

## Exclusive interview with Lori Fisher and Ralph Robinson

*Sophia Marx, Senior Member, Silicon Valley Chapter*

I met with our incoming and outgoing Quality SIG Managers, Ralph Robinson and Lori Fisher, respectively, via email and got them to answer some probing questions on their work with the Quality SIG. I hope you find this interview stimulating. Now for the first time ever, here are the answers to those burning questions you've had about Lori and Ralph.

**Lori Fisher**, *outgoing Quality SIG Manager, gregarious and hardworking, yet always has time to have fun.*

**Q:** *What is your background in Quality? What do you do? Tell us a little about yourself?*

**A:** I have an M.A. degree in Expository Writing from University of Iowa and an undergraduate minor in Management. I have worked at IBM since 1983 as a writer, team lead, manager and now middle manager. I currently manage Data Management User Technology, an organization of information developers, human factors engineers, graphic designers, and production staff working on data management software products. I teach two core courses in a certificate program in Managing the Development of Technical Information at the University of California Santa Cruz Extension. I am currently serving a two-year term on the STC Nominating Committee, and was named an Associate Fellow of the STC in 1998.

**Q:** *How long have you been Quality SIG Manager?*

**A:** I took this on jointly with Shirley Hancock in 1995, and then fulltime since the 1996 STC year.

**Q:** *As outgoing Quality SIG Manager, how do you feel about not having this "job" any longer?*

**A:** I have very mixed feelings! This has been an extremely rewarding position and I have enjoyed every minute of it. But it is time to let other people have this opportunity to grow through the experience, as I did. I learned so much in this role about leading volunteer groups, about working

with people located around the world, about how the STC works at the international level, about quality itself, and most of all about all the wonderful people in the STC!

**Q:** *What will you miss the most?*

**A:** The people in the Quality SIG, definitely. I have met such wonderful, talented, dedicated professionals! And we have all become friends through our work in the SIG, which is an incredible "bonus" to the job! I am especially thinking of Jennifer and Richard and Ralph and Don and Robbie and Liz who have been so reliable in their contributions to the SIG over the years. And of Shirley who mentored me early on. There are many, many people whom I feel that I *know*, even though I have never met them. I have worked with them during these years on the Quality SIG — people like Steve Jong, Matt Bin, Mary Ann Campbell, Bonni Graham, Phil Brittenham, Bill Dubay, Amber Fenner, Miki Magyar, Julia Land, David Dick, and many more. Of all these people, I only knew 2 when I took the position! Now I have a whole network of talented people to brainstorm with and to contact about quality-related topics.

**Q:** *What won't you miss?*

**A:** Scurrying to gather content for the newsletter deadlines every quarter — somehow each quarter always seemed to come sooner than I expected!

**Q:** *What accomplishment are you most proud of during your tenure?*

**A:** We achieved a number of *firsts* during my tenure that I am very proud of: the first quarterly newsletter (DocQment), the first Quality SIG listserv, the first Quality SIG website, the first Quality Bibliography, the first Quality SIG brochure. Each of these was accomplished by volunteers, sometimes in teams (Richard and Jennifer and others on the newsletter) and sometimes as heroic solo efforts (Don's

**Q:** *What won't you miss?*  
**A:** *Scurrying to gather content for the newsletter deadlines every quarter — somehow each quarter always seemed to come sooner than I expected!*

See "Interview" on page 3.

## DocQment Staff

### Editors

Liz Hidalgo  
Sophia Marx

### Acquisitions manager

Jennifer Atkinson

### Production

Richard Colvin  
Jacqueline Morris  
Christina Hembree

### Quality SIG staff

Ralph Robinson, manager  
Robbie Rupel, membership

## To join the SIG

Contact the STC office at  
Society for Technical  
Communication

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(703) 522-4114

## Publication Policies

We welcome articles for "BookQueue," "What's Hot," or "In the Trenches." Articles should be 400 words or less. Email or phone the *DocQment* acquisition manager, Jennifer Atkinson, if you want to review your topic before submitting an article or to request style guidelines.

Submit your articles at any time during the year to the *DocQment* editor. We prefer ASCII text via email. You can also mail us a 3-1/2" PC- or Macintosh-formatted diskette with ASCII text, Word, or RTF files. (Please mark format and application version number on the diskette and include your phone number and name.) All articles will be edited for length, clarity, and appropriateness. Include a brief bio statement.

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.

## Email or mail submissions to:

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Evening phone:  
(317) 849-7585

## Quality SIG active in Cincinnati

*Ralph Robinson, Senior Member, Toronto Chapter*

The 46<sup>th</sup> Annual STC Conference is now over, and a new Manager has been appointed for the Quality SIG, Ralph Robinson. Many of you know me, as I have chaired the ISO 9000 subgroup of the Quality SIG since 1995. Before I go any further, I would like to thank Lori Fisher, the outgoing SIG Manager, for her dedication and service over the past years. Thanks to her, I have inherited a well-oiled, professional team of SIG leaders that will serve the membership well as we move into the next millennium. THANK YOU Lori for all that you have done for the Quality SIG, Quality, and the STC in general, I know you will be a great success on your new roll as a member of the STC Nominating Committee.

The Quality SIG hosted two events at the 46<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference, a SIG business breakfast meeting on Tuesday, and a panel discussion titled, "The Basics of Quality," on Tuesday afternoon. Members of the SIG also hosted four tables at the SIG Networking Luncheon. Thank you Lori, Robbie, Don, and Richard for your support at these functions.

The conference allowed us to renew old acquaintances and form new ones. I hope that everyone enjoyed themselves, and left Cincinnati with lots of new ideas and new knowledge. If you weren't able to make it to Cinci, make a note to yourself to be sure to attend the 47<sup>th</sup> Annual Convention in Orlando, Florida, May 21-24, 2000. Based on the enthusiasm displayed by the Florida

## Quality SIG membership report

*Robbie Rupel, Quality SIG Membership Manager*

Greetings from St. Louis! As of May, the STC Quality SIG has 584 members. Welcome to our newest members in the United States from Alabama, Arizona, Arkansas, California, Colorado, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Indiana, Louisiana, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Oklahoma, Oregon, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, Washington, Washington, D.C., and Wisconsin. Welcome to our newest international members from Alberta, Canada, British Columbia, Canada, Ontario, Canada, Quebec, Canada, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Israel, Japan, New Zealand, Slovenia, and the United Arab Emirates.

If you would like to be profiled, contact me at rupel@inlink.com and write a brief article focusing on the following questions:

- What do you do and where do you work?
- Why did you join the Quality SIG?
- What quality-related issues are you currently facing and how are you trying to resolve them?

Until next time.

contingent in Cinci, it's bound to be a great conference.

What's in store for the 1999-2000 year? Well, there are a few areas where we need some assistance in carrying on the work of the SIG. Presently we need a Chairperson for the ISO 9000 subgroup, as my time will be taken up managing the overall activities of the SIG. We also need members to act as liaisons with the following SIGs: Emerging Technologies; Environmental, Safety, & Health Communication; Illustrators & Designers; Indexing; Information Design; Lone Writer; and Policy & Procedures. If you're a member of any of these SIGs, please contact me and I'll advise you of our needs - they're really not that time consuming.

### Your SIG leadership team wants your input!

We need to know what you like about the SIG, what you don't like, suggestions on how to improve it, and any other information you can provide with regards to providing you a quality service. Remember, without your input we can't satisfy your needs. The SIG leadership also encourages you to become an active participant in SIG activities. Submit an article for *DocQment*, propose a subject for a presentation at the conference in Orlando in May 2000, write a book review, act as a liaison with another SIG, or submit a reference source you have found helpful in your work.

From "Interview" on page 1.

Bibliography). I believe that these accomplishments have established a solid infrastructure for Ralph and the incoming SIG leadership to build on. None of these existed four years ago!

**Q:** *What other things has the SIG accomplished this year?*

**A:** Just recently Liang, Don, and Amber completed an overhaul of our web site's visual design. I think it looks fantastic, and it is easier to navigate. Before that, we added *Frequently Asked Questions* to the web site. We also sponsored a panel presentation at the STC Conference on *The Basics of Quality* that was very well-attended, and sponsored five tables at the SIG Networking Luncheon. Our membership manager, Robbie Rupel, has provided excellent, prompt, and reliable service to our new members. Ralph Robinson has also fielded a growing number of questions this year that came to me about ISO 9000.

**Q:** *How do you feel about the newsletter, DocQment? What sort of feedback do you get on the newsletter?*

**A:** The newsletter is one of the shining stars of our Quality SIG! Richard Colvin has been the design and production editor for the past three years, and was on the newsletter team from the very beginning along with Jennifer Atkinson, our fearless style and content editor. Richard and Jennifer, along with a team of authors and copy editors (such as Liz Hidalgo and Sophia Marx), have done a fantastic job of constantly pushing to improve the layout, format, and design of DocQment. In 1998 DocQment won the highest honor, "Distinguished," in the International STC Newsletter Competition. I am very very proud of Richard, Jennifer, and the newsletter team for this accomplishment. The newsletter is one of the main visible deliverables from the SIG. The survey forms we distribute uniformly express positive satisfaction with DocQment. The newsletter team has provided an outstanding service to our members in this area.

**Q:** *What are the areas that you hope the SIG improves or changes in the coming years?*

**A:** My only wish for the SIG is to have many more volunteers in the coming year, all of whom can benefit from the experience as I have.

**Ralph Robinson**, *incoming Quality SIG Manager, doesn't-know-what-he's-in-for (just kidding, Ralph), and all-around social butterfly.*

**Q:** *What is your background in Quality? What do you do? Tell us a little about yourself?*

**A:** I have been involved in quality since the Fall of 1993 when I volunteered to help with the

implementation of ISO 9001 at AlliedSignal Aerospace Canada. At that time, as a Senior Technical Writer in the Engineering Publications Department, I felt that the adoption of ISO 9000 by the company afforded me an opportunity to expand my capabilities.

In spring of 1994 the company had a pre-assessment audit of its quality system, and numerous noncompliances were recorded, the most significant being in the area of Document Control (my area). The company rethought its processes for controlling documentation and elected to implement a centralized system, and I was given the opportunity to head up the Document Management Group established to provide this service.

I have been a member of the Toronto Chapter of the STC since 1988, and have been active in the chapter, participating in education day events, working on the organizing committee for the 1997 STC Conference in Toronto, and generally helping out wherever I can. I have published a book on documenting ISO 9000, conducted full day post-conference workshops on the subject at four STC annual conferences, and this year began teaching the documentation portion of a quality management course at a local community college.

**Q:** *How did you decide to take on the responsibility of Quality SIG Manager?*

**A:** Lori asked if I would consider taking over the SIG during the conference in Anaheim, California in 1998. Through very persuasive efforts on her part, I was encouraged to take on the responsibility. I had enjoyed working with Lori and the rest of the SIG team for the previous two years as the ISO 9000 subgroup chairperson, and felt that this was an opportunity to stretch my abilities and acquire new skills. Many of the people on that team also encouraged me to step up to the challenge; their support was definitely a major factor in my accepting the position.

**Q:** *What plans do you have for the Quality SIG this coming year?*

**A:** Having just taken the reigns of the SIG at a time when my work situation became a tad chaotic, I haven't had time to formulate any major plans. I'd like to consult with other members of the SIG Leadership team to get their input and suggestions before making any firm plans. Also, I encourage any of the general membership to send in their suggestions for improvements or additional services they would like to have provided.

See "Interview" on page 7.

*My only wish for the SIG is to have many many more volunteers in the coming year, all of whom can benefit from the experience as I have.*

# Information products and quality

Jeanette Evans, Senior Member, Northeast Ohio Chapter

The article is based on a paper *What is quality and what is an information product?* presented at the 1999 Annual Conference in Cincinnati.

To begin examining quality in terms of developing an information product let's first define the terms quality and information product.

- Quality can be defined in terms of "satisfying customer needs." This is a working definition and loose translation of the formal definition from ISO 8402:1994 of quality as "the totality of characteristics of an entity that bear on its ability to satisfy stated or implied needs." This reference is from "Quality Management and Quality Assurance -- Vocabulary." (ANSI/ISO/ASQC 8402-1994, American Society for Quality Control, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, 1995.) In simplified terms "quality equals a satisfied customer."
- Information products are online or paper documents that are content rich and developed for the purpose of presenting information. These could be for example a paper instruction manual, online help, or informational Web site. In other words this is any piece of technical communication.

What is an applicable process for building quality into any product? A Continuous Quality Improvement Process (CQIP) is referenced by T. Herron, G.P. Bohan and R.P. Meyer in *People Make the Difference -- Prescriptions and Profiles of High Performance* (Oakhill Press, New York, 1996) as a model that has met with success in top performing companies. The ten steps in this process include:

1. Identify output
2. Identify customer
3. Identify customer requirements
4. Convert requirements into specifications
5. Identify steps in work process
6. Select measurements
7. Determine process capability
8. Produce output
9. Evaluate results
10. Recycle

This process is typically used in manufacturing or design environments. However, it can apply to any environment, but I will show how this

process applies to development of an information product. What is key about the process is that it is rooted in satisfying the needs of the customer, which means we increase the chance of achieving quality as we have defined it.

Here is a proposed way to apply the steps in development of any information product into the continuous quality improvement process (CQIP) process we reviewed in the last newsletter.

1. Identify output  
Information product delivered on time
2. Identify customer  
Users of information product
3. Identify customer requirements  
Product that is "True, Enough, Accessible, Maintainable" as defined by Bibus (See the paragraph following this list.)
4. Convert requirements into specifications  
Evaluate contents, timetable, design, process
5. Identify steps in work process:
  - a. Determine contents
  - b. Determine timetable
  - c. Determine style guide
  - d. Design textual and/or online elements
  - e. Test and redesign
  - f. Review material
  - g. Produce and evaluate results
6. Select measurements  
Measure through prototype feedback. Ask testers what they think of the prototype
7. Determine process capability  
Evaluate plan with respect to available resources
8. Produce output  
Monitor milestones
9. Evaluate results  
Continue usability testing for future releases
10. Recycle  
Evolve the product with future releases

In step 3, I used a standard proposed by Connie Bibus. It is a list I have found to be simple, useful, and easy to remember. For more information See "*Information Products*" on page 9.

*What is key about the process is that it is rooted in satisfying the needs of the customer, which means we increase the chance of achieving quality as we have defined it.*

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# Musing on metrics

## Marching toward world-class documentation

Steve Jong, Senior Member, Boston Chapter

The billionaire, gadfly, and presidential hopeful H. Ross Perot may speak in hyperboles, but when he uses the term “world-class,” he knows exactly what he’s talking about. I wish more businessmen understood the term.

Let me clarify some other quality terms that are frequently misused:

**Benchmark:** A “best-in-class” achievement, the recognized worldwide standard of excellence against which similar things are compared. If your product, service, or process is the benchmark, you are the gold medalist, the best in the world.

**World-class:** Among the best in the world. If you’re world-class, you might be the silver medalist.

**Best in Class:** Recognized top performance in the subject you are benchmarking. You could be a bronze medalist; you could also, literally, just be the best in your class, which isn’t necessarily a big deal. (Automakers advertise nearly every car as “best in class.” How? By dividing the market into so many classes that there are only about three models in each; within that context, they can always find some attribute that’s best, whether it be size, power, fuel economy, or hip room.)

How do you discover if you’re the benchmark? By benchmarking, of course. Here’s the formal definition: “A systematic and continuous approach to identify the benchmark, to compare yourself to the benchmark, and to identify the practices or methods that enable you to become the new ‘best-in-class.’” According to the methodology used by Xerox, to benchmark, you have to answer four questions:

1. Benchmark what?
2. Who is best?
3. How do we do it?
4. How do they do it?

If you’re doing process benchmarking, you need to capture your processes. I have done it, and believe me, it is difficult and time-consuming. But it will open your eyes. (We discovered, for example, that everyone in our work group thought the work process was very well defined, but no two people used the same steps.)

The point of benchmarking is to improve your products, processes, or services. For benchmarking to cause effective change, you must take a series of steps:

1. Set benchmarks as new operative goals
2. Implement changes
3. Measure improvement
4. Monitor progress
5. Recalibrate benchmarks to keep current

You can see that becoming world-class is a formidable challenge. If your boss comes to you and tells you he wants to see “world-class documentation,” try not to laugh in his face. Instead, I suggest that you make your documentation the best in its class. That is an achievable goal.

(In the interest of full disclosure, I must report that I was the writing project leader for an enterprise network management software product. Our documentation was judged “best-in-class” by a trade magazine. I leave it as an exercise for the reader to decide whether that’s a brag-worthy accomplishment. But my boss at the time was impressed.)

Next time: Buggy whips, the Arch Deluxe, and quality improvement.

Steven Jong is Documentation Manager at Lightbridge, Inc. in Burlington, Massachusetts. You can reach him at [jong@lightbridge.com](mailto:jong@lightbridge.com).

*If your boss comes to you and tells you he wants to see “world-class documentation,” try not to laugh in his face. Instead, I suggest that you make your documentation the best in its class.*

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## In the trenches

### Improving the quality of documentation reviews

Richard Colvin, Senior Member, Washington DC Chapter

At the STC 46<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference, I hosted a Networking Lunch table on the topic, Improving the Review Process. The table was full, and many people were interested in how to improve the review process in their organizations. We all understood clearly that reviews are our primary means to ensure we are producing high-quality, accurate information. However, many agreed that the review process could be improved in our own organizations. Others at the table were curious as to how electronic review tools could be used to improve the review process.

One attendee, Kurt Kroeber, a Senior Member of the Boston chapter, was so curious that after the conference he tracked me down at IBM to ask what electronic review process we use. He mentioned that his department is still distributing hardcopy manuals and printed online help when conducting reviews. He asked some specific questions about how we conduct electronic reviews at IBM. I would like to share the answers to Kurt's questions with you.

*What form of electronic media does your group distribute for hardcopy manual and online help reviews (Word files, Frame files, PDF)?*

We actually use a specialized tool developed within IBM: WEBREUVU. This tool allows reviewers to enter text-only comments in an online version of the document that is being reviewed. This tool was developed for IBM, and it is not currently available for purchase. Similar tools are available, such as Review Pro, developed by Software Development Technologies. Acrobat Exchange is certainly a tool that you can use to conduct electronic reviews, but it lacks administrative functions and you can't easily chain comments together. However, I understand that Adobe is improving these features in Acrobat Exchange in an upcoming release. Use the Web to search on Electronic + Document + Review + Tools as a starting point for locating other electronic review tools.

*How do reviewers indicate their changes in the electronic files?*

In the tool that we use, a reviewer places the cursor at the point in the document where a

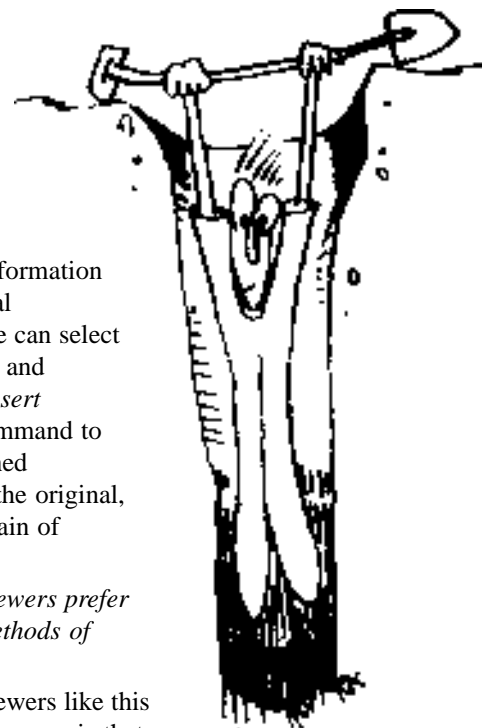
comment is intended, and selects the *Insert Comment* command. A dialog opens, the reviewer selects the type of comment (technical, typo, format change), and then enters comments in a text field. The comment is then added to a special view of the document that all reviewers and writers can see. If another reviewer wants to add additional information to the original comment, she can select the comment and choose the *Insert Comment* command to add an attached comment to the original, creating a chain of comments.

*Do your reviewers prefer electronic methods of review?*

Yes, our reviewers like this method; one reason is that reviewers like to see what others have to say about the document being reviewed. They can also avoid repeating comments that others have made, which is not the case in most hardcopy reviews. Sometimes a reviewer will request a hardcopy version to mark-up when there are special circumstances, like the need to travel during the review period. Writers also provide PDF versions that reviewers can print on demand. Our process is such that we are required to review documents electronically in most cases, and both writers and reviewers prefer to follow this process closely.

*What do the writers do with the electronic reviews once received?*

Writers monitor the review comments daily during the review period. As comments are made, the *See "Reviews" on page 9.*



*Q: Do your reviewers prefer electronic methods of review?*

*A: Yes, ...reviewers like to see what others have to say about the document being reviewed.*

From "Interview" on page 3.

**Q:** What do you think your biggest challenge will be?

**A:** One of my challenges is to try to match the tremendous job done by my predecessor, Lori Fisher. She has that smile, you know, that weakens the most firm resolve, and we found ourselves agreeing to whatever she asked. Lori did a great job with the SIG and has handed off a tremendously talented and committed team that will make my job a great deal easier.

Our SIG has interesting logistics. I am located in Toronto, Canada, the newsletter production editor is in Washington, D.C., our Acquisitions Manager is in Fishers, IN., our editing and production team is split between San Jose, CA and Pearland, TX., and the newsletter is currently printed in California. Coordinating the total effort over this spectrum of locations will be challenging, but it is one that the team is confident we can handle.

**Q:** Do you plan to make any changes to DocQment, the Quality SIG's quarterly newsletter? Will you be distributing it online in the future?

**A:** I am a firm believer in assigning responsibility to people, and then letting them get on with the job. Richard Colvin has been involved with the DocQment for a number of years and he has agreed to stay on for this year to handle the newsletter. I have the utmost confidence in Richard and the great DocQment team, so I'm going to let them decide if changes are required.

As far as online distribution of DocQment, it has been discussed, but no firm decision has been made. I feel that the SIG team needs more information on the experiences of others with this method of delivery before making any firm plans. I know of one chapter that uses a hybrid of both printed and online distribution methods that might be worth looking into.

**Q:** Who are the members of the Quality SIG Leadership team?

**A:** The SIG Leadership team is as follows:

*Ralph E. Robinson*, SIG Manager

*Steven Jong*, Quality Metrics subgroup Chairperson

*Don Lenk*, SIG webmaster, SIG Reference Source Manager, and wearer of many other hats

*Robbie Rupel*, SIG Membership Manager

*Richard Colvin*, DocQment Editor

*Jennifer Atkinson*, Acquisitions Manager

Please note that these are just the people whose names appear in a lot of places, but behind each of them are dedicated volunteers who **really** make it all work. (Sophia knows, because she is one of those dedicated behind the scenes volunteers.) We currently have two positions open on our team: we need chairpersons for the ISO 9000 and for the Processes and Techniques subgroups. Do I hear someone volunteering?

The SIG also has some members who also belong to other SIGs and act as liaisons with those groups: looking for newsletter items of interest to the Quality SIG, and keeping the SIG membership aware of developments in areas that might impact the Quality movement. Again, there are some SIGs where we do not have any liaison. If you're interested in being a liaison, please contact me at [ralph.robinson@alliedsignal.com](mailto:ralph.robinson@alliedsignal.com) or [r2innovations@myna.com](mailto:r2innovations@myna.com).

A big *thanks* to Lori and Ralph for taking the time to answer these questions and for volunteering their time running the STC Quality SIG. Lori, we will miss your smiling face. Don't run away too far, we may need your help! Ralph, good luck in your new reign as Quality SIG Manager. We know that you'll do a great job. And as Ralph said, feel free to volunteer your services to the Quality SIG. We could use your expertise!

Sophia Marx is Director of Technical Publications for the Baan Company in Santa Clara, California.

*We currently have two positions open on our team: we need chairpersons for the ISO 9000 and for the Processes and Techniques subgroups.*

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# What happened to the Spring issue of DocQment?

*Richard Colvin, DocQment Production Editor*

*By my math, you could submit today, raise a family, get another college degree, retire from your current job, and let 19.5 years pass before your next submission...*

From time to time we have dry spells during which we are unable to gather the content needed for an issue. During the Spring season we were simply unable to obtain the content needed to produce a Spring issue. In the past we have had many regular contributors and some one-time contributors to the newsletter. To all those who have contributed we say thank you. Without your efforts DocQment would not be what it is today.

To have a successful and useful newsletter, we must have something valuable to share with each other. Quality is an important topic no matter in what industry you work. In documentation, quality is exceptionally important since without high quality documentation, customers cannot use our products, whatever they may be. We know that you as a member of the Quality SIG understand the importance of quality in documentation. We, the editing staff for DocQment, hope that you find this newsletter a valuable part of your information resources on quality. For some of you, this newsletter may be your only resource.

DocQment publishes four times per year. The average page count is ten pages. There is at least one feature article, as well as ongoing features like those for "Musing on metrics." We always provide a membership report and some information in "SIGnificant news" to keep you abreast of administrative issues regarding the SIG. These items always take up a little space. What's left are the blank pages that you, our membership, can fill. If you like what you read, consider adding your voice. If you don't like what you read, challenge the SIG with your own ideas.

It really only takes a few of us with good ideas to fill up a newsletter. Consider that per issue we average about seven submissions give or take an article here and there. This adds up to only about 30 articles per year that we need for four issues. There are 584 members in the Quality SIG. By my

math, you could submit today, raise a family, get another college degree, retire from your current job, and let 19.5 years pass before your next submission, and we would still have plenty to publish, four times a year even. But seriously, we skipped the Spring issue, and we could skip other issues without your involvement.

We want to make submitting an article as easy as possible. Jennifer Atkinson has taken over as our Acquisitions Manager. In her new capacity, she will be charged with soliciting content from you, our membership. We decided that this is such an important task that we needed the focused attention of one dedicated individual. If you would like to make a submission, please contact Jennifer at [atkinsbj@ix.netcom.com](mailto:atkinsbj@ix.netcom.com) or call her at 317-849-7585. We would especially like to hear from our international members so that we can learn more about the quality issue they are facing. Anyone can help by making one of the following submissions:

- A short book review
- A definition of quality
- A process improvement
- A story on quality improvement
- A review of a tool or procedure
- A question on quality

We will publish two more times this calendar year. To help you plan, here are the submission deadlines for the rest of the fiscal year:

- Early Fall 1999 issue is August 23
- Late Fall 1999 issue is October 21
- Winter 2000 is January 21
- Spring 2000 is April 21

We hope that you will add your voice to this award winning forum.

Richard Colvin is an Information Developer with the IBM Corporation in Washington, DC.

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*From "Reviews" on page 6.*

writer sets the status of each as: accepted, open for discussion, rejected, accepted with change, and so on. When the review comes to a close, the writer will conduct a review meeting where all the technologists can come together and discuss open comments. When all comments are resolved, the writer proceeds with the documentation changes. This process can be repeated up to three times for a publication cycle.

*Do you find electronic reviews more or less effective than hardcopy?*

They seem to be more effective and time efficient, as there are not repeated comments that often occur in hardcopy reviews. Also, there is an opportunity to communicate with technologists during a review. For instance, if a technologist makes an unclear comment, I can attach a question to the comment, and the technologist can respond to the comment in the course of the review.

*Do you have any other thoughts on how to improve the review process?*

After you have identified and begin using a tool in your organization, you will need to manage the change in process for both writers and technologists. Hardcopy reviews can be relatively private exchanges between one writer and one technologist. The electronic review process is a very public one. As such, you should set guidelines for writers and technologist on what

are acceptable and unacceptable comments. For instance, if a technologist thinks something is incorrect, he should provide the correct information free of personal attacks. Writers should take care to avoid arguments over content and strive to maintain professionalism.

If you aren't quite ready for an electronic review process, you can gain some of the same benefits of this process by conducting routed hardcopy reviews. For instance, print out your document or online help, place a routing sheet on the cover, and send it around to all the technologists in a specified order. At minimum, the last reviewer will get the benefit of seeing all the other comments. And you will avoid repetitive comments. This process takes more time than an online review and the writer must monitor who has the hardcopy and for how long.

Finally, no matter what type of reviews you conduct, you can dramatically improve their effectiveness and quality by asking specific questions, either by commenting in the electronic review or by writing your questions in the margins on hardcopy documents. Questions focus the technologist's attention on specific items you are unsure of. After all, you know what you know and you know what you don't know!

I would like to thank Kurt Kroeber for supplying the questions and the impetus for this article.

Richard Colvin is an Information Developer with the IBM Corporation in Washington, DC.

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*From "Information Products" on page 4.*

and easy to remember. For more information about the standard refer to Bibus, C. J., and J. Bown. Setting Standards for Documentation Quality, 42nd Annual Proceedings, Society for Technical Communication, Arlington, Virginia, 1995. I chose this standard because it is generic and applicable to any information product. As you actually go through the process for your particular product, this list of course could change to fit your product and needs.

I hope you have found this approach to developing quality information products of interest. What I want to get across is the idea that

from CQIP we can conclude that successful information products are developed using a process that focuses on satisfying customer needs. I have been on several teams that used this 10-step model for several projects. I also wrote about a similar online help development process an issue of Intercom and the last conference in Cincinnati. But more on that another time.

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