

# DocQment

Quality SIG Newsletter



Volume 5, Number 3  
Summer, 1997

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### *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 kicks off new STC year

*Lori Fisher, manager, Quality SIG*

A new STC year begins each July, and the Quality SIG is already off to a good start for the 1997-1998 year. If you haven't yet found a way to contribute your one hour of time to the SIG, get in touch with any of us on the newsletter staff or any subgroup leader and we can get you involved!

### **New LISTSERV discussion group**

One of our newest endeavors is an Internet discussion group, or LISTSERV, for our Quality SIG members. If you got this newsletter, you are a member of the SIG and therefore eligible to subscribe to the LISTSERV. To subscribe, you need to have access to an Internet email service. Send an email note to [majordomo@stc.org](mailto:majordomo@stc.org). On the first line of the text of your note, enter the following text: `subscribe stcqsig-l`. Every time someone posts a message to the discussion group, you will get an email with a copy of that posting. You can post a message by sending your comments or questions in an email note addressed to [stcqsig-l@stc.org](mailto:stcqsig-l@stc.org). We encourage you to ask questions about quality, about SIG activities, about resources to learn more about ISO or metrics, and to share any great resources you know about with other members. Right now I am administering the LISTSERV myself, but I would love to have a volunteer take this over for me. It is not time-consuming, but does require occasional monitoring — at most 20 minutes per week. Please call or email me if you are willing to help with this and I can tell you more about what is involved.

### **SIG Web page**

Have you looked at our web page on the STC Internet site yet? If not, come visit us there. The URL is <http://stc.org/pics/quality>, or you can navigate to us from the STC Home Page at <http://stc.org>. The site contains the Quality Reference compiled by Don Lenk in our SIG, a description of the various work groups within the SIG, and other useful information about quality. We are building content, and looking for any contributions you might have that we could share with others using the web page. Let us know what you would like to see on the web page in the future. Also let us know if you are interested in owning one of the pages on the web site, keeping it updated, adding new content from members, and so on. We thank Laurie Pritchard and Mary Ann Eiler who are actively assisting our webmaster, Don Lenk, in creating and maintaining our site.

### **New volunteers**

For the new 1997-1998 STC year, we have a new membership manager! Welcome to Robbie Rupel of Chesterfield, Missouri who will now be mailing out welcome packages to all new members and tracking our membership statistics. We also have several new liaisons to other SIG groups, who monitor the activities of related SIGs and report on items of interest to our Quality SIG members. The current liaisons are: Sheila Rainford, Mary Ann Campbell, Mary Durlak, Debbie Malone, Jean Femia, Julia Land, Bonnie Graham, Peg Rickard, Catherine Dinno, Larry Arnold, LeeAnne Logan, and

*See "SIG update" on page 5*

## On Toronto...

*Jacqueline Morris*

The crowds gathered with enthusiasm as the 44th Annual STC Conference began. People from around the world met once again to leech knowledge from their fellow technical communicators. Although I've been a member of STC for years, this was my first conference—wow! The diversity and quality of the sessions offered surpassed any of my expectations. From publishing books to discovering the power of color, there was something for everyone. I learned that no matter how long you have been a communicator, there is always something to learn, especially at such an expertly run conference. If your ears were open, learning experiences were everywhere: in each of the 100+ sessions, sitting in the hotel lobby, in elevators, on the tour buses, walking to and from sessions, and at the restaurants. Everyone was talking about the sessions they went to and what they learned. It was great! Learning or hearing something new could not be avoided even if you tried your hardest. So if you think you know everything there is to know, go to next year's STC conference: keep your eyes and ears open and you just might rethink that.

*Jacqueline Morris is a Technical Communications Specialist at Huntsman Corporation responsible for compliance, quality, administrative and corporate publications. She has been writing and illustrating for the last 15 years.*

## Ediots and the quality of their resumes

*Phil Brittenham*

Everyone in publications management has complaints about the poor quality of some resumes that they review, and most of these complaints involve carelessness, like the applicant who referred to himself as an experienced Ediot. Working for a contracting house, I deal with resumes as a marketing tool, and I also receive resumes from potential employees and independent contractors. Computers are great tools for job hunters, but when used thoughtlessly, they add to the already considerable list of potential resume pitfalls. Here are few I have collected.

- Nothing is more curious than a virtually unreadable resume in 6-point courier type with no margins. The people who produce these monstrosities usually profess to have years of desktop design expertise. If so, shouldn't one expect to see some indication of those skills displayed in the resume?
- References to samples of a writer's work on the web are very effective—when the sites are actually there. A surprising number of writers direct employers to inactive sites. If you are a student, you should know that your alma mater is going to erase every trace of your existence and your web page the second you graduate. It is also wise to see what different browsers do to the site.
- Cover letters are often the rope that hangs the writer. If a writer is shaky on grammar, the more he writes, the greater the chances of doing himself harm. Running a spell check on the cover letter and the resume is so obvious a step for a minimally prudent person that I am amazed how many resumes contain simple spelling errors. (The second "i" in "Liaison" is a real career killer.)
- Applicants composing cover letters on computers often forget the formalities of a business letter. A cover letter is a formal business letter—it's not a memo and it's not E-mail, in which anything goes.
- A listing of computer capabilities is essential these days. However, it is most useful when applicants identify those softwares in which they are truly proficient. Shaking the box a couple of times doesn't make a person expert in any software. Getting hired on the basis of extravagant claims is not to the benefit of the employer or employee.
- Samples are great, and I don't mind getting them with a resume. However, the flashy desktop publications that people choose to show are rarely individual efforts. The question I always ask is, "What did you do?" After hearing the answer to that question, I am sometimes more interested in talking to the writer's editor or word processor, but the samples are meaningless until the applicant's contribution is defined.
- Online work is best evaluated on line, but it is rather presumptuous when a writer simply assumes that everyone has the right software, the correct version, and the compatible equipment to view that work. The applicant shows sensitivity by checking in advance of presenting a disk for evaluation. Although it hasn't happened yet, I will undoubtedly be impressed when a writer brings a laptop to the interview and is ready to demonstrate her online work.
- Although it is convenient, faxing puts a very unattractive copy of the resume in the employer's hands. If making a good impression is important, mail the employer a clean original. At the very least, it makes a good excuse to follow up with the employer.
- The rather narrow focus of writing computer-related documentation seems to pigeon-hole writers quicker than most writers think possible, and writers applying outside such a specialty should be aware of that effect and explain their desire to make a transition.

*See "Resume" on page 3*

## References on usability

David Robbins

There's a growing wealth of usability information regarding user interface and document design in the literature and on the web. I recently spent some fruitful time browsing several sites listed by Chauncey Wilson of WilDesign Consulting (Chaunsee@aol.com) in the latest edition of the Usability SIG newsletter. Check out these sites from Chauncey, whom I've quoted here:

- Human Computer Interaction at IBM

<http://www.ibm.com/ibm/hci/>

This web site has guidelines on web and application design and examples of design ideas. The web design guidelines are written from a process perspective. There is also a section on designing 3-D environments and demos and downloads of Web backgrounds, toolbar icons, and other goodies.

- The Usability Process in Computer Science:

<http://www.sct.edu/sct/departments/cs/classes/cs610/usabincs.html>

This article, written by Richard Halstead-Nussloch, provides a succinct example of the basic information needed for a usability plan. The author describes abstract information on usability goals and testing plans, and then gives a practical example.

- Yale C/AIM Web Style Guide

<http://info.med.yale.edu/caim/manual/contents.html>

This is a revised version of an excellent style guide on Web design. I would highly recommend this document for people designing or testing Web sites.

- Digital Library Design for Usability

<http://www.csdl.tamu.edu/DL94/paper/kling.html>

This site contains a research paper that deals with the usability of digital libraries. The paper discusses high-level issues of "organizational usability" as well as detailed system usability.

- Usability Characteristics

[http://www.cc.gatech.edu/computing/classes/cs6751\\_94\\_fall/group1/chars.html](http://www.cc.gatech.edu/computing/classes/cs6751_94_fall/group1/chars.html)

This web site contains descriptions of usability attributes as they apply to electronic books. There are tips on how to measure each usability attribute.

Chauncey's list of Web sites is much longer. He also produced a list of new books. My first choice (there are many good ones) would be "Standards for Online Communication: Publishing Information for the Internet, World Wide Web Systems, and Corporate Intranets," by Hackos and Stevens (Wiley: New York, 1997). Chauncey notes that the authors "have pulled together a set of critical guidelines for developing modern information systems...often overlooked by companies rushing to get on the Web...The book covers three main topics: analyzing information needs (something often neglected), designing online systems, and implementing designs."

*Hats off to Chauncey and thanks to the editor of "Usability Interface," the newsletter of the STC Usability SIG, for permission to reproduce the information.*

*David Robbins is a Product Information Specialist for Unisys Corporation in Plymouth, Michigan.* 

*"Resume" from page 2*

- A number of writers post their names or resumes to job banks on the web and then forget about them. A year later, they act quite offended when someone requests their resume or some information about them, seemingly (to them) out of the blue. One hopes that they are happy in their employment because getting nasty with potential employers over a situation they caused is bad form.

Resumes and cover letters may be the most important documents that a writer produces. If the writer is slipshod in handling his or her own work, I have to wonder what sort of quality I can expect from the person as an employee. With the features available in most word processing programs, I find that quality expectations are higher, not lower.

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

## To the editor

To: Lori Fisher

Subject: Letter to the Editors  
of *DocQment*

26 June 1997

The Editors, *DocQment*:

In the Spring 1997 issue of *DocQment*, Don Lenk wrote an article on documenting business processes. The article includes a five-step process on process documentation. Step 1 says "Draw it."

It is interesting that Mr Lenk includes a process and in it advises us to draw our processes, but did not include a drawing of the very process he suggests.

This Don Lenk character should get his act together and follow his own advice.

Sincerely, Don Lenk Lockheed  
Martin Federal Systems,  
Manassas VA Phone: (703)  
367-4517 E-mail:  
don.lenk@lmco.com

*We appreciate Don Lenk's honesty and humor in reporting that he did not include a drawing of his process. We have all haphazardly not followed our own processes from time to time. The editors of DocQment will, in the future, ensure that when a process is presented and a graphic is needed to help explain it, one will be included. Thank you Don. The editors.* ☺

## Membership Report

363 total member in June

8 new members this month

Welcome to our new membership manager, Robbie Rupel! ☺

## BookQueue



### Need a book on TQM training?

*Quality Games for Trainers: 101 Playful Lessons in Quality and Continuous Improvement*

by **Marlene Caroselli McGraw-Hill, 1996. ISBN 0-07-011503-6 (paperback) or 0-07-011502-8 (looseleaf), 283 pages**

*Reviewed by Mary A. Campbell*

Marlene Caroselli, Ed.D., is a professional trainer who serves as Director of the Center for Professional Development in Rochester, New York. This book contains games to supplement Total Quality Management training. Games, as defined by Caroselli in the preface, are "short, interactive, fast-paced activities with few restrictions on their sequence or use. . . . The activities here are more like icebreakers, warm-ups, brainteasers, fillers, quizzes, self-assessments, etc."

Quality Games provides several games for each of 12 broad categories of quality management. Each section contains innovative ideas and materials; however some topics are particularly relevant for technical communicators:

- Processes
- Roles Quality Advocates Play
- The Power of Teamwork
- Problem-Solving Tools
- Benchmarking
- Reengineering, Reinventing, Redefining

In addition to the games, each section contains a short introduction, overviews of each topic, transparencies, and handouts. For every activity, Caroselli lists the objectives and the time and materials required. She also includes a short lecture, steps to follow, and discussion questions.

This book is a valuable resource for full-time trainers and for those who need activities for an occasional class, meeting, or presentation.

### Thinking about the Internet?

*Silicon Snake Oil: Second Thoughts on the Information Highway*  
by **Clifford Stoll,**

*Reviewed by Dee Ullrich*

*Reprinted with permission from the June 1997 issue of "Q-TIPS", newsletter of the West Houston Chapter of the Society for Software Quality. Submitted by Julia Land, one of our liaisons within the Quality SIG.*

*Second Thoughts on the Information Highway* is the subtitle of *Silicon Snake Oil*, a new book from Clifford Stoll in which he questions our embrace of the information superhighway. Stoll is no technophobe resisting the modern age. He is an astronomer and computer jock who chronicled his track down of the Hamburg hacker in *The Cuckoo's Egg*. I was intrigued to see what he had to say about society being carried away by the Internet.

The book is both entertaining and thought-provoking. He makes some valid points about the deficiencies in substituting chat rooms and email for real face-to-face interpersonal relationships. He talks about the tools, how user unfriendly they can be, and how we often spend much more time trying to figure out how to do something with our fancy tools than it would take us to do it the old-fashioned way.

Computers and the Internet are touted for their usefulness in education. But neither can motivate students like a motivated teacher or fire up an interest in learning the way

*See "Books" on page 6*

## Musing on metrics

### What is a metric?

Steven Jong

There's no getting around it: quality must be measured. It's not enough to say "We have good quality"—we have to measure how good it is. If I'm going to tout documentation metrics, I must define what a metric is and describe how to obtain it.

According to the Japanese quality expert Kaoru Ishikawa, a metric is a standard of measurement. It must be well-defined, so we know exactly what it means. A metric has a range, a meaningful domain, and a known slope (that is, we understand the shape of the curve). It is measurable by raw numbers, not by percentages. (This is so successive measurements can be combined.) It must be reproducible, and hopefully objective. It should correspond to something important—a Critical Success Factor (CSF) or a process milestone. Finally, a metric should be easily obtained or well worth the effort to obtain.

What does all this mean? A simple example is typos per page. The range is zero (no typos on the page) to infinity (hopefully not); the domain is the lower part of the range; the slope is negative (bigger numbers are worse). It's objective and, I think, important.

Metrics are either evaluative, measuring observed quality, or predictive, measuring anticipated quality. I think predictive metrics are the more valuable; they tell you beforehand if a document will be perceived as good.

You can derive documentation metrics from basic research, CSFs, customer satisfaction surveys, process analysis, and published metrics. Metrics can measure products (how many pages, typos per page) or processes (elapsed days to complete, project billable hours).

Here are other good metrics to consider. With a clever definition of "page," they work equally well for printed and online products:

- Exhibits (figures, tables, examples) per page
- Signposts (headings, labels) per page
- Index entries per page, cross-references per page
- Glossary entries per book, readability, active-voice sentences per sentence
- Defects per page

None of these metrics are perfect. Individually they're not important, but collectively, I think they're persuasive.

Granted, most people think this is ridiculous. It looks too simple to them, and they're uncomfortable being measured. But these are product metrics, not people metrics. And measurement is the only way to compare dissimilar documents, do competitive analysis, or assess the quality of your own work. I don't suggest that these are the best or most pertinent metrics. Do you have better ideas? I'd love to hear about them!

Next time: The great readability-index debate

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

*"SIG update" from page 1*

Jacqueline Morris. We thank all these volunteers!

### DocQment wins an STC award

DocQment has come a long way in a short time with help from many of you who contribute articles and columns. Steve Jong has been contributing his column for the past year now, and Mary Ann Campbell has recently volunteered to coordinate regular book reviews. Several other members have been reliable contributors of content. Richard Colvin, the man who makes it all possible by single-handedly producing this newsletter every quarter, continues to do an outstanding job with the design and format of the newsletter. All of you should be very proud that this work was recognized in the 1997 STC Publications Competition with an award of Achievement in the Chapter Newsletter category. Congratulations to all of you!!! We are very proud of this award.

If you would like to be a part of this award-winning effort, contact me about how to contribute articles, reviews, or columns. We especially need someone to coordinate "In the Trenches" stories each quarter.

### Work Groups Continue to Need You!

Our work group leaders are all continuing on for the 1997-1998 year, and look forward to increased participation from members. As a reminder, the work groups are: ISO 9000 led by Ralph Robinson, Quality Metrics led by Ted Dennison, References and Resources led by Don Lenk, and Electronic Communication also led by Don. If you have an interest in contributing to projects in these

*See "SIG update" on page 7*

*"Books" from page 4*

a human mentor can. What about the Library of Congress online? It's only an index; you have to physically visit the Library to read anything you find; no volumes ever leave the building.

The Internet is totally unregulated; anyone can post anything without consequence for libel or falsehood. Because it is easy to broadcast messages to many users, many users find their mailboxes clogged with unwanted messages. And these messages don't come in the kind of envelopes that advertise "junk mail" the way that physical mail does. The network gets overloaded, messages get lost, those with a real reason to know get locked out because everyone in the world has access. Stoll cites a case of astronomical data from a space probe; he couldn't get the data he needed to process because the curiosity seekers had the network overloaded.

Stoll cites example after example of us losing our way in our exploration and use of the information highway. The Internet has its place, but we should keep our perspective about how to use it. His sense of humor shows through all along way. You will be entertained, and you will often stop to consider the point he is making and find yourself agreeing.

*Dee Ullrich is a member of both STC and of SSQ.*

## What is data quality and where does it begin?

*Mary Ann Eiler, PhD*

As technical communicators, we may be all too well familiar with a poorly designed software or systems interface (e.g., those ugly, "noisy" crowd screens!) that burdens the documentation for coherence and usability. Increasingly, however, technical communicators, as part of data management teams, are being called upon to plan for quality at the data level. For example, we must assure that data from legacy systems or multiple domains are consistently defined and formatted for use throughout the corporate enterprise in changed or new technological environments. Further, it is becoming our job to design readable data dictionaries with standardized nomenclature and data values for both internal and external client use.

As an Operations Manager responsible for tracking data quality in a migration from mainframe to client-server/relational database environment, I've come to realize the need not only for standard data definitions but for data conformity to business rules as well. As a technical writer it is also my job to design data edits as part of input criteria for the development or maintenance of databases and to insure semantic integrity in the statement of both data values and their codes.

My responsibilities include making clear distinctions among:

- data that is not collected correctly
- data that is collected correctly but not stored correctly
- data that is collected and stored correctly but not reported correctly

Here are some typical data problems I encounter on a regular basis:

- invalid values (e.g., mis-reported codes)
- incomplete or missing data (e.g., blank names or addresses)
- lack of referential integrity
- duplication of records

Sounds complicated and "thorny"? Yes, the nature of data is that it is messy, not unlike the data a linguist collects and categorizes. In my second role as an instructor in a technical communications program at the university level, I also realize the increasing need for students to understand how total quality data management works and for technical communication courses to "wed" the processes and procedures for data quality with strategic business decision making.

*Mary Ann Eiler teaches in the Technical Communication and Information Design Program at the Illinois Institute of Technology, Chicago, Illinois. You can reach her at [maeiler@compuserve.com](mailto:maeiler@compuserve.com).*

### Reminders

**Send your newsletter contributions by September 1, 1997.**

**Sign up for the Quality SIG LISTSERV! Send an email to [majordomo@stc.org](mailto:majordomo@stc.org). The first line of your email must read "Subscribe stcsig-l". After you sign up, you can post comments or questions in an email addressed to [stcsig-l@stc.org](mailto:stcsig-l@stc.org).**

**If you would like to submit a book review, contact Mary Ann Campbell at [Mary-Ann.Campbell@compaq.com](mailto:Mary-Ann.Campbell@compaq.com).**

## In the trenches

### I Thought YOU had the quality process

Bonni Graham

"It's OK, just compile and give us what you have so far."

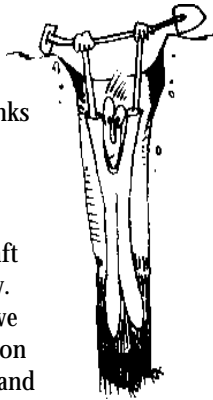
As soon as I agreed, I knew it was a mistake. We had completed the first draft development of an online help file for a client. To close a sale, the client had asked for an "emergency preview copy." We were in the middle of testing and QA on the file, but I agreed to compile right then and deliver what we had completed so far.

I warned the client that we had not finished our QA, and carefully explained that the draft I was providing was very definitely "in progress" and not really ready for delivery. He assured me he understood, but that he really needed the help file right away, in whatever condition it was in.

I'm sure it comes as no surprise that I had an angry client on the phone the next day, demanding to know why he had received a "substandard" file from me. I reminded him of our conversation, and he cut me off, declaring, "I don't care; I want those errors fixed NOW!" In the end, the entire project was delayed three days because I agreed to deliver a file too early.

What did I learn from this?

1. To build quality in, rather than inspecting it in. Now, each day before we go home, each of my employees spends the last hour of his or her day reviewing what was written that day. We spell-check, re-read, print and view the layout of, and test the links in the chapters or topics we just finished. This way, when the client demands an interim draft, what we deliver is tested and proofed even if the information is not yet complete.
2. To explain, in writing, just what is being delivered with each draft and what has and has not been done to the draft before delivery. We've created a series of checklists, one for each type of draft we deliver, and these checklists accompany the draft. For any item on the checklist that we have not completed, we provide a reason, and ask the client to sign off on and return the checklist. That way, no one can claim he or she didn't know or didn't agree to an interim, "emergency" draft.



These two simple ideas make sure that we deliver the highest quality material as quickly as possible. My employees are happier, even though this costs them extra effort, because they know what they've done is good. My clients are happier, even though they have to take responsibility for their own demands, because they know they're getting something they can safely show to their clients. And I'm happier, even though I have to manage this process, because I haven't had to take a preventable QA-related call in nine months. Un-preventable QA-related calls? Now that's a different story...

*Bonni Graham owns and operates Manual Labour, an award-winning full-service technical documentation provider in San Diego, CA.*

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areas, contact me or one of the group leaders. We think we could complete some interesting projects this year that would have great value for STC members at large, but we will need interested participants to make this happen. Come be a part of these activities!

#### Are You Visually Gifted? We're Looking for You!

One last "opportunity" to mention. I'd like to create a brochure this year that gives a brief overview of the Quality SIG and its activities. I need to work with someone to design such a brochure and create an interesting visual layout. If you would be willing to work with me on this and have some graphic design skills, please contact me!

#### Looking Forward to a Great Year Together

I'm looking forward to another great year together as Quality SIG members. I look forward to seeing your comments and questions on the LISTSERV, and to working with many of you on the newsletter, web page, work groups, or brochure. Happy New Year!

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

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**Next submission deadline: October 1, 1997**

# DocQment

Quality SIG Newsletter

We welcome articles or features for "BookQueue," "What's Hot," or "In the Trenches." Feature contributions should be 250 words or less. Articles should be 400 words or less. Email or phone the *DocQment* editor, Lori Fisher, if you want to review your topic before submitting an article or request style guidelines.

Submit your contributions at any time during the year to the *DocQment* editor. We prefer ASCII text via email. You can also mail us a 3½" PC- or Macintosh-formatted diskette with ASCII text, Word or RTF files (please mark format and application version number clearly on diskette, and include your phone number and name.) If you want the diskette returned, include a self-addressed, stamped envelope. All submissions will be edited for length, clarity, and appropriateness. Include the word count with your submission.

You may reprint original material appearing in *DocQment*, as long as you acknowledge the source and send us a copy of the publication containing the reprint.

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