan, Membership Manager

As of December 1996:

361 total members

7 new members joined from California, Florida, Iowa, Michigan, Utah, and Ontario, Canada.

As of January 1997:

366 total members

5 new members joined from California, Florida, Illinois, New Hampshire, and Rhode Island.

Improving picture quality with digital cameras

Ted Dennison

Thinking of getting a digital camera? Now might be the time to do it.

In the past two years I have had the opportunity to work with a digital camera that represented inexpensive state-of-the-art. My expectations were that I would be able to take a picture of my subject, load it into a connected PC, edit the image to meet my requirements and import it into my document. I expected to increase my response time and productivity with the little gem.

Unfortunately, I found that the process was much more complex. An image of 640 by 480 pixels didn't work well when I needed to include it in a paper document. I couldn't make out the legends on the subject, nor could I get good color rendition under normal "cool white" fluorescent lighting. Many times I had to resort to creating a "mosaic" of pictures that I stitched together with software. This got the job done, but it took much more time.

An image measuring 640 by 480 pixels is probably acceptable if you are going to view it on a monitor in an online application.

We're just beginning to see a new offering of digital cameras that appear to be significantly more useful and affordable. A very recent arrival, which I have tested under fluorescent, tungsten and outside lighting, is impressive.

The camera lists for under $900 and creates an image of 1024

See "Digital" on page 9

New SEC requirement for plain English in disclosures

William H. DuBay

A news release on September 9, 1966, from Washington D.C. stated that Bell Atlantic and NYNEX became the first companies to file Plain English disclosure documents as participants in the Securities and Exchange Commission's Plain English pilot program. The SEC program encourages companies to use simplified and readable English in disclosure documents for investors, in exchange for expedited staff review of their filings. The Commission also announced drafting a Plain English handbook and Rule 33-7183, which requires that prospectus have cover pages, summaries, and risk factors written in Plain English.

In April of 1966, when SEC asked for volunteers to design Plain English disclosure documents, Bell Atlantic and NYNEX quickly stepped forward in a joint effort. Their cover page and the summary of their joint proxy statement and prospectus are written in Plain English. Chairman Arthur Levitt, in a speech before the North American State Securities Administrators conference, said: "Although lawyers get most of the blame for creating unreadable documents, today they have earned my deep appreciation for enthusiastically leading the charge for Plain English. This is a victory for investors, for public companies, and for state and federal regulators-to say noting of the English language. As you examine the cover page and summary of the proxy statement and prospectus for Bell Atlantic and NYNEX, you should notice the following hallmarks of Plain English: everyday language, active voice, personal pronouns, shorter sentences, a 'questions and answers' format, a straightforward tone, more white space, and double columns of text that make it easier to read."

On January 19, 1997, an SEC news release announced the release of the draft of *A Plain English Handbook, How to Create Clear SEC Disclosure Documents.* The press release and draft are available online at: http://www.sec.gov/news/plaineng.html. Both the draft manual and the web site feature before-and-after examples of disclosure documents. You can order the hardcopy handbook by calling (202) 942-7040.

The attempt to define a controlled language for English goes back to C. K. Ogden's Basic English in 1936. In the 1960s and 70s, Caterpillar Tractor Company developed its own system of Fundamental English for technical manuals. In addition to a controlled vocabulary, this system uses simple sentence structures that both English-speaking and non-English speaking readers can easily understand.

Early on, other companies bought into Caterpillar's Fundamental English (also called Basic English, Controlled English, Simplified English, and International Service Language), including NCR, Eastman Kodak, and Sundstrand. With special training, non-native readers can actually read a manual in English. According to Caterpillar Tractor, readers can learn the language in 30 to 60 hours of class. Kodak found that it takes two to three month s for non-English-speaking service people to become proficient at its International Service Language.

If classes are not feasible, readers use a Controlled English dictionary. As another alternative, manuals first written in Controlled English are easily translated by human or machine translators because of the limited vocabulary and sentence structure. An important element in Plain English is the use of visuals wherever possible. The "New Look" standard adopted by the U.S. Department of Defense prescribes a one-page illustration opposite each page of Plain English text.

One of the most striking examples of the success of a controlled technical language is *Fannie Farmer's Boston Cooking School Cook Book* (1896) by Fannie Merritt Farmer (1875-1915). This book revolutionized cooking and became an enduring best seller in the U.S. It used standard procedures and measurements using ordinary household items

See "Plain English" on page 5

Musing on metrics

What do your customers want? Ask them!

Steven Jong

In previous columns I've said that if you give your customers what they need most (that is, their Critical Success Factors), you're doing quality work. So how do you know what they need most? Simple: ask them. Here's how.

At Digital Equipment Corporation in 1992 we administered a comprehensive documentation survey to a cross-section of our division's customers. Some of the questions were open-ended:

- What distracts you in the documentation?
- What do you like best in the documentation?
- What makes a good document?
- What would improve the quality of our documentation?

We recorded every comment from every customer, listing negative responses as positive (for example, if a customer said "I hate bad indexes," we recorded it as a vote for "good indexes"). We wound up with 111 statements about documentation needs.

Next we wrote the statements on Post-It notes and moved them around on a conference-room wall until we had 27 groups of related factors. This grouping is called an affinity diagram. Naturally, some groups had more entries than others; for example, there were fourteen statements about the value of examples, but only one calling for color documents.

Finally, we arranged the groups into a Pareto (or "80-20") chart, showing which groups accounted for the largest portion of customer comments. Since these comments came directly from our customers, we interpreted the groups as their current weighted list of CSFs.

What were the results? At that time, those customers of that company needed these things:

1. More examples
2. More illustrations
3. Technical organization tied with finding information quickly
5. Index
6. Conciseness tied with clarity

The survey technique isn't rocket science, and the results were no surprise. But we could say with some confidence that if we concentrated our efforts in these areas, we would improve the quality of our work; and, based on this survey, we did just that.

I have tried to qualify this survey carefully. Proper survey design takes careful planning, perhaps by a professional statistician. Even granting that this survey was statistically valid, the results are but one company's customers' needs at one time. It's a snapshot, likely to be different today. You might well get different answers from your customers. So ask them!

Next time: What is a metric?

Steven Jong is Documentation Group Leader at Lightbridge, Inc., in Waltham, Massachusetts.

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such as teaspoons, tablespoons, and cups.

In each recipe, Ms. Farmer first states the ingredients and the amounts required. Then she describes the procedure in standard language: "In a large bowl, mix flour, water, and yeast." Not a word too many or too few.

For more on the use of Plain English in technical manuals, see these articles in past issues of Technical Communication:

"Preparing Instruction Manuals for Non-English Readers," by Stacy Sanderli. Vol. 35, No. 2, p. 96.

"The Problems of Distorted English in Computer Documentation," by Peter Hunt and John Kirkman. Vol. 33, No. 3, p. 150.

"Simplified English in Maintenance Manuals," by Becky Gingras. Vol. 34, No. 1, p. 24.

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Measuring why people buy

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It doesn't matter how usable a product is if no one buys it. Good products can fail unless engineering, sales, and marketing have a common understanding of why people want to buy the product. Interface designers get feedback on the effectiveness of their work through usability testing—why not do something similar for the sales and marketing materials?

That's exactly what one of our clients did. The company believed they had a good product (an application development environment), but people who attended their sales presentation "didn't get it"—they walked away without any understanding of why they should care about the product. But if those same people met 1-on-1 with a sales representative, they did exhibit enthusiasm and an interest in buying. The company thought they were conveying the same message in both of these situations, but something in their sales presentation obviously wasn't working.

The survey

We used a survey to pinpoint the problem with the sales presentation. At a trade show, we interviewed people as they were leaving the presentation, and we wrote down their answers to some question.

This survey gave us three types of information:

Messages—what people had actually heard in the

See "Measuring" on page 8

Dreaming in color: print quality goes digital

Phil Brittenham

For those of us who produce short-run documentation (reports, administrative documents, white papers, etc.), the affordable use of color in our publications has remained an elusive dream. Recent developments such as the advent of digital color printing may revolutionize how our documents are printed and may make short runs of high-quality color feasible. At the same time, other digital technologies have transformed processes used in offset printing, not only speeding things up but increasing quality. These changes in printing technology may soon cause us to rethink what is reasonable in short-run documentation, particularly the use of color.

Traditional offset printing, with its cumbersome prepress processes (all the work that goes on before the actual printing), was just not designed for short runs, and especially not for short runs of color. In offset printing (to simplify grossly), a page is photographed, and the film image is exposed onto a light-sensitive metal plate, which is then manually placed on the press. For color images, the complexity of the process is multiplied many times. Given the time and expense of an offset job, many short runs end up being done on black-and-white copiers, even though it means sacrificing print quality.

By replacing expensive typesetting with economical desktop-publishing alternatives, publications groups streamlined their processes by bringing the work back into their departments and into their control. These electronic files made possible the remarkable digital innovations in the print industry. The integration of digital equipment into offset prepress work has streamlined the process for both color and black-and-white jobs. Previously, when a document was delivered to the printer, he was handed a bundle of pasted-up paper originals that included cut lines, smudges, crooked page numbers, and at least one printable thumb print. Now printers can produce printing materials directly from the customer's relatively pristine computer files. The printer can produce the film used to make printing plates from the electronic files or make printing plates directly from the electronic files, which considerably increases quality. This computer-to-plate technology (CTP) is coming on so strong and is so popular with print customers that you may encounter it very soon if you have not already. Some presses can even transfer the images to printing plates right on the press. The once arcane color separation process can now be done by the customer from scanned files, with some coordination with the printer. Even with the efficiency of these digital elements, offset printing of short runs of color is an expensive proposition, but the developments bear watching.

Color copiers and color laser printers put the price of short-run color well within reach and allow customization of documents with color to an extent not possible before. In fact, my company's institutional customers have produced mixed runs with a few volumes containing color copies for the executives and the rest in black and white for everyone else, a level of customization that is very unlikely with offset printing. One nice feature of a color copier is that you can slap an image on the glass and produce an acceptable copy, or you can scan it and manipulate the colors electronically for even truer colors. Although the results can be impressive, the output is too slow for more than a few copies, and the quality may not be acceptable for more discriminating customers. Of course, that can change as well.

Another very intriguing option that is developing rapidly is color digital printing. For the most part, this involves high-end copy machines that use basically the same technology as the color copiers with which you may be familiar. More like offset printing presses, though, they offer larger paper sizes and run faster, sometimes printing both sides of a sheet at the same time. Although they may not yet be able to produce the highest quality of color printing, their output is very impressive, and can be even more impressive if you work around their limitations. The process is

See "Color" on page 7

"Color", from page 6

remarkably spare. The designer sends an electronic file to the print shop where it is received and manipulated electronically. When it is ready to be printed, the file is sent directly to the press. An interesting option is the ability of some of these presses to cut material out of a file and insert pre-determined replacements without breaking the press run. And, once the kinks are worked out, files can be sent electronically anywhere in the world for printing. With lower prepress and set-up costs and faster turnaround times, there will be less reason to print more copies than are needed immediately, giving us the advantage of a just-in-time documentation inventory.

The cumulative effect of all these technologies is a degree of customization and flexibility in printed documents that has not previously been possible. We can customize documents to keep prices down for printed documentation and to serve our readers better. For example, manuals often include material for all levels of users so that we get the savings of one big print job instead of the extra costs of four or five little ones. As a result, the reader gets a clunky manual, and the producer of the manual gets to pay for a lot of pages that the reader will never use. As shorter runs become more cost-effective, we may realize some savings by aiming our publications more directly at the readers' actual needs, and we may get to liven up our documents with a little color. Warehousing costs will also be cut with print runs that parallel demand.

I cannot predict how well paper documents will compete with electronic documentation in the future, especially the extensive use of color and the potential for customization that electronic documentation provides. However, it seems likely that paper manuals will be highly customized for very particular purposes and printed in small quantities. In the scenario above and many others that we could fashion, short-run digital color printing and other digital printing technologies will likely be important factors. It seems prudent, in any case, to keep an eye on these technologies as they mature because they will continue to provide new capabilities that may affect how we do our documentation.

Of course, these processes are more complex than my brief outline of the various technology options indicates, and there is a raft of new acronyms to master. To learn more about them, I highly recommend Agfa's introductory publications, *An Introduction to Digital Color Printing* and the four volumes in the Digital Color Prepress series. They are about thirty pages each and are extensively illustrated with graphics that really help to get the tough concepts across visually. Although intended for graphics arts professionals, there is a lot in these books for writers and editors to think about and some things that we can gratefully let someone else worry about. Check out or order these volumes online at //www.agfahome.com/books/pubs.html. *Electronic Publishing*, from PennWell Publishing Co., is a magazine for prepress professionals, but it gives a good idea of industry trends and available hardware.

Phil Brittenham manages long-distance documentation projects for Tech Reps, Inc., a publications contracting firm in Albuquerque, NM.

Visit the Quality SIG Web site at http://stc.org/pics/quality

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what do you suggest?

Try a layered approach. Three levels of documentation should be enough to meet the needs of any audience, progressing from an overview to specific task instructions. For example, my technical manual development process is described at the top level in six phases: Plan, Outline, Write, Produce, Reproduce, and Distribute. The next layer expands the process to 35 steps which correlate to the six phases. The most detailed layer includes work instructions, checklists, and forms which support the process.

Be willing to submit your process to objective examination by yourself and your peers. You'll have a more effective, efficient process for your efforts.

Be willing to bend, but not break, your process. Some projects may demand that you skip steps, change their order, or do in parallel what should be done sequentially. When this happens (and it will) use your process document to examine the risks and benefits involved. If you find that you bend your process often, it may be a clue that the process needs to be changed.

Don Lenk is an Advisory Information Developer with Lockheed Martin Federal Systems. His duties include documenting logistics support processes for ISO-9001 compliance.

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presentation, and what was important to them

Perceptions—their impressions of the products, and how they posit-ioned this product compared to others they were familiar with

Background—information about their current working environment

If someone had an interesting answer, we asked them to elaborate, but we only spent a few minutes with each person. Out of 200 people who sat through the demo, we talked to 30 of them—enough to see the patterns. As compensation, we gave each interviewee a $7.50 gift certificate to a bookseller at the show.

Missing messages

Before the survey, our assessment had been, "The presentation audience doesn't get it." But we found out otherwise. They did "get it"; they were just getting a different "it." We learned that the messages that buyers most wanted to hear were missing from the presentation. The product offered the solutions the buyers wanted, but the demo glossed over them.

We found that buyers actually didn't care that much about some of the highly-touted capabilities of the product, but they did share a common interest in finding solutions to a certain kind of problem. Prospective buyers got excited about the product once they knew it did the things they wanted most. We also learned that some aspects of the product that we took for granted impressed people as being unique and important.

We were surprised to find that most people didn't know much about the competing products. Positioning in the marketing

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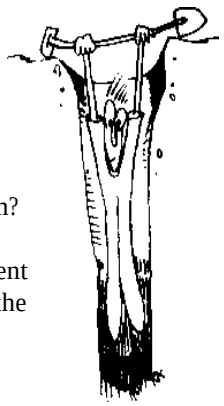
"Trenches", from page 2

my design? No way. We expect to convert the 16 bit applications to 32-bit shortly after we release the applications with their new functionality. Then I'll be able to easily implement my information design as planned. For now, we've come up with some alternatives that won't cause us much extra work, and more importantly, won't cause too much inconvenience for the users.



Who told me, the team technical writer, that this would be a problem? No one. They were issues I was able to identify and resolve by pro-actively keeping up with technology changes, plans of the development team, and how they would affect the design and implementation of the Help. For any good technical writer developing online Help for software, this is a key way to add value.

Submitted by a member-at-large of the Quality SIG. Q

"PIC name", from page 2

growth, diversity, synergy, and sharing while having fun and being creative. STC members may choose to join either a chapter SIG, a Society SIG, or both. Chapter SIG members and programs are encouraged to become working partners with the Society-level programs. The Society-level programs gain input of ideas and active volunteers from the chapter level. The chapter level keeps its independence, without added bureaucracy, and the strength of face-to-face, personal contacts among members while gaining status from being part of a larger whole.

A visibly two-tiered program also gives members another avenue for developing personal leadership skills and moving up within the Society. This is already happening informally in some cases. A number of managers and others in Society-level SIG leadership positions have risen from leadership in a chapter SIG. Likewise, SIG members choosing to join both tiers can expand their circles of knowledge and influence: self, chapter, region, nation, and international (both inside and outside of STC).

Vision

We're excited about the direction in which STC's Special Interest Groups are evolving. The following is a vision statement for the Society's new, two-tiered SIG program. Each SIG:

- Offers members a basic understanding of the special interest area and its effect on their roles as technical communicators.
- Encourages member-to-member dialog as well as dialog with other professional organizations to broaden the range of members' technical knowledge.
- Offers members a platform from which to demonstrate and share information, especially with a view to education.
- Keeps members abreast of new developments in the special interest area.

The SIGs need to maintain the vitality and dynamism that have become their hallmark. Thus, this evolution is not a dramatically new organization. Instead, the change conceptually unifies, and hence strengthens, the current PIC program at both the Society and chapter levels.

Shirley Hancock manages the Publications Department at Federal Express in Memphis, TN. She manages overall coordination of SIGs at the society level of STC. Q

"Measuring", from page 8
material was a waste in this case—all it did was alert potential buyers to the fact that there were competitors!

Looking for patterns

From the survey responses, we collected a bunch of phrase like "visual diagrams" and "fast code generation." We sorted these into groups and came up with a name for each group. This allowed us to correlate the qualitative responses with other factors. For instance, the group called "Quality" showed a correlation with "Competition" — people who cared the most about the competitors' products. This analysis also helped us identify separate user population that had different needs.

Working with real data

This was the first time these marketing people actually had data (as opposed to opinions) on the effectiveness of their presentations. After this exercise, they knew which product features were key to sales and how to convey them. They also learned how potential buyers saw the product in relation to the competitors, and knew what things turned customers off.

Responding to the feedback

The goal of the sales presentation was to motivate attendees to take the next step in the sales process, either by signing up for an evaluation copy or talking with a sales representative. In response to the feedback from the first day's surveys, the company changed the presentation to spend more time on the concepts that were of interest to prospective buyers.

We didn't measure numbers of evaluation copies or the number of conversations before the survey, so it was hard to quantify the effects of changing the presentation (this something we could do differently next time). However, we noticed that more people stayed until the end, and they tended to ask more detailed question which indicated their interest. Afterward, more of them were willing to talk with the sales representatives.Q

Quality at the Annual Conference!

Look for the following sessions at the Annual Conference in Toronto.

PD 5E Conducting Peer Reviews: The Key to Quality in Scientific Communication

TR 6I Testing Indexes for Quality & Usability

PD 5K STC's International Technical Publications Competition: What It Can Teach Us About Award-Winning Quality

MG 6P Managing and Measuring Quality Development Processes

PD 7V STC Quality PIC Progression: What Technical Communicators Want to Know

"Digital", from page 4
by 762 pixels. With this resolution, images appear clean and sharp when printed by a laser printer with 300 dpi resolution or better. Colors, when exposure is in a clean light (don't mix tungsten and fluorescent), are good quality with little noticeable shift in hue. Of course, brightness and contrast can be modified, so they're not as critical. I have been able to create acceptable images and import them into my documents in a matter of minutes.

I was impressed with the camera's ease of use. Loading the software and installing the camera were a snap. The software provides a view of the subject as seen through the camera lens, so there's no parallax when taking a closeup shot. Since exposure and focus are automatic, taking the picture is a no-brainer. Storing the image in one of several standard formats makes it easy to use your favorite editing application.

One caution, though. I still don't get the same result as scanning a film image at 600 dpi. This capability, with a digital camera, is still quite expensive and difficult to justify for most desktop publishing applications.

*Ted is the metrics subgroup leader for the Quality PIC. He is the team leader at Utah Scientific in Salt Lake City.*Q

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