

1.98

MARCH 1998

Interactive Discussion Medium



FORUM

**TECHNICAL
COMMUNICATORS'
FORUM**

Topics:

Translation Issues

cont.

Readability / Usability /
Quality

cont.

Consulting

cont.

Education & Training

cont.

Tools

cont.

Professional Events

TC-Forum is supported
by INTECOM



The International Council for
Technical Communication

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* Each Topic has a two-letter abbreviation, for example

- CO for Consulting
- ET for Education & Training
- RU for Readability/Usability
- TO for Tools
- TR for Translation Issues

The contributions (articles or comments) are numbered consecutively through the different issues of TC-Forum.

When commenting to any of the contributions, please refer to these "codes" for ease of understanding.

Should Documentation Be Written in English in Countries

A summary prepared by Marilyn A. Dunning and Anne-Marie Payne-Charby

*Preliminary remark from the editor
At Comtec'97 (10–11 October 1997) idea markets and several idea workshops were held. Marilyn A. Dunning was the activator of this workshop and Anne-Marie Payne-Charby was one of the nineteen participants.*

Different countries, similar experiences...

Though ours was quite an international group, we soon found that we shared similar experiences. The table below represents two of the examples given by the participants. Comparing our experiences led us to affirm that when non-native writers produce English documents, mother tongue reviewers are required.

Writers from...	Produced...	For...	Using...
Sweden	English documents	Swedish readers	UK proofreader + Swedish editor
Slovenia	English documents	Slovenian readers	Canadian editor

A brief roundtable discussion produced the following points:

- A „trained technical writer“ does not necessarily mean competency in writing.
- A „native speaker“ does not necessarily imply language mastery.
- Quality is a must.

And what about quality?

The last statement about quality generated more questions, such as:

- How can we define quality in this context?
- Is quality grammatical? Is it technical?
- Is providing easy access a characteristic of quality?
- Is providing useful information an indicator of quality?

Here Marilyn played the devil’s advocate by asking: „So, quality begins with the quality of the language?“ To which the audience unanimously replied „YES, but only in terms of grammar and usage.“

Many countries, one language...

When the discussion turned to competency issues, a constructive debate ensued regarding:

- how competent the writer should be in the target language, and
- which was more important, language competency or technical writing skills.

The debate led to one global question: „Can one separate language from writing skills?“ In one voice, the audience stated: „DEFINITELY“.

We then came to the conclusion that a good communicator teamed with an excellent editor results in the production of quality documents. This formula can also be applied to native speakers writing in their mother tongue.

Good formula, expensive solution...

We immediately recognized that our formula means a longer production cycle and will cost more money than our clients are likely to want to invest.

Once again, Marilyn played the devil’s advocate: „So, either invest or do nothing?“ The audience reaction was quick: „Using trained native speakers does not automatically assure quality. It is impossible to leave out the editing phase.“

where the Natural Language is not English? (TR 4)

So...

Speakers	Time investment	Money investment	Conclusion
Non-native	high	high	It still costs more
Native	increased	increased	in either case!

How do you define an „English native-speaker“?

Here are some of the ideas that popped up in response to this question.

The English native-speaker can be defined:

- as someone who has had the majority of their education and schooling in English, or
- by the passport he (she) holds (this was a joke!), or
- by results of general writing tests, or
- by looking for potential in candidates (this was rejected as having no bearing on this issue).

So, English has been imposed on us? Or, has it been?

The participants found that English is rich in technical terminology, and responded negatively to the above question. The consensus seemed to be: „We simply write in a common understandable language, then localize.“

We considered the following example: „We have German writers producing English documentation then translating it into Japanese. In the end, there is neither quality nor accuracy.“

Final analysis: Write in English first, then localize.

An appreciated cycle

A writer from the Netherlands gave us an example where the technical communicator combined writer and editor roles. The same person wrote the English and Dutch documents. The process was as follows:

- first, the Dutch communicator wrote the English document,
- then, the English proofreader read the text and performed the linguistic review, and
- finally, the Dutch communicator translated the reviewed English document into Dutch.

Considering the above process, the audience queried: „Can the Dutch technical communicator, write in both languages at the same speed?“ The answer was „YES“.

Language controversies can be advantageous...

We came to the conclusion that language controversies

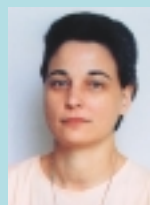
- can challenge technical writers to ask questions in order to find the proper information,
- eliminate dangers, as in lazy technical writers who blindly copy information into their documents,
- enable a writer to implement methods for structuring documents. (In an example we were given, developers and technical writers used such a structure to produce documentation jointly; that is, they actually wrote the documentation together),
- can enable us not to forget our users (for example, we might incorporate usability tests).

Please feel free to submit your comments and suggestions either to the editor or to us via E-mail.



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The European Language Resources Association - Promoting Language Resources in Europe (TR 5)



The Association

The European Language Resources Association (ELRA) was founded in February 1995 as a membership association, by a number of leading academic and private-sector bodies in co-operation with the European Commission. As a non-profit making organisation, ELRA aims to serve as a focal point for the collection, marketing, distribution and licensing of language resources, as well as being a provider of general information in the field of language engineering. Day-to-day operations are run by the European Language Distribution Agency (ELDA), while the strategies and plans of ELRA are set by the member-elected board.

fees are diverse: : 750 ECU for European non-profit making organisations, 1000 ECU (European Currency Unit) for European profit-making SMEs (Small and Medium Enterprises) with less than 50 employees, 1500 ECU for European profit making organisations with 50 or more employees), and 5000 ECU for non-European profit making organisations. Today, the group of members incorporate organisations from many parts of the world, with nearly all the countries of the European Union being represented. The members are all from different sections of the language engineering area: there are companies and commercial organisations from the language engineering industry, and research laboratories and institutes, universities and other academic bodies involved in language research.

The Services

Out of the services offered by ELRA, the most appreciated is the large collection of language resources, available for purchase by both members and non-members. Examples of the ELRA resources are speech databases, monolingual and multilingual lexica, aligned and multilingual corpora, and terminological data in monolingual and multilingual forms. At present there are about 500 different items being offered, with about 70 in speech, 120 in text and 360 in terminology.

The most appreciated is the large collection of language resources.

Other services are the publication of a quarterly newsletter, with news and information from the LE community and industry. Anyone with queries on resources or related topics may turn to ELRA for help and information.

Also work on creating validation manuals for the different resource areas is being conducted under ELRA supervision, to be used as quality assessments for language resources.

The Future

The association is now able to provide both resource providers and consumers with excellent support for commercialisation and access to resources. In the future, work will continue in gaining new resources for the association and refining solutions to legal issues. However, the focus of effort is shifting away from those of the past (establishing infrastructure, gathering resource, and membership) toward distribution and active marketing of resources. In addition the association will initiate its planned programme to validate and quality control the resources being distributed.

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The Members

Membership is open to all organisations or companies, public as well as private, though voting rights in the General Assembly are restricted only to European members. The annual membership



Indexing Problems? Let's Discuss Them! (RU 6)

by Marilyn A. Dunning

At Comtec '97, I was the activator of an idea market on indexing. What follows is a summary of the ideas we exchanged. I hope you will find its contents worthy of reflection, and that it will encourage you to respond with comments and suggestions.

An Unanticipated Early Start

The earliest ideas evolved the day prior to Comtec '97. As I was preparing my paperboard, fellow activators gathered around me and we began an impromptu discussion. Here are two of the initial comments:

- „With online documentation or information, people think that indexes are passé [that is, antiquated or out-of-date].“
- „Indexes are links for online information sources, they are not just links used for online Help.“

I offered the following for the group to reflect upon: Generally, one finds the index at the back of the book (though I have seen a few French documents with indexes placed at the front of the book). Or, then again, professional indexers often refer to themselves as „back of the book indexers“. The index has had enough of sitting at the back of the book. It's time for indexes to come to the foreground in our documentation. Today, the index has a star's role, but we are not paying homage to our star!

The basic principle of indexing is still valid: key words in an index must point end users to pertinent information concepts. This is even more important with online documents. Whether online or in print, users require rapid, accurate access to information. Rapid, because time is money. Accurate, however, is a topic that requires closer attention. Just as a document requires planning to enable it to meet the needs of the intended audience, so too does the index. If users cannot find the information they seek, using terms familiar to them, the index will have failed its purpose. Worse still, the user is led to believe the information he or she is seeking does not exist.

Warming Up the Audience

To get the workshop off and rolling, I wrote the following questions on the paperboard: Who?, What?, When?, How?, Why?, and, In which order?

Audience Reaction

How do you go about making an index?

„The problem with indexing is that it is a skill. You have to learn it like algebra, where you learn the [correct] equation for solving the problem. So, I know there must be a formula for creating a usable, ... an excellent index.“

What does one index?

„Key words.“

What kinds of key words?

„Key words of a document.“

Consider this:

How many times have you used a search engine on the Web and as a result of a one-word inquiry, received 20,000 responses? A key word is an important word in a particular context. Secondary entries bring specification to key words. As seen in the example below, the key word „Printing“ is followed by secondary entries „forms“ and „graphics“. Such references lead users to the exact information they require.

Printing,
forms, 40
graphics, 25

Who should write the index?:

„A machine can do the index.“,

„Machines do only logical, analyzed indexes.“

Consider this:

By specifying the word „capital“, do we mean for the machine to index the city of a given state or a monetary concept? So, while a machine can compile an index, the end result still requires human intervention.

Another consideration:

A writer once stated that he created a macro that turned a table of contents into a basic index. Perhaps he was not aware that a table of contents and an index definitely do not serve the same purpose.

Indexing Problems? Let's Discuss Them! (cont.)

How about employing a second writer or a professional indexer to write your index?:

- „I don't know about a second writer. I feel like I'd lose control of my document.“
- „If you're too close to the book, you can't make a proper index.“ (Is that true or false?)
- „You wrote it, you know it – all the concepts – so you will use the correct words.“

Consider this:

- „I wrote this
this sentence so that
you will be able to understand...“

I wrote the above text on the paperboard and asked the audience to read it. One participant, who stated that she felt she'd lose control of her document, read the text aloud, missing the second „this“. Another participant, standing right next to the first one, read the text silently and announced „The word „this“ is written twice.“ The first participant was amazed that she'd missed this detail, which led to an affirmation that indexes should be edited.

How does one evaluate an index, especially if it has been written by a second writer or a professional indexer?:

- „By performing usability testing with typical end users.“
- „By asking an end user to use the index as they would normally use one, stressing that they should look up terms that are familiar to them.“
- „... as for losing control of your document, you can always provide a list of terms and concepts that you feel should be in the document.“

From the audience:

„What is the correct number of pages for an index?":
Consider this:

The answer depends on the quality of your index. However, some writers advocate a certain number of entries for each page of text. Others swear by a fixed percentage of the total number of pages in the document. (Tip: If you choose the latter of the two, try using columns in the index to gain space.)

No matter which method you choose, carefully plan your indexes. Try to keep the number of

repetitions to a minimum. Anticipate the way in which your users will look for information. For example: one participant stated, „At IBM, they don't use the term „floppy disks“, they call them „diskettes.“

Try to create user-helpful entries that take the user where they want to go. For online documents, make sure your users have the option of getting back to where they started.

An innovative approach to indexing

Consider this:

I surprised the audience when I stated that an index can be a learning tool for multi-level audiences. „When you have novice, intermediate and expert users, an index can prove to be a very valuable learning tool. Expert users will know what they are looking for and require no assistance, just exactitude. Novices will need help in finding new concepts. By efficient use of cross-references, you can give novices complementary information without wasting the expert users' time. Intermediate users, sometimes resistant to learning or letting on that they do not know what function XYZ performs, could find old terms coupled with new terms and still learn something.“

An acknowledgment and an encouragement

My thanks go to all those who participated in this workshop (especially Anne-Marie Payne-Charby, who was both a participant and a reviewer of this article). I also encourage all of us to take steps toward finding ways to improve the quality of our documentation.



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The High Cost of Quality (RU 7)

by *Gabriele Bock*

Quality Systems (QS) have become essential for (inter-)national competition. Companies spend large amounts of money for „measuring“ quality defined by national and international standards. Quality, however, is a value, and like creeds and ideologies values cannot be measured with scientific exactness and are difficult to control. Total Quality Management (TQM) and other standardized concepts take that idealistic dimension into account. Certification according to ISO 9000, for instance, covers only about 50% of a TQM implementation. (Hagmaier: 53)

Detailed instructions and precise procedures associated with Quality Systems further the notion of objectivity. Companies proudly present their sophisticated tools for quality assurance. They neglect the fact that consumers do not care whether quality has been accomplished in a traditional intuitive way by a talented and well trained production team, or by expensive and time consuming quality management tools.

QS made in Germany

Probably in no other country is Total Quality Management taken as seriously as it is in Germany. Instead of adapting the TQM requirements to the specific needs of a company, and interpreting them in a commercially sensible way, as the concept suggests, many German companies try to reach the acme of perfection for Quality Systems. Managers as well as staff members at all levels are occupied establishing

„...how work is reviewed, approved, identified, traced, controlled, inspected, tested, handled, stored, and delivered.“ (Fisher: 484)

Executives at all levels are expected to dedicate a considerable proportion of their working hours to list, on specifically designed QS forms, what they wanted to accomplish, what they did accomplish, and what they are planning to accomplish in the near future. Most people try to write down some-

thing sensible, but find that considering and describing these goals often consumes more time than practising them!

Instead of writing about exchanging ideas with staff members and encouraging them to carry on producing high quality products, they should just go ahead and do it. Informal talks, customary in most companies in former decades, are much more likely to improve quality than writing, presenting, and revising reports.

**Just go
ahead and
do it.**

The TQM concept, however, really offers more freedom than German thoroughness is sometimes willing to accept. Companies are free to decide how they want to meet the requirements and which work activities would be appropriate considering their specific economic situation. It is useful to write down a company's quality policy as a guideline for management decisions, or to agree on quality factors and procedures to evaluate customer satisfaction. But these activities should not take up too much time and effort. The expenditure of increasing product quality and controlling quality must be kept reasonable.

Award Quality, not Quality Systems

As mentioned in my previous articles, quality is a very complex subject. Most aspects of technical performance are checked by internal tests which are easy to implement and control. However, consumer-based quality, the determining factor for economic success or failure, cannot be operated under the same conditions.

Everybody agrees on nicely worded quality policy statements, such as „customer satisfaction is our main objective“. But goals of that kind cannot be achieved by implementing internal tests and making each and every staff member responsible for producing quality without allocating means for their training in customer-oriented production. If a company has not identified its customers' needs, it is hardly possible to produce high-quality products that will satisfy those needs. (And do not believe that marketing has the answer!)

The High Cost of Quality (cont.)

Get consumers involved in the development of a product.

The only way to produce consumer-based quality is to get consumers involved in the development of a product and to establish after-sales feedback procedures. I will elaborate on a few consumer relevant quality assurance methods in the next issue of TC Forum. Although these methods serve the purpose of improving quality – and even suit the TQM concept – they are far from being adequately represented in most existing Quality Systems. As long as awards are given to the best Quality Systems and not to the best products, „customer care“ are shallow words.

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„Qualitätssicherung durch TQM“ in *tekom-Nachrichten 3/95*, pp. 52-53



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Comment on „Cartoons ...“

Engineers and scientists may say that the use of humour in periodicals is „non-professional“.

Thirty-seven years as a professional journal editor have taught me that well-used humour – be it in graphical or written form – is always read and remembered long after other items are forgotten.

While cartoons may – or may not – have a role in a particular technical manual, or other piece of technical literature, their use is a decision that should be thoughtfully made on a case-by-case basis. The concept should not be discarded out of hand.

To my mind TeeCee adds – but, as with all things, let her (him?) be seen in moderation.

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Life: A User's Manual (RU 8)

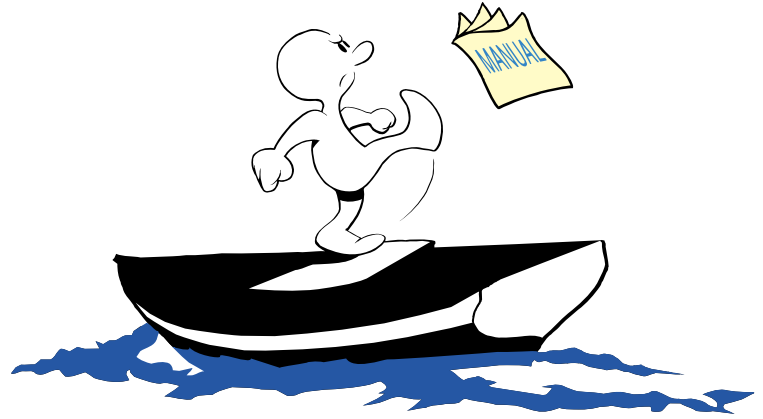
by Lars Forsslund

The heading is the title of a book, relatively lately translated into Swedish. It has created some fuss in cultural circles. In France the book was published already in 1978 under the title *La Vie mode d'emploi*. The author, George Perec, seems to be a somewhat odd person who surrounds his writing with all sorts of weird formal rules, and then tries to overcome the difficulties. Jan Söderqvist in *Moderna Tider* (a Swedish highbrow magazine) compared Perec's way of writing with a tennis player trying to serve blindfolded, the left arm tied behind his back, the right foot tucked down into a bucket, and the back facing the net. The player holds the ball in his mouth, and the serve is executed by spitting the ball up in the air and hitting it.

I don't know why, but I came to think of technical writers in this connection. With his back towards the reader, a bucket over his head, hands and feet tied up by SGML, CALS and company standards, and half choked by all the possibilities of the latest computer system the writer tries to produce manuals and instruction books for unsuspecting readers!

So how come I have this unusually bitter attitude? Well, it has been summer. And in the summer the summer machines break down (and in winter the winter machines) and then the instruction book might come in handy. Among things that broke down last summer was the impeller (everybody knows what an impeller is?) in the diesel engine of my fishing boat. To change the impeller (the waterpump wheel actually) is not an easy job. The lid of the pump is fastened by four tiny screws. The space is narrow, dark, and smells of diesel. There is no room for an ordinary socket wrench and you cannot find the ring wrench.

Now an inventor has had the bright idea to replace the small screws with stud screws, threaded both ends, on which you can put wingnuts. The idea is good, but the instructions are not! They take the form of a small piece of paper with Swedish on one side and English on the other.



The Swedish instruction ends abruptly after a few directives which do not help you to get the things in place. Unless you turn the paper over and switch to English. But there is a mismatch between the languages, and you are stuck.

A very simple test of the instruction leaflet with an ordinary boat owner as test person would have solved the problem. And perhaps also led to a design change that would have eliminated the need for an instruction.

This little story is rather trivial, and also annoying. Problems of this type are not solved by investing in new computer systems and sending people to courses for learning the new system. It's not the computer, but the operating system that we from birth have got installed between our ears that has to be trimmed and updated, (for instance), by attending conferences and courses where the human user is the main person and real functional testing of information is the natural thing to do. Whether the information is produced with an old mechanical typewriter or the latest version of Framemaker doesn't really matter



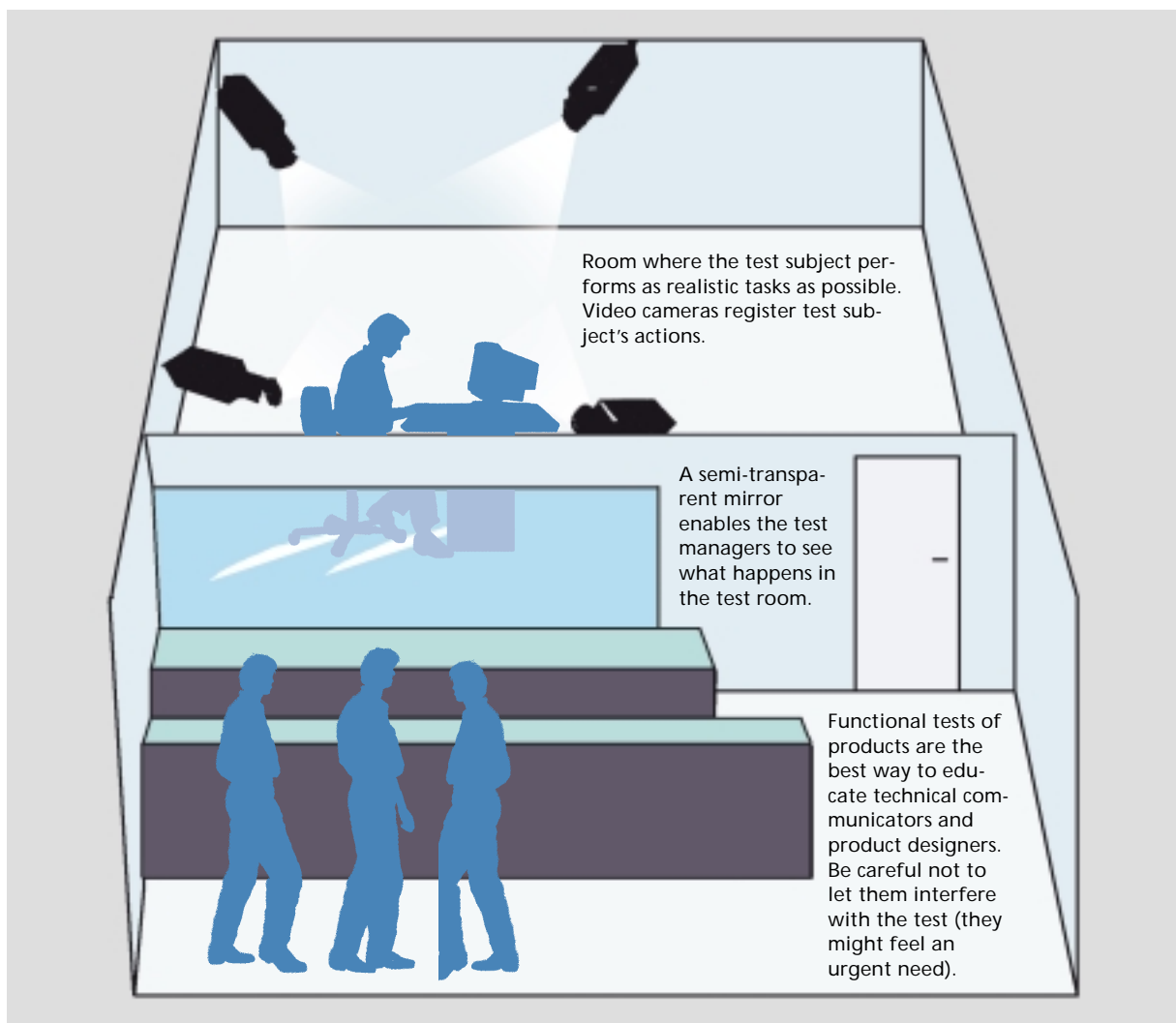
Lars Forsslund
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Demand your own test lab (RU 9)

by *Ulf-L. Andersson*

No company would dream of delivering a new product without having tested the hardware and software. But there are still companies which never test the humanware (the humanware is every-thing in the product that humans need to

have to be able to handle it, e.g. controls, indicators, instructions). As a technical communicator you too should demand to have test resources, for example a test lab like this:



Deficiencies in hardware and software are often immediately obvious. Deficiencies in humanware may not be discovered until too late (when the products is out there in the real world). The users can of course always be blamed (being too stupid) – but they may be clever enough to buy from another company next time.



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Comment on „Is Independent Consulting a Growing Trend...“ (CO 3)

by Alexander von Obert

Hello Ron,

here in Germany more and more technical communicators are „going independent“. Quite often I am sure that they did not intend to go this route but see no other possibility. Some of them may have a university degree such as biology, geology, chemistry, physics – but they often lack even basic knowledge of many things they should know before becoming an independent communicator, not to mention their ability to offer consulting.


I hardly see manufacturers who think that good documentation would help their sales figures.

On the other side there are those who have lots of experience and then get independent. I left the „safe haven“ at my employer in 1989 when the job got boring and I could only find same-level alternatives. A few years later my former employer decided to out-source documentation. A former colleague used that opportunity to start his own business.

The first group of independents tries to get jobs at any price. They have definitely destroyed the price structure in the greater Berlin area. Most development and production that had been subsidized in West Berlin has left and most of the East German producing economy has collapsed. You always find someone who wants to do it another bit cheaper... I hardly see manufacturers who think that good documentation would help their sales figures. EU (European Union) regulations more and more require that documentation must be delivered and quite often say a lot about required contents. But I see not so many traces of this at my work.

With a sluggish economy and more than 12% official unemployment rate times aren't so good for newcomers. I am happy that I took my route eight years ago. These days I actively search for jobs over the Internet and if someone asks about my qualifications I can simply write him „search for me at Altavista“.

You cannot build such a portfolio within a few months...



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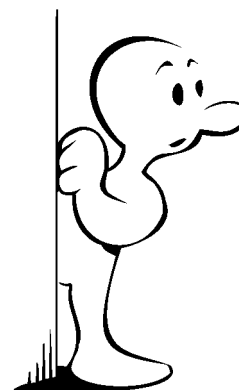
Response from Ron Blicq

Alexander:

Thank you for responding to my article. Your comments certainly paint a different picture than the picture I see in Canada. Yet one thing seems to come through your words, which is common in Canada too: those who are very good at their work will succeed, once they have established a „track record“. The hard part for the newcomer to independent consulting is establishing that history.

The successful independents also hire or subcontract work to other independents when their „plate becomes too full.“ Again, they hire only those who are good at their work; those with less skill get hired only once.

Ron Blicq



Introduction into Integrated Documentation Development (CO 4)

by Rini Weijmann

Previously, the documentation development process was sequential.

Industry considers technical documentation as a subordinate matter. The documentation department is usually involved late in the product development process. The result: technical documentation spoils the planned time-to-market. The company loses market share and a loss of profit mounts up to 30% over the product's total life cycle. Market trends indicate that this can be improved with the introduction of integrated documentation development, speeding time-to-market by 40%.

Improved Time-to-Market Can Increase Market Share

Management consultants like Arthur D. Little and McKinsey have investigated the internal business factors that influence total profit on a product. Their main conclusion: if a product exceeds its predicted market release date by 10%, it will miss 25% to 30% of its forecast profit over the product's total life cycle. Innovative companies speed up time-to-market continuously: they recognize that to lose time means to lose market position.

Technical Documentation Can Cause a Bottle-neck in Product Readiness

If the documentation department is involved too late in the product development process, the crucial time-to-market is lengthened because unforeseen activities often have to be carried out giving even less time to prepare changes in the product documentation. In addition, recent (European) directives pay much attention to requirements for technical (user) information, which increases documentation preparation time.

Integrated Documentation Development = Effective Project Management

Integrated documentation development means that the documentation product development process must run parallel with the product development process. This results in a simultaneous availability of the product and its (multi-lingual) user information. Practice shows that implementation of integrated documentation development can result in a 40% reduction of the time required for documentation development, a 40% improvement in efficiency, and a 30% reduction in costs.

How are these results achieved? Which parameters are responsible for these improvements?

Changing the Documentation Development Process

The reduction in running time is primarily based on changes in the documentation development process itself. Previously, the documentation development process was sequential, starting about half way through the product development process. Each part of the process - writing, translating, layout and production - did not start until after the previous part was finished. As a consequence the technical documentation often was not available on the product release date and so time-to-market was delayed. Introduction of a parallel process for documentation development, with each part started at an appropriate time for that part to be completed on time, shortens the overall running time, and the product and its documentation are available at the forecast product release date.

Simultaneous preparation of the whole documentation development process in parallel is also essential. Common milestones are determined for both processes and common review meetings are organised regularly to monitor progress.

Similarly, suppliers of services to the documentation development process, like translation agencies and printing houses, are integrated into the total picture and are considered members of the documentation development team. They are

also continuously updated on the planning and progress of the project.

Making all this happen means implementing effective project management. Documentation development is divided into a number of projects, with each of them headed by a project leader. Contemporary information technology tools are used to implement process planning and make the required knowledge of the product and its development accessible for everyone involved.

Introducing Project Management

To reduce mis-understandings and overlap of functions, and to prevent „reinventing the wheel,“ a summary of the proposed contents of each document is prepared and approved by the project management team. This helps identify existing text that may be re-used. Similarly, any changes have to be processed through a change order procedure process. These steps also result in cost reductions, such as:

- Fewer staff hours per project
- Higher efficiency per staff hour
- Delivery of all languages as a one-time „package“ to the printing office
- Suppliers do not have „empty hours“ on the account.

Consequently, forecasting and cost control also become an integral part of project planning.

STIC Meetings On Integrated Documentation Development

I realise that this is only a very short summary of integrated documentation development. The implementation of the process as described here takes time and effort, but the results make it of great value. The Dutch Society for Technical Information and Communication (STIC) will be organizing meetings on Integrated Documentation Development throughout 1998. I gave the first, general introductory lecture, which is now being followed by presentations by other professionals who are focusing on particular aspects of the process.

Now, start your computer and share with us what you know about this subject!

You can contribute your opinion to TC-Forum or, if you are impatient, contact us by email. We will be eagerly waiting for your information!

STIC is anxious to know

- Are you interested in integrated documentation development?
- How far has your company progressed in implementing the principles of this process?
- Should we consider organising an international workshop?

For Information on the STIC-meetings „integrated documentation development“ contact the

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Documentation development is divided into a number of projects.



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Rini Weijmann works as a free-lance management consultant mainly on CE-certification and on documentation management.

TC Consulting: A Network Approach (CO 5)

by Wolfram Pichler

In 1997 two developments in the area of networking have become evident:

New methods of documentation production

1. Equipment manufacturers are no longer content with instruction manuals printed on paper. They are beginning to ask for online documentation as well—partly for distribution on CD-ROM and partly for web presentation. So classical DTP documentation has to be prepared for interactive network use in addition to the usual form.

2. The method of documentation production – as far as other than in-house documentation is concerned – is changing from the freelancer workshop to a service network of 10 to 20 participants, which acts like a communication convoy, virtually cooperating via a network. This development enables large equipment manufacturers to outsource extensive and complex documentation jobs, negotiating with only one service organization.

Documentation for Network Use

Common publishing tools have developed in a way that has gradually enabled the output of not only offset films but also html and pdf files. Suddenly new distribution channels for our publications have appeared. As a publishing team, we can use Adobe Acrobat files for cross-platform cooperation.

Equipment manufacturers have started to use Acrobat files for distribution on CD-ROM. They have discovered that Acrobat files readily serve as a technical database on which one can set up an interactive navigation interface.

The next step followed almost automatically. By using multimedia authoring tools one can add a presentation of corporate and product philosophy or even a catalogue to offer final customers the possibility of online ordering. For web purpo-

ses, the pdf files can be used in combination with html pages as a user interface for navigation.

TC Consultants Cooperating via Network

These multimedia jobs often require more than one expert. A photographer may be needed to take professional shots of devices or machines in a factory. A TC consultant will have to design the instruction manuals from scratch to pdf file. And a screen designer will have to organize the interactive user interface. If, for example, you have to design the online help for tomorrow's type of refrigerator, you will need a software programming expert. To draw up contracts between TC consultants and their corporate clients, you may need a lawyer (also to avoid product liability or copyright violations).

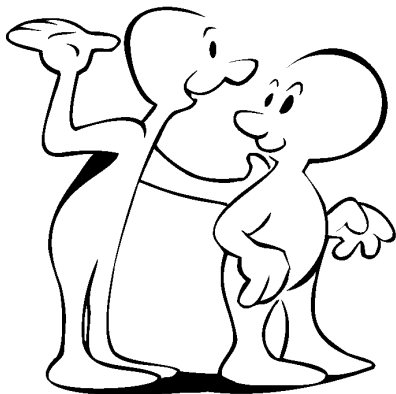
To gather these skills means assembling a team of experts who come together differently for each job. As a TC consultant, you might remember all the professionals that have successfully worked with you in the past and invite them to establish a small enterprise syndicate. The participants should know each other directly, or through other participants who know each other well enough to ensure mutual trust and that they can rely on a high quality contribution from each member.

As contributing professionals you might consider the following for your team or syndicate:

- [Technical Writer](#)
- [Graphic Designer](#)
- [Technical Photographer](#)
- [Screen and Multimedia Designer](#)
- [Webmaster](#)
- [High-End Scan and Print Service provider](#)
- [Software Programmer](#)
- [Product Manager](#)

- Technical Mother Tongue Translators
- Training Consultant
- Management Consultant
- Lawyer
- Overall Production Editor

All these individual professionals should be able to contribute complementary skills, thus avoiding competition between the participants. They need not reside in the same region since they will arrange their cooperation by electronic networking. To begin with, the participants may be spread over a whole country, although really they will be limited only by the „borders“ of the Internet.



Internet Based Cooperation

As soon as the mini-syndicate has constituted itself, it should establish a WWW, FTP (File Transfer Protocol) and mail server. There should be a common presentation of the services of the complete team, containing links to a presentation of each individual participant. The presentations should contain the scope of the services offered as well as a spotlight page displaying recent examples of job experiences and/or developments of new TC products and services, thus maintaining the web presentation up to date and regularly offering fresh information. The syndicate should establish a mailing list for internal communication

and cooperation. This will keep all participants informed, even though they may not be involved in a current project. They will also require an FTP account for quick and comfortable distribution of multiple-megabyte multimedia files between participants and clients.

Commuconvoy - a Model for a Virtual Consulting Group

To meet the above-mentioned objectives, in 1997 several people established Commuconvoy to carry out highly efficient work-group publishing. It comprises a group of experts, each a specialist in a particular field, who can offer all services in technical documentation, consulting, and advertising. Commuconvoy can assemble both human resources and high-tech equipment for all kinds of projects. The greatest advantage for customers, is that there is only one interface between client and Commuconvoy. And Commuconvoy can communicate between partners in an extremely flexible way, even if its members are not located in a single office building, or within the same town.



Wolfram W. Pichler

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Independent Consulting in Technical Communication - A Necessity Rather than a Trend (CO 6)

by Achim H. Pollert

As he wrote in TC Forum 3-97, Ron Blicq has watched the number of technical communicators working as independent consultants increase remarkably over the past decade – and he wonders whether you may call this a trend.

To me the reason for this is obvious.

As far as I can see the world economy is going through a change in structure which makes „outsourcing“ a necessity (I shall explain later why this is not quite the correct word).

When talking of *new* products, *new* services, *new* technologies today, you are talking of small and medium sized businesses. It started in the 1970s with the PC, and it's going on now with the Internet, that a good part of total innovation has *not* come from the big shops. Very often fundamental innovation in our days stems from one individual entrepreneur.

In the small and medium sized company, however, the production of technical documentation and/or instructions is a one-time job. You merely have got one product which you have got to sell first to make some cash. So there is no way to employ a technical communicator - for the job cannot become full time employment. Therefore, at least in a starting phase, smaller businesses have to have their technical documentation produced by an independent consultant. This, by the way, is the reason why you cannot really call it „outsourcing“, for it never has been in-house.

Some five people who work in a shop in Hazebrouck, France, and sell a highly specialized product on the world market, could not possibly hire a full time technical communicator. Similarly, they won't have either a marketing director or an accountant on the payroll.

Later this may change, of course. Once the business is large enough many of these duties may be looked after by in-house employees. (Mind you,

because of high rent and overhead costs, even in large companies such as IBM it may still be more economical to bring in an external consultant to do their technical documentation.)

So the question whether there is going to be a growing market for freelance communicators really depends on what sort of companies will dominate industry in the future.

If the trend continues as at present, there is no doubt there will be business for many independent communicators. This will also apply to technical translators, CI (Corporate Identity) consultants, marketing professionals, etc.

It certainly will not depend on manufacturers' receptiveness.

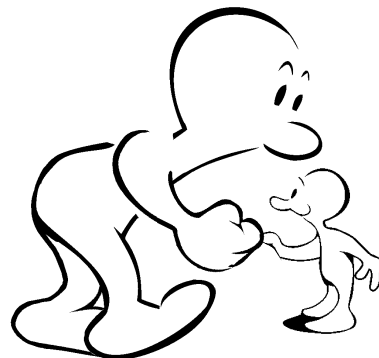
There will
be business
for many
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commu-
nicators.



Achim H. Pollert

works as a marketing consultant, journalist, and management trainer in Switzerland. He owns an internet consultancy firm.

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Following New Avenues: "TANDEM" (CO 7) Partnerships Between Daimler-Benz Technical Writers and Suppliers

by *Bernd-Ruediger Heinisch*

The approaching Daimler-Benz (DB) product offensive has given the impetus to a new step. Star Information & Services, the DB service literature „factory“, has also introduced TANDEM philosophy, which has been already put into action by DB's development and production divisions. An important aspect of this new method of cooperation is that it allows DB to integrate the suppliers into the system much sooner than previously.

Another aspect of applying the TANDEM principle to the production of service literature is that it improves efficiency and quality, and achieves safe processes even under extreme time pressure and shortage of personnel.

Until recently a multitude of suppliers with very different levels of specialization more or less cooperated with DB's technical authors: Sometimes there were up to four suppliers for only one kind of information, which resulted in considerable expense in co-ordination, maintaining quality, and product control. Production of a new Cabriolet gave the starting signal for a new way of cooperation.

The TANDEM partner for development and production, Messrs Karmann of Osnabrueck, has been involved from a very early stage. As a Cabriolet specialist, they played a prominent role in the preparation and production of the folder control literature.

The technical authors of Karman, once they were introduced to the DB documentation system, produced the diagnosis manuscripts, the wiring and hydraulic diagrams, and the functional and repair descriptions. They adapted the vehicle-specific customers' literature and introductory manuals according to a guide and, based on a division of labour, they prepared the service literature together with an integrated TANDEM partner, following the DB documentation system.

Thus the partner was responsible for the

system range on the expert level, and the DB coordination has been reduced to a minimum (just quality control and controlling).

The mutual understanding of the TANDEM philosophy has enabled the partners to implement close and efficient project handling. The experience they have gained will point the way ahead for future projects.



Bernd-Ruediger Heinisch

Head of Information-Management
Product Projects

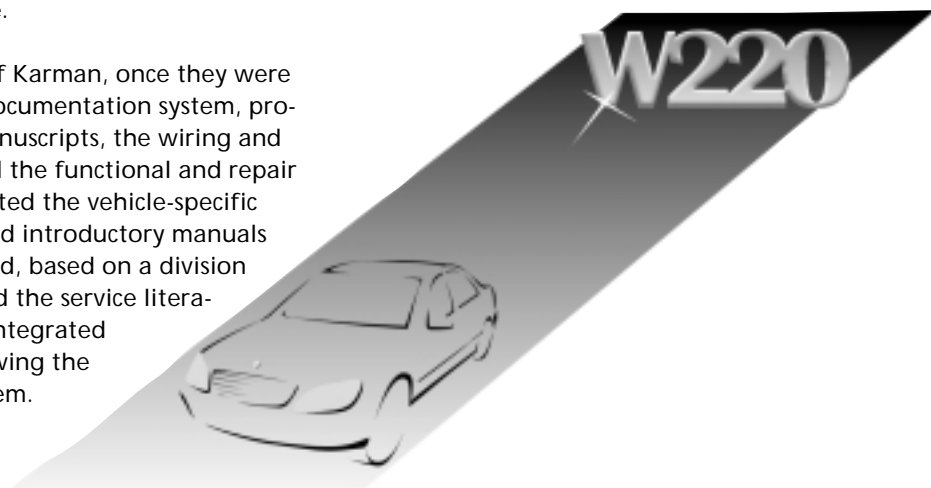
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How we Educate Technical Communicators in the United States (ET 2)

by *Thomas L. Warren*

Background

During World War II, the weapons systems became complicated to the point where special documents were needed to install, repair, and use them. The job of being a technical writer emerged in the defence industry as a result. After the war, in the 1950s, interest in educating these writers led to establishing academic programs in technical communication. The first graduate-level program was established at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, Troy, New York (RPI) in 1952, and the first undergraduate program was established at Carnegie Mellon in 1958. Since then many programs have been developed, offering education leading to certificates and associate, bachelor, masters, and Ph.D. degrees. In 1973, when the Council for Programs in Technical and Scientific Communication (CPTSC) held its first meeting, 17 schools were identified as offering programs. CPTSC has met annually since then and the number of schools offering programs has climbed steadily from the original 17 (1973) to 28 (1981) to 140 (1993).

Schools sending a representative to the annual CPTSC meeting have increased over the years from 9 in 1974 to 39 in 1993. Approximately 10 to 12% of the Society for Technical Communication membership identifies itself as being associated with academic programs – although not all these programs offer certificates or degrees in technical communication.

Curriculum

Students studying technical communication as a discipline currently mix study of the theory of human communication with the practical application of that theory in projects. Frequently, the textbooks they use offer theoretical background to the instruction and require students to acknowledge that background through, for example, papers written to explain the project.

Students at Oklahoma State University, for example, have courses that range from pure theory (theories of human communication) to pure practice (internships where they work as a technical communicator in business, industry, or at a campus agency). Some courses are focused on specific skills. Undergraduate students, for example, take a course in copy editing and graduate students take a course in production editing (although they may also take the copy editing course). Other courses are focused on specific forms of technical communication (documentation, for example, is offered with the focus on writing both on paper and online). For information about the program, see our web page (<http://www.okstate.edu/artsci/techwr/>).

With this as background, what do you think about how technical communicators are educated – especially in your own country? How do you, readers of TC-Forum, respond to the following assertions?

1. Technical communicators must have a technical background before working in industry, business, or government. The formal educational systems must supply that background as part of the degree programs.
2. Professional societies must directly influence how technical communicators are educated.
3. The professional societies should control the technical communication certification process, including the decisions about what knowledge should be certified.
4. The professional technical communication societies should certify formal educational programs.
5. The professional societies should offer continuing education for the technical communicator rather than the formal educational system.



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Comments on „To Use Word ...“ (TO 3)

by *Annegret Zimmermann*

Some months ago I had the misfortune of having to use Word 6.0 for Windows to write the translation of a manual (normally I use INTERLEAF for such jobs). The manual consisted of about 400 pages, filled with formulas, graphics and numbering. This job was a great opportunity to notice the shortcomings of Word. Let me list the features I found most disturbing and hindering:

- **Working with document templates.** Yes, you can use document templates containing formatting styles in Windows, but it is extremely tedious. If you want to create a new style or edit an existing one, you have to click yourself through at least 3 menus and dialogs. If you are setting up a new document template you will likely get a cramp in your mouse-hand!
- You cannot **work with large files** - at least not if you want to avoid having a Windows crash every 10 minutes. Large files must be broken down to files with max. 20 to 30 pages. Consequently, using automatic numbering or creating an index or a table of contents becomes complicated.
- **The formula editor** is completely inadequate and must be a bad joke – especially if you are used to the very comfortable formula editor of INTERLEAF.
- **There is no real WYSIWYG** (Most disturbing). Yes, there is a View option called Layout, but what you see on your screen is not what you get. Word creates the actual page breaks always just before printing (and again and again and again if you repeat printing your document). In the printout you nearly always find some nasty surprises: e.g. the graphic which fitted on the page on screen does not do so on the printout and the following paging is a mess.
- **Different printout on different PCs.** Word uses both the printer and the graphic driver for making the final page breaks. If you change your PC to work with a different printer, you will probably get a different printout. If you

change to a different PC with different graphic card but the same printer, you will also get a different printout.

My conclusion: I cannot recommend Word for technical documentation if you need any DTP abilities, or if you have to insert lots of graphics and formulas. Word is certainly no match for real DTP programs such as INTERLEAF or FRAME-MAKER, whatever the advertisements may say.

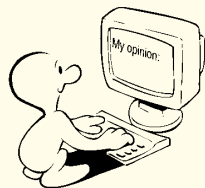
Word is acceptable if you need a text processor for simple texts without extensive layout, e.g. for secretarial work, or if you need an RTF (Rich Text Format) editor for online documentation but certainly not in technical documentation!

Now for a personal tip: if you want a low-cost Windows text processor with a high ability in DTP, try Word Pro (formerly Ami Pro) of Lotus.



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Letters to the Editor:



Dear Hans,

I am writing in response to the discussion about consulting in the last couple of issues of TC-Forum (CO 1 & CO 2).

I work as an independent technical writer near Boston, on the east coast of the United States. My experience has been similar to that described by Marcella Lazzari. Frequently, the people who hire me have only a vague idea of what they need. They need „a manual“. The manual also is often an afterthought. This is not universally true, but it is common. It is especially common among small start-up companies, of which there are many in the Boston area.

In addition to the questions presented so far, I also would be interested in discussing how people market their services. I've found that the most effective method for me is referrals from existing clients. Do other independents also find this to be true? What have people's experiences been with other methods? Have other people tried direct mail? A Web site? Cold calls? Something else more creative?

Also, I've been very impressed with the issues of TC-Forum that I have received.

Regards,
 Ami Wright
 ami@ziplink.net

A Multi-Language Translation Problem

I have been asked whether subscribers to TC-Forum can provide answers to the following multi-language question. Please send your reply directly to Marla Marom (marla.marom@oridion.com) or, if you think your suggestions are of more general interest, to me for publication in TC-Forum.

*Hans Springer,
 Editor*

Marla wrote:

Background:
 MDD (Medical Device Directives) are currently applied to 19 different European countries. The languages needed to cover these for professional use products (i.e. operator's manuals, directions for use, etc.) are Danish Dutch English Finnish French German Greek Italian Portuguese Spanish Swedish

The Question:

I am curious to know how other companies are handling this multi-multi-language translation – not from the translation aspect but from the documentation end-product. Are they providing one language per manual? Or are they providing several languages (and, if so, how many?)

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Please feel free to contact either the Editor or your NCP for any questions concerning TC-Forum.

Professional Events

TC-Forum provides information about upcoming events for technical communicators. These include conferences, seminars, calls for papers and other information of professional interest. TC-Forum accepts information about non-profit events only. Send information to the Editor (address see Impressum page 3).

14 - 15 May 1998
Luebeck, Germany

tekong Tagung

Technical Communication Conference

The tekong spring conference will take place on May 14-15 in Luebeck, Germany. International participants are highly welcome. Information in German and a flyer in English are available. If you want to distribute conference information to your colleagues, or to receive copies yourself, please contact Michael Fritz¹⁾

21 - 22 May 1998
Language Technologies Institute,
Carnegie Mellon University

CLAW '98: 2nd International Workshop on Controlled Language Applications

The 2nd International Workshop on Controlled Language Applications will be held May 21-22 at Carnegie Mellon University, Pittsburgh, PA, USA. Since the first CLAW workshop, held at University of Leuven in 1996, there has been continued strong interest in the research and development of controlled language applications. For further details see: <http://www.lti.cs.cmu.edu/CLAW98/> or contact Teruko Mitamura²⁾

28 - 30 May 1998, Granada, Spain, First International Conference on Language Resources and Evaluation

The Conference will provide an overview of the state-of-the-art in Information and Communication Technology, with particular focus on the availability of language resources and the methods for the evaluation of resources, technologies and

products. We will discuss problems and opportunities, exchange information on ongoing and planned activities, present language resources and their applications, discuss evaluation methodologies and demonstrative evaluation tools, explore possibilities, and promote initiatives for international cooperation in the areas mentioned above. For information: <http://ceres.ugr.es/~rubio/elra.html> or <http://www.icp.inpg.fr/ELRA/confle.htm>

3 - 6 June 1998, Winnipeg, Canada:

TCI 98

Third Annual Educational Institute for Technical Communicators

A strong educational program has been prepared for the Third Technical Communication Institute - TCI 98. This year's topics include

- Designing Interactive Learning Materials
- GUI Computer Interfaces and Performance Support
- Writing Effective Proposals
- Standards for Online Information
- Usability Testing
- Developing Indexing Skills
- Elements of Visual Design

For information contact Ron Blicq or Lisa Moretto³⁾ or: www.umanitoba.ca/faculties/con_ed/partners/tci

11 - 13 September 1998
Cambridge, Great Britain

ISTC Conference '98 - Golden Opportunities

"Conference '98 celebrates the 50th anniversary of the ISTC. It is also 50 years since the transistor transformed electronics and gave us our first computers.

Costs for the full weekend are:

Society Member	£300.00p
Non-member	£350.00p
Partners	£175.00p

Members of INTECOM Society Members enjoy Society Member Rates. The programme is coming together. Those wishing to present a paper or workshop should contact the ISTC conference office⁴⁾.

23 - 25 September 1998
Quebec, Canada:

IEEE/PCS IPCC 98

Technical Communication Conferences

The Professional Communication Society of the Institute of Electrical Engineers Inc (IEEE) is holding its 1998 annual conference in Quebec City, Canada. Sessions will be in both normal conference format and in the Forum „Idea Market“: pioneered at INTECOM's Forum conferences. Some sessions will be held in French. For information contact Ron Blicq or Lisa Moretto³⁾ or www.quantumlynx.com/ipcc98

June 2000 in the UK:
Forum 2000

At its second meeting in October 1997 the organizing committee fixed the theme for Forum 2000: "Forum 2000 - Technical Communication Leading the Way. As we enter the new millennium Technical Communicators will make their mark in history. Documenting technology is our responsibility and, with the advancement of tools and equipment in all aspects of life, Technical Communicators will have to seize the opportunity to lead users into the future". Further announcements will be published in TC-Forum and in www.TC-Forum.org as soon as they are available.

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