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* Each Topic has a two-letter abbreviation, for example
• CL for Controlled Languages
• RU for Readability, Usability, Quality
• SA for Special Aspects
• TO for Tools
• HL for Highlights from Prof. Events
• ML for Mailing List Discussion
The contributions (articles or comments) are numbered consecutively through the different issues of TC-Forum.

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

Dear colleagues:



In this issue, we focus on the role and education/training of technical communicators:

- Johan Näsström (from Sweden) describes the development and Training and Education of Technical Communicators in Sweden (p. 12) and the results of a member-survey of the Swedish FTI (p. 17)

- Frederick Menezes (from India) has investigated the personal 'history' of technical communicators (p.14)
- Andreas Baumert (from Germany) describes thoughts for future development of study courses at a German University of Applied Sciences (Fachhochschule) (p.7)
- Reto Schilliger (from Switzerland) proposes a combination of education and training for technical communicators based upon future job requirements (p. 9) and suggests advertising our professions and services (p. 18)

These articles present different points of view and give, I feel,

interesting backgrounds for further discussion among us technical communicators. I invite your comments and your views on the future of education and training in our field. Please send me your contributions for publication in TC-FORUM.

We are also introducing a new topic: "Mailing List Discussions". In this new topic, we will publish summaries of such discussions to inform those of you who have not followed these discussions. The first such summary is contained in this issue. We still look for further volunteers to summarise one or the other topic. The list of topics discussed so far is contained on page 22. Please contact me if you are interested.

The Forum 2000 committee is working enthusiastically for you to prepare a great conference. The first call for activators (presenters) has been distributed by INTECOM member societies. If you haven't received your copy, please contact:

- Peter Greenfield, pegre1@abbeynational.co.uk (if you are from Europe) or

- Ellen Fenwick, fenwick@cyberhighway.net (if you are from outside Europe)

- Or visit the website for Forum 2000 information: <http://www.istc.org.uk>

The organising committee has already received a number of proposals and accepts further proposals by July 1999. A call for exhibitors will be distributed soon. If you're interested in being an activator or exhibitor, please make sure you are registered in time.

We will keep you informed regularly about any progress.

Yours
Hans Springer



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- ▶ **TWIN**, Technical Writers of India
- ▶ **IBM**, T. J. Watson Research Institute, USA

Technical Writers Gain Control (CL 16)

by Ursula Reuther

In the field of technical writing the use of Controlled Language (CL) attracts more and more public interest. However, the merits of controlling language in the context of technical documentation are not uncontroversial.

On the one hand, there is a clear need for correct, consistent, easily readable and understandable, and *translatable* documentation. This objective undoubtedly can be reached by adopting a Controlled Language approach, restricting "natural language" input to previously defined syntactic and stylistic structures as well as to a restricted set of both general and terminological vocabulary.

On the other hand, there are the reservations put forward by the technical writers about the realisation, the feasibility and even the usefulness of such an approach, since often they feel uncomfortable being restricted in "yet another" domain, i.e. their personal style of writing.

Conflict
between
needs of
industry and
wishes of
writers.

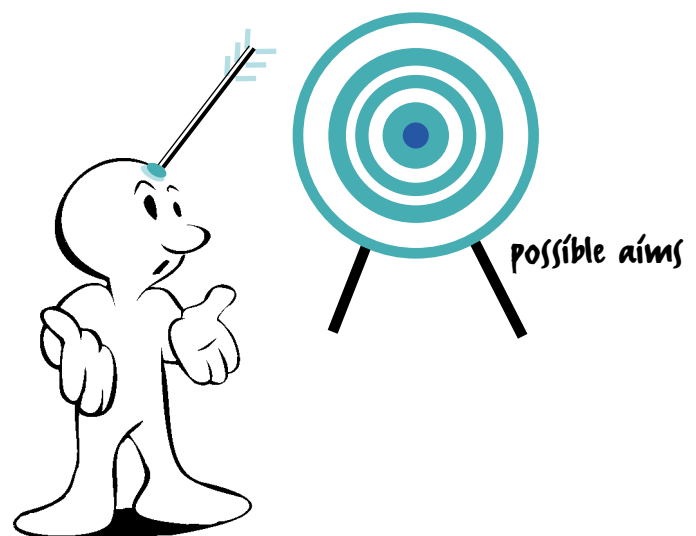
Within the MULTILINT¹⁾ project one of the aim has been to find a reasonable and feasible balance between the two positions above: the prototype application developed within the project takes into account both the users' needs (i.e. the requirements and expectations by the technical writers) and the needs emerging from the request to produce high quality technical documentation.

The linguistic tools integrated in the system focus on **source text control** are one of the most prominent points for quality control within the whole documentation process. The approach of controlling as early as possible aims not only at improving translation performance, but also at improving terminology management, information retrieval, and the like.

All tools can be activated from the SGML editor the technical writers are using for producing and editing their documents. The source text control tools comprise spell checking, grammar checking, terminology checking, consistency checking, and style checking. Once a control tool or a set of control tools is applied to a given document, the system highlights the defective text part in a separate control window and gives an explanation of the error and, for some control tools, a suggestion of how to correct the text segment. The tools can be combined and executed in any combination. So the control can be "tuned" according to the personal needs and well-known weaknesses of the technical writer, who then may decide for him-self or herself which control tools to apply and which recommendations to follow. Thus the writer to some extent preserves his or her "freedom".

New system
can be tuned
individually.

In addition, the system allows authors to specify further control parameters, i.e. they may choose between instructive and informative text types (which has an impact on the "style rules" to be applied), they can specify the (technical) domain



¹⁾ MULTILINT (07/95-06/98) is a research and development project funded by the German Ministry of Economy. Project partners are IAI and BMW AG, Munich, as industrial partner and validation site.

The Blue Background in Power Point (RU 16)

MULTILINT is flexible and user- friendly.

the text relates to, and they may choose between various languages and various levels of error explanation, since writers cannot always assume they will write in their mother tongue or to have an in-depth linguistic knowledge.

The most recent feature integrated in the system, which supports the user-friendliness on the conceptual level, is the so-called "shielding" of lexical items and grammatical structures. This functionality allows technical writers to "ignore", in special cases, the error message provided by the system. As for lexical items, the system stores the unwanted item in an author-specific word list for a possible later legitimisation, where appropriate.

The unwanted error messages with respect to syntactic structures are stored only for the same document, thus respecting the context sensitivity of syntactic errors.

So, given the modular design and the flexible handling of the system, the MULTILINT approach consists not only of a system which controls the technical writer, but also the technical writer controls individually what is going to be controlled and how this control is realised.




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by *Amo Fuchs*

Why is the default color of PowerPoint dark blue? (Here, I may speak for the local custom only.) People prepare the best slides MAN CAN CREATE – and yet they leave the default color stay dark blue. Then you cannot see what they want to demonstrate!

I would be glad to hear others' opinions too, particularly on the default color of PowerPoint.



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 Comment by Hans Springer

Comment by Hans Springer

Amo, there is a real reason to use a blue background: white characters on blue background are the most readable – especially in projected pictures and on traffic signs. In this case a bright white background could create a dazzle to the viewers' eyes.

Power Point is primarily designed to create slides for projection - and you may select whichever background color you think your customers will like the most!

On PC-monitors a light green background is, for psycho-physiological reasons another good choice - to avoid eye-fatigue during long work-hours.

Method of Text Presentation (RU 17)

by *Gordon Farrington*

If your readers read English as a foreign language.

A problem that sometimes occurs, when authors ask my advice about the method of presenting an instruction, is that they use words that I think will not necessarily be understood by people whose mother-tongue is not English.

This is especially true where the words are traditionally generic to the engineering domain, and I advise people to try and avoid using them.

Consider the instruction #1 below:

- You must apply a layer of XXX to:
 - all male and female threads
 - all thread undercuts, splines and bolt shanks
 - all interfaces of mating parts
 - all cavities and voids.
- Do not apply the product to chrome parts lubricated with grease or painted surfaces.

The words/terms I am wary of in this instruction are:

- undercuts
- shanks
- voids.

Now, in this case, the instruction is covering virtually the whole of the object, and excluding only a couple of areas. I therefore thought it might be better, simpler and just as understandable, to reverse the thought/writing process with that in mind, as follows #2.

- Apply a layer of XXX to these areas and parts of the YYY:
 - all attached parts
 - all fasteners and their threads
 - all the joints of mating parts
 - especially those areas that do not have easy access.
- Do not apply XXX to painted surfaces, or parts or areas that have greased, chrome surfaces.

Would those members who use English as a foreign language advise which of the above instructions they prefer. Other comments are, of course, welcome.

The replies produced the following statistics:

Prefer Para.1	Prefer Para.2	No Preference
2	9	4

Those preferring #1 obviously had a good command of English engineering terms as well as the language, and were used to reading such terms. Those not specifying a preference were either not in the same engineering domain, wanted to debate the pros and cons of audience analysis, or were totally non-committal, with regard to the intent of the original question.

Those preferring #2 generally stated 'better understanding' as the main reason for their choice. These replies represented 60% of all replies and 82% of the replies specifying a choice.

Conclusions

Provided that you can get your meaning across to your audience, without causing ambiguity or losing important meaning, do not include terms that you suspect are specific to your domain/locality.

If you do, you run the risk of baffling your audience with 'technocratese'.



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Maintaining a Curriculum (ET 4)

by *Andreas Baumert*

In 1991 the University of Applied Sciences (Fachhochschule) in Hanover was the first German academic institution to teach technical writing. Since then our curriculum has been subject to changes and it still is: Developing a curriculum is an ongoing process.

The curriculum currently puts its main emphasis on writing, computer science and visual arts. Other fields are interviewing skills, mechanical and electrical engineering, norms, law, business management, didactics and some more. The course lasts four years or eight semesters. It is oriented towards the specific needs of information design in business and industry. Therefore students spend nearly two semesters as interns in documentation departments as staff writers or in other areas related to the profession.

Despite the permanent changes to every curriculum we now need to meet some new requirements. One major challenge to every German university is to think about international degrees.

International Degrees

Traditionally a course at a German Fachhochschule ends with a diploma, which in our degree course has the title of "Diplom Redakteur" or "Diplom Redakteurin." Very few people know about that degree outside German-speaking countries. On the other hand the MA and bachelor degree are well known nearly everywhere. Consequently, if companies around the world are not familiar with the German diploma, applicants with an MA or a bachelor degree are in a much better position than graduates of a German university. This weakens a German applicant's position if international competition between universities is a factor in the selection process.

Our degree course in technical writing needs to meet that challenge. We have just started to discuss that issue. I cannot foresee the results but I hope that we will have an international degree for technical writers within the next five or six years. To achieve this goal will be much more complicated than it seems to be:

- International degrees need an accreditation. It is much more than a mere exchange of titles. We will need to completely redesign the curriculum.
- If we are really thinking about an MA in technical writing, we have to use English as the course language for at least the last two years.
- The master degree course will expand the course from four to five years.
- All changes need to take place without additional resources.

I cannot see that we can avoid developing new curricula leading to the MA or bachelor degree. The skilled and clever student wants to achieve the best results from his or her course of study. In the years to come that will only be possible by getting an international degree.

The Market

Companies hiring our graduates, and students starting their own businesses, tell us about the market's requirements toward our curriculum. The market often wants universities to take into account the latest version of specialized software, operating systems and so on.

That seldom makes sense, and neither is it possible: time and resources are limited. When, for example, I wanted to use Macromedia Director in one of my courses, I first needed to go for training myself. It took me a lot of time to acquire the basic skills for that one software package. We cannot answer every request from the market.

Market requirements towards curriculum are very specialized.

Maintaining a Curriculum (cont.)

On the other hand, teaching does need to consider new developments. These may be new techniques, such as JavaScript or XML, or more general changes such as the possible transition from technical writing to information design; changes that, as some argue, cover much more than writing.

The latest development is teleteaching which means providing correspondence courses via the Internet. Professor Rolf Schwermer has successfully finished the first courses. At German universities, he is the leading developer in the area of teleteaching for technical writers. For more information, visit the webpage:
<http://telekurs.fh-hannover.de/>

Internal Developments

Center of
excellence
for infor-
mation
specialists.

We do not concentrate on technical writing alone when we talk about future developments.

Our degree course also belongs to a department which has its own effects on our work. That department - science of information and communication - is home for biological documentation as well as for librarians. With new courses such as public relations and journalism, it will develop a center of excellence for information specialists.

Of course, a joint department also means joint administration of resources. One requirement is to match at least some content from one degree program with the content from other programs. In the past it was nearly impossible to find any match between librarians and technical writers. Today, some librarians also think of themselves as information specialists. From that point of view, common elements in different curricula make sense.

The Technical Writing Program in the Years Ahead

1. In Germany, more than 10 academic institutions have started degree courses for technical writing within the last eight years. None of them share the same preconditions.
2. Traditionally, German academic programs seldom competed in an international market. With technical writing programs this will change substantially within a couple of years.

I foresee fast-growing competition between universities worldwide. It started some time ago in the engineering sciences and shortly will have its effect on information designers. The market will evaluate different approaches German universities take towards technical writing. We in Hannover will need to introduce changes to our current curriculum if our program is to be ready for that competition.

That's what our team successfully started with.



Andreas Baumert, Prof. Dr.

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Technical Communicators for the Challenges to Come? (ET 5)

by *Reto Schilliger*

What are the Future Challenges?

When I started as a technical writer more than ten years ago, I wrote my first drafts with a pencil. Soon after, desktop publishing became part of my work, as did writing story boards for computer based training and managing online information projects. For several reasons the work of a technical communicator will change at an even higher rate in the future:

- The fast developments of the information age have already had some impact on our profession. While up to now not everybody has had to catch up with the fast-paced developments, this will soon be essential if they are to remain in the job market.
- Under the light of the increasing specialization of technical businesses and the growing weight of product liability issues, technical communicators will need a much more thorough understanding of the technical aspects and of the norms and regulations specific to their working field.
- Business changes have become the rule and they affect everybody. This means staying flexible through life-long learning.

A Basic Approach to Face the Challenges

Facing the challenges in technical communication may be possible only through a carefully optimized combination of education and training, two concepts that for the *purpose of this model* are defined as follows:

Education

Education stands for teaching rather broad knowledge and skills in a field of interest. It is typically offered by public schools, universities or other large organizations, and usually takes place in traditional settings. Although exceptions do exist, education usually requires the full-time presence of the student for a long time.

Training

Training stands for teaching very carefully selected knowledge and skills, over a shorter period. The objectives are based on specific tasks to be carried out at a workplace. Training is often delivered on-the-job or in modular courses that working people can attend in addition to their work. Being highly specific and therefore limited in content, training modules can be delivered in more modern ways, too, using media like CD-ROM and the Internet.

In the case of technical communication, education and training could be assigned the roles described below.

Carefully optimized combination of education and training.

Education in Technical Communication

To Provide the Common Basics

Independent from the exact nature of their jobs and the technical field they work in, technical communicators worldwide must have a common set of basic knowledge and skills to draw on.

Parts of the basics are already taught by regular schools, as is the case for writing in general. These parts, which often take years to learn, form a necessary prerequisite before one can even think about becoming a technical communicator.

Factors that are important when educating technical communicators are the required common basics not taught by regular education, such as being able to:

Technical Communicators ... (cont.)

- describe the mental process of handling information and take it into account in the design of information,
- describe and apply the basic requirements to make text legible and comprehensible, efficiently plan and manage writing and information projects
- visualize complex information,
- produce sketches,
- describe and apply the rules of good layout, and many more.

Basic education to be handled by schools and universities.

Because of the solid and proven nature of the common basics, there is no need for high flexibility. Therefore, and because of the amount of content, basic education in technical communications should preferably be handled by schools and universities, as well as by commercial organizations as already being done: some form of basic education is offered as part of engineering and language studies, and sometimes in the form of separate full-time or part-time courses.

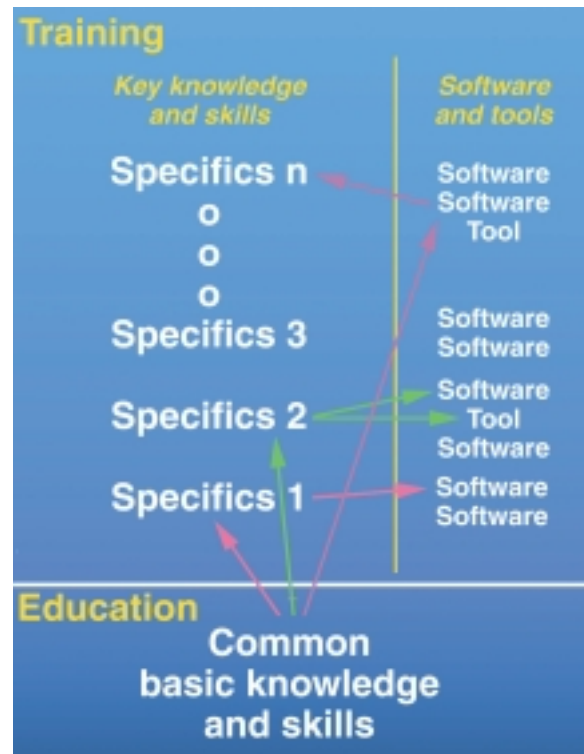
The only thing missing is the coordination of the various efforts, to achieve common objectives and content.

Training in Technical Communication

To Provide the Individually Needed Specifics

Once a technical communicator has completed basic education, the missing specifics for his or her individual career plan, job or project, should be covered by highly focused training modules. This is the only way to meet the requirements of fast adaptation to business and job-market changes. It is also more cost-effective.

Such training should focus on what may be called key knowledge and skills, and not on any specific software or tool (except, of course, to perform some exercises). There are so many tools on the



market today, that it would make no sense to concentrate on a specific one.

If tool-specific training is offered in combination with other training, this is fine. Otherwise, there are enough businesses already offering tool-specific training.

Consider an example:

For somebody needing to prepare for the production of an online-help, the additional training might cover four objectives: to be able to

- describe the different approaches of online-help systems,
- plan and manage any online-help project,
- explain the specific requirements concerning structure and writing style, and
- meet existing software standards.

Specialized training offered in individual training modules.

The content of any training modules depends on developments in production technologies and therefore requires steady change. As public schools and other large organizations are hardly able to react to new developments fast enough, training individually needed specifics might be in better hands with smaller (commercial) organizations.

A Daring Vision?

A Globally Coordinated and Approved System

A prerequisite for the success of the described model is the quality and the transparency of all its parts to trainees, customers and businesses. And, as globalization more and more asks for mobility, passing any of the courses should not only be of value in a specific country but also find acceptance worldwide.

When it comes to basic education of technical communicators, courses are already offered by private organizations as well as by technical schools and even universities. The first step towards the described system would mean standardizing the objectives and outcome of these basic courses, to be able to establish the further trainings from a well-defined basis.

This is where professional organizations such as INTECOM and its member societies might come into play, working in close cooperation to outline the objectives and the content as well as any further educational requirements. Such an outline should of course leave room for national and cultural specifics. The result of the work might be a standardized basic professional diploma that could be acquired at educational institutions worldwide.

The concerted efforts of professional organizations might also be needed when it comes to outlining the training modules. For these items, too, standards should be established, ideally in close

cooperation with potential employers. The standards could then be recommended to any organization offering such courses. If courses meet the standards they could be officially approved, and **advanced professional diplomas** might be awarded to successful students.

Finally, a higher **international diploma in technical communication** could be awarded to students having passed basic education and a combination of several training modules.

Establishing such a combination of standardized basic education and highly focused modular training will not be an easy task, especially when it is not limited to a single country. But thanks to the Internet and email, borders need no longer be considered an obstacle.

So, why not try?

International diploma in technical communication.



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Technical Communication in Sweden: Education, Certification

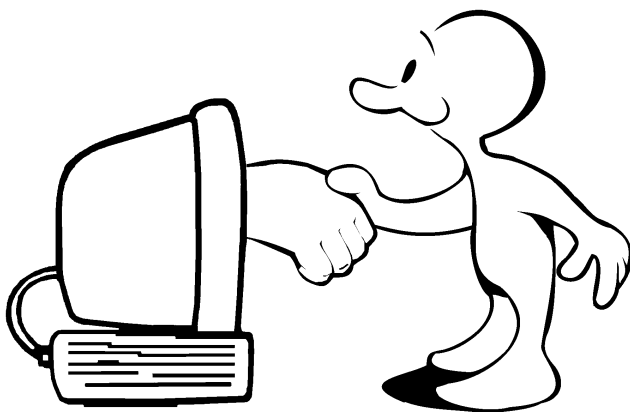
by Johan Näsström

Sweden is a small country. With a population of some 8 million, it is slightly larger than, for instance, the Paris region.

Internationalization is everyday life for technical communicators in Sweden.

In spite of the limited population, Sweden is a highly industrialised nation with a number of globally well known industries. As the home market for these industries is far too small, they have to rely on the export markets to sell their products.

This situation creates a rather special situation for technical communicators in Sweden. We have to translate the manuals into a large number of languages. And, as our own culture really does not have a dominating position in the world, we have to adapt the information to the target cultures on the different markets. Internationalization is a part of our everyday life.



35th Anniversary

Sweden's favourable position as an industrial nation during the sixties fostered a climate where the need for technical communicators grew fast, even if the profession as such was not identified. To promote the profession, a small group of technical writers initiated the formation of Föreningen Teknisk Information (FTI), the Swedish Society on Technical Communication, in 1964. Now, in 1999, FTI will celebrate its 35th Anniversary, and is thus one of the oldest communication societies, preceded only by the societies in England, USA and The Netherlands.

The main purpose of the society was to identify the profession, assist the members to increase their skills through conferences and produce a regular member newsletter. There also has been ongoing lobbying to develop education within the profession.

Growing Education Possibilities

The first courses in technical communication started by the training and consultancy company COMED in 1969. During the nineties a number of courses have also been developed at different universities covering subjects such as Information Engineering, Multimedia Design, Cognition Science, Interaction Design, Information System Science and Information Design. Even if many of these courses are rather recent additions, they will add to the overall competence and recognition of our profession.

But, so far, the best professionals probably are found among those who gained their competence during many years of experience. They are lacking little but an official recognition as an experienced and qualified communicator.

and Internationalization (SA 3)

INTECOM Code of Good Practice

Certified Communicators

More than twenty years ago, long before the ISO 9000 era, discussions were held among the FTI members how to establish an official status through a kind of certification for these experienced “pioneers” and experienced communicators. Eventually, the rules were set last year and some fifty members were officially certified during a small ceremony at a conference day last November.

The primary requirements for being an FTI-certified Technical Communicator are to have at least five years of experience in the profession and have been an FTI member for at least three years. The communicator also has to be aware of related laws and regulations.

The Communicator has to respect the INTECOM’s Code of Good Practice, to inform the client or the employer that they have the right to have jobs reviewed by an independent jury within FTI, and to be bound by the jury’s recommendations. The certification has created great interest from the members, particularly from the independent consultants, giving them a stronger position and a third party to sort out misunderstandings or complaints that may occur.

To sum up: the education possibilities, the well established society FTI, and the certifying possibilities, are promising factors that will ensure Swedish industries get qualified technical information from present as well as future technical communicators.



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by *Brigitte Beuttenmüller*

- Do not burden the reader with information he does not need – he has more than enough difficulties in handling the information he does need.
- It is the reader’s need for information that shall be fulfilled – not the communicator’s store of information that shall be emptied.
- The communicator shall be able to choose freely the means of expression that are the most effective with regard to the reader and the defined audience.
- The communicator is responsible for the intended reader’s understanding of the technical message.
- The medium is not the message.
- An information problem can often be solved in many ways – seldom is only one solution right and all the others wrong.
- The communicator must not surrender to irrelevant, subjective demands for changes of information.
- It is not unclever to express oneself in a simple way.
- The communicator should make changes in information products only when the alterations increase the effectiveness of the information.
- The communicator must be aware of the legal and moral aspects of his communications.



Technical Writing in India – a Survey (SA 4)

by Frederick Menezes

A technical writer is mostly involved in writing and designing user guides, brochures, and white papers for a variety of products. Though none of these activities are new, their categorisation under Technical Writing is a comparatively recent happening in India.

This survey attempts to peep behind the curtain and learn a bit more about those India's technical writing profession.

Scope and Purpose

Though the technical writing field in India is growing faster than ever before, no institution in the country imparts any kind of technical writing course or training. Some University courses include a paper in Technical Writing, but its scope is very limited. Also, no figures are available about the number of technical writers in India. Rough estimates suggest that there could be as many as 200 spread across the country.

So, if there is no formal technical writing training in the country, how did these approximately 200 persons get into the field? What are their academic qualifications? What field were they in before switching to technical writing?

This survey report centres around these questions and attempts to answer and analyse them.

Methodology

About 140 technical writers in India subscribe to an electronic mailing list called TWIN (Technical Writers of India). Thus, if you want to get through to Indian technical writers, TWIN is the best medium. The data for this survey has been gathered through TWIN.

The following four questions were posed to the technical writers:

1. What is your academic background?
2. What were your previous jobs before technical writing?
3. How/where did you hear about technical writing? How did you get into the field?

For how many years have you been involved in technical writing?

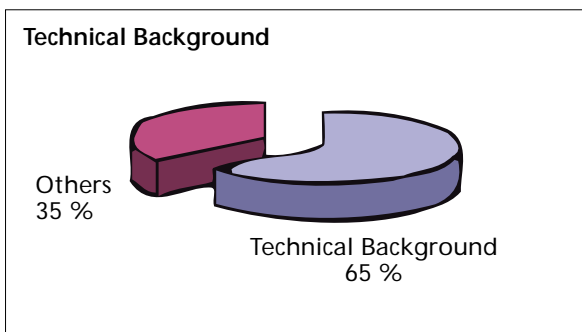
The survey is based on the responses of 49 technical writers who come from across the country and hail from many different organisations. The sample of respondents can, therefore, be considered sufficiently random.

Academic and Job Background

Technical

Technical writers are primarily writers who attempt to explain technical intricacies or concepts to a lay person. Therefore it is imperative that technical writers are technically competent to understand what they write about. A technical background for a technical writer definitely helps though it does not mean that those without a technical background cannot be technical writers.

If Indian technical writers are arranged according to their technical or non-technical background, the division looks like this:



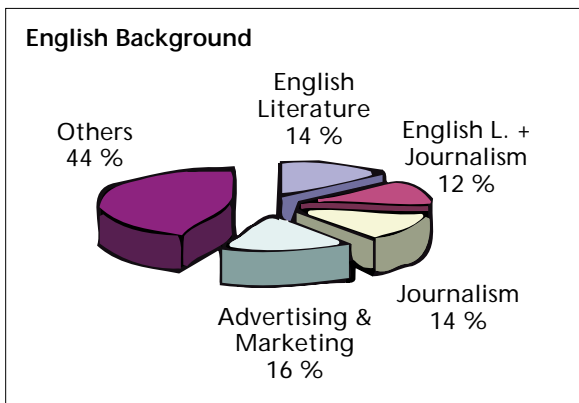
However, technical writers who have a technical background do not necessarily have a degree/ diploma in their field; rather, some may have worked in that field in some technical capacity.

English Literature, Journalism, Advertising & Marketing

Command over the language and a flair for writing are absolute musts for technical writers. Generally, those with a background in English Literature or Journalism are considered to have the skills and therefore could make good technical writers.

Probably, we can also include those in Advertising & Marketing in this category, if they have been involved in copywriting, preparing marketing material, and so on.

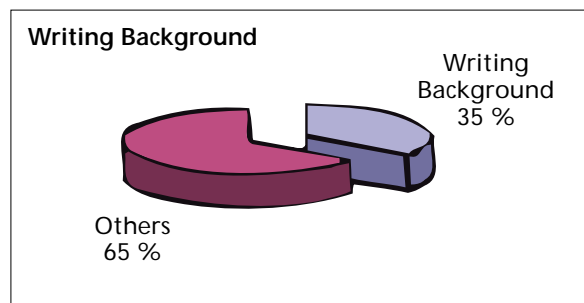
A substantial percentage of Indian technical writers have a background in English Literature, Journalism or Advertising & Marketing:



However, we cannot assume that all technical writers who fall into these categories have been involved in writing per se; that is, not all students of English Literature or Journalism may have sufficient writing background.

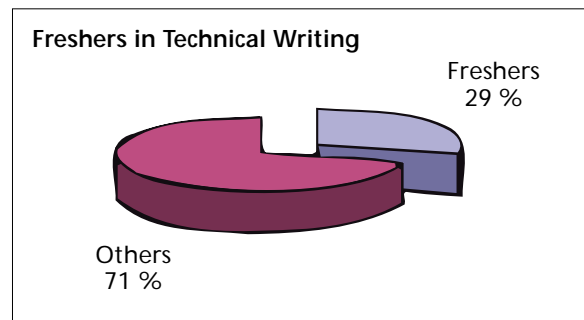
Writing

About two-thirds of Indian technical writers were engaged in some form of writing before switching to technical writing. While most of these technical writers were in journalism, a few others were involved in freelance writing, copywriting or research oriented writing.



Freshers

Although there are no formal technical writing courses in India, and awareness of technical writing is low, it is interesting that quite a number of Indian technical writers have started into a career as a technical writer – i.e. technical writing was their first-ever job:



Another interesting revelation from the survey is that some top Indian software companies recruit technical writers directly from the campus. Asia's largest IT company – Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) along with Wipro Infotech, Aditi Technologies and other software firms have conducted campus recruitment for technical writers at one time or the other. Recruitment of this kind has taken place at least at the Department of Journalism and Mass Communications of a prominent University and some private computer education institutes.

Technical Writing of India (cont.)

How Technical Writers got into the Field

One of the basic motivations for this survey was to find out how India's approximately 200 technical writers came to be in the field that they are in.

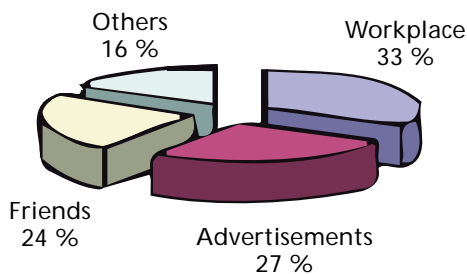
Many got the job by accident.

The survey reveals that a substantial number got into the field without having a clear picture about the job they were supposed to do. These technical writers mostly answered advertisements thinking they would fit the bill.

A lot of technical writers also seem to have been introduced to the field by friends and family members who were already technical writers or who were aware of the field.

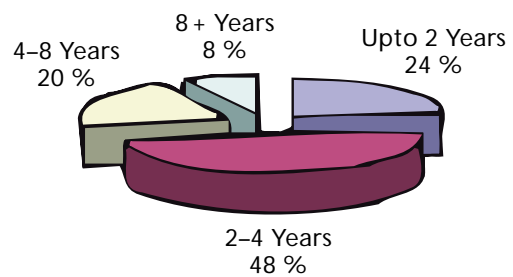
The majority of technical writers, however, came to know about technical writing through the organisation they were working in. These people apparently came in contact with people doing documentation in their respective organisations, took a liking to what the documentation people were doing, and embarked on the path of technical writing themselves:

Entry into Technical Writing



Experience Range of Indian Technical Writers

Experience Ranges



As expected, the survey suggests that technical writing has been picking up in India in the past few years. Today, about half of India's technical writers fall in the experience bracket of 2 to 4 years. There are also a few veterans in the field with over 8 years of experience extending up to 12 years:

Conclusion

The growth of technical writing in India and the kind of people in the profession make for an interesting study. Indian technical writers come from diverse backgrounds and appear to have adapted quite well to their new-found profession.

This survey, probably the first of its kind, has been a preliminary attempt to identify the backgrounds of technical writers and how they got into the technical writing profession. Ideally, the data collected for this survey should be further correlated to produce an enhanced and comprehensive study.

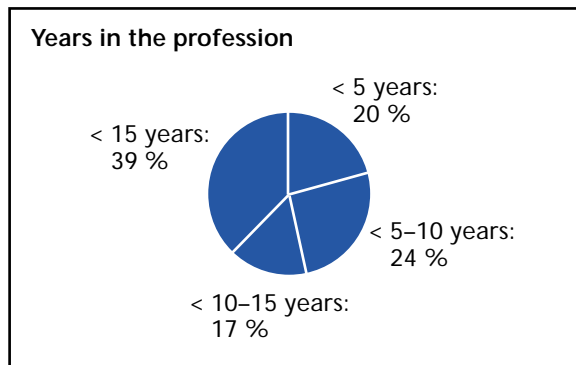
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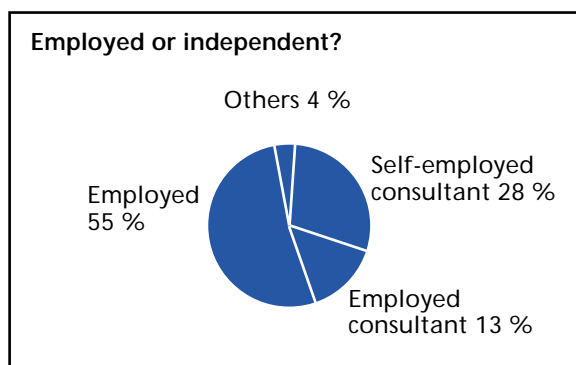
Swedish Member Survey 1998 (SA 5)

by FTI, the Swedish Society for Technical Communication

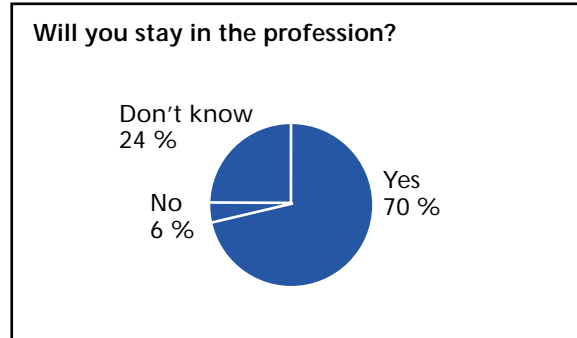
During the last year a member survey was made as a follow up to a survey made in 1991. Some 25 % answered of the 400+ FTI members. Here follows a selection of the results along with some comments:



The member share of rather new technical communicators has decreased somewhat compared to the 1991 survey.

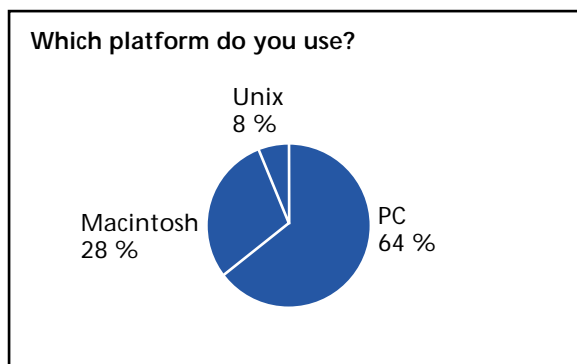


Compared to the 1991 survey, the number of employed has decreased, but the self-employed consultant share has increased to a large extent.



Only 6% think they will be doing anything else in the future but being a TC. From another question in the survey, it shows that 95% are satisfied or very satisfied with the job.

In the 1991 year survey one of the questions was: "Do you work with a mainframe, personal computer or typewriter?". (The answers then were: Mainframe 20%, Personal computer 75% and Typewriter 8%.) This time, only seven years later, that question was superfluous and was replaced with the following:



In the 1991 survey, Macintosh had a share of 61%, now reduced to 28%, but many have access to both Mac and PC. It is also worth mentioning that, according to the survey, 96% uses word processing, 80% layout programs. 98% has access to e-mail and 93% uses Internet. And as much as 82% of the member are storing documents in pdf-format, which now can be seen as a de-facto standard.

On Advertising our Profession (SA 6)

by Reto Schilliger

All over the world professional organizations advertise the technical communication profession. My personal impression is this: Many of these activities address students of higher schools (which is basically fine), while others address professionals already working in the field (which only makes sense if the objective is to sell memberships or training).

What I have not seen up to now are activities to address young people in the early process of planning their higher education and professional careers. The following thoughts contain some ideas for those trying to make our profession known to young people and to encourage them to consider a career in technical communications

Why Address Young People?

Choosing the right profession is a huge challenge.

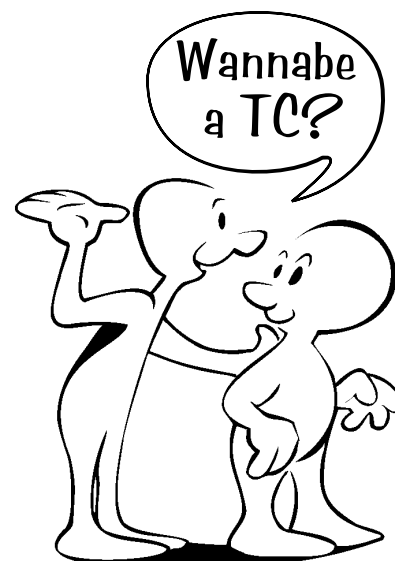
Choosing the right professional career is a huge challenge to most young people -- and their parents. The wider the talents of an adolescent are, the harder it gets to decide on a career that focuses on one or two specific skills and interests. Often, the right choice just does not seem to exist. I know this quite well, having struggled myself with the decision to become either a mechanical engineer (because of my interests in technical matters and aviation), a teacher (because I like to work with people and to pass on knowledge), or a journalist (because I have always liked writing and foreign languages).

Nobody ever told me when I was young that there was the option of becoming a technical writer to apply my somehow scattered interests and skills in a well-balanced mix! I only found out much later, and even then by pure coincidence. I strongly believe there are many young people out there in similar situations, and I think our professional associations should actively address them. Here are some ways to do so:

- Send carefully designed information material to education and career counselling services.
- Spread the knowledge of the existence of our working field in schools: Prepare lesson, plans and materials for various school levels that may be ordered or downloaded for free. Such lesson plans might incorporate topics such as:
 - the classic communication model (sender, receiver, channel, noise, feedback)
 - the use of active and passive voice
 - to be understood versus writing to get good grades (by writing for the teacher)
 - the process of writing from research, via outline to final text
 - methods of structuring
 - the limitations of written language and the power of illustrations
 - basics of layout and typography
 - basics of illustration work
 - testing of information

In the best case such materials encourage project-oriented learning across classes in language, drawing, physics, chemistry, and more.

- Give orientation speeches at schools about the jobs in technical communication.



Technical Documentation Goes Electronic:

- Organize competitions for schools in writing and illustrating instructions for everyday tasks. How about "repairing a flat rear tire on a classmates' bicycle"? Such a competition should be accompanied by detailed information on how the work can be tackled as a joint effort by language and drawing teachers.

If some of the above efforts require investment, sponsors will need to be found. How about a company that produces consumer goods and stresses user-friendliness? Or, in the above context, a bicycle manufacturer?

Prerequisite for Success:

An Inviting, Innovating and Young Image of our Working Field

Young people are affected and influenced by very high standards of visual communication. Just have a look at music videos or the design of snowboards or computer games! What should be taken into account, too, is that young people spend increasingly more time with CD-ROMs and on the Internet. So, modern media must be the very best, whether for print, CD-ROM or the Web. Information material must never have a cheap clip-art-look. Depictions of soon-to-be-outdated diskettes and technological innovations of the past should be avoided. Young people are after what they consider being „cool“.



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New Media Create New Problems for Technical Writers (TO 10)

by Ulrich Thiele

We finally are reaching the end of all our dreams: Distributing technical documentation electronically, creating CBT applications (Computer Based Training) and even transferring technical content into multimedia presentations. This is what technical writers have been working hard to achieve during the last years of our millennium.

Well, we still have some minor problems to solve, such as:

- How can we force users to obey our instructions to install the required reader software on their computers?
- How can we make sure that the software is 100% compatible with the customer's individually configured working environment?
- How can we foresee all the mistakes that a user probably will make during the installation process?
- How can we force customers, who have already messed up their system by trying to install the electronic documentation, to tell us exactly what was done so we are able to help them?
- How can we prevent frustrated customers from suing us if they are not able to use an electronic manual as expected?
- How can we convince frustrated customers that our products still are perfectly engineered, even if our electronic manual sometimes crashes their operating system?

New Media and all that: but the customer remains the king!

One thing is certain: It is not very helpful if we reject any responsibility, even if it would be covered by some laws dealing with product safety and product liability. And it does not help if we write: "If you, dear customer, don't exactly follow our installation instructions for the electronic manual, this will be your fault and not our problem. We will not be responsible for any trouble

Technical Documentation goes electronic (cont.)

caused by your stupidity (See the following list of European laws and directives regarding product liability).....“ ..

Customer satisfaction is the topic we are talking about. And even if it is definitely not the technical writer's fault that some electronic documentation is not compatible with the customer's PC, we have to help the customer solve the problem! This is the never-disappoint-a-customer-rule, which is much more important than any product liability law. Solve any PC problem caused by your electronic documentation at your customer's side, and do it quickly!

**Customer
satisfaction
always en
vogue!**

Here is extract from our top ten hotline list (don't laugh: this is real life experience in distributing electronic documentation at the end of our century!):

1. Trouble with self-extracting WINZIP archives: People don't know where they will find the unzipped files after extracting them.
2. Trouble with PDF files (Adobe Acrobat format): There are still Acrobat Reader versions 2.1 out there, that are not compatible with the newer 3.01. And it is important that older versions are completely removed from a system before the new version is installed!



3. Trouble with CD ROM applications: Some users copy the whole CD onto their hard disk (why?). They forget, that WINDOWS as a default hides all system files. The result: no DLL files are copied and the application will not run from the hard disk. It is real fun, finding out such faults by phone

4. No matter how much you write in your installation instructions and hardware requirements for multimedia documentation applications, hardly anyone reads what is printed on the CD or in the README files. And hardly anyone accepts any restrictions (such as "Close all Windows applications, especially any uninstaller software and screensaver programs!").

Well, these of course are minor problems for a programmer or experienced technical writer. Yet they will turn out to be major problems when it comes to providing customer satisfaction. These problems will still rule our electronic world for a couple of years. Keep this in mind when you mail another ZIP file or PDF document to a customer you depend on!



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„Results from the Electronic TC-FORUM / Summaries from the Mailing list“

Knowing that not all readers of the TC-FORUM paper version subscribe to the mailing list TCF-GEN, we have decided to report on some of the electronic discussions here as well. There are three reasons for doing so:

- *To spread discussion results beyond the TCF-GEN subscribers.*
- *To encourage technical communicators to subscribe to the mailing list.*
- *To invite colleagues to volunteer as reporters of interesting subjects to the readers of the TC-FORUM paper version or of the Website.*

The topics currently under discussion are listed in our website under "mailing-lists", where you can also find details on how to subscribe (and unsubscribe).

Discussion Results from the TC-Forum Mailing-List TCF-GEN on

Screenshots with the Mouse Pointer



by Hans Springer

Some time ago somebody asked (in a German speaking mailing list) how to produce screenshots which include the mouse-pointer.

Many thanks to those who commented on this topic: there were 7 comments. Here is my summary:

There are 3 or 4 software packages that enable screenshots showing the mouse-pointer, and permit different outputs of the result (e.g. print, email, save as a file in different graphic formats, OCR...). For example:

1. Hypersnap DX (details from www.hyperionics.com)
2. PaintShop Pro (details from www.jasc.com)
3. SnagIt (details from www.techsmith.com)
4. Hardcopy (details from www.sw4you.de in German language; other languages available)

In my view, the first three have the greater flexibility in output formats. The fourth mentions only the possibility of working on the output with 'external' graphic programs.

I prefer Hypersnap DX because it is not restricted to the dimensions of the screen. It allows 'scrolling snaps' and 'repeat last capture', which catches the mouse-pointer where you want to have it. Another advantage of HyperSnap and PaintShop Pro is interconnection to control a scanner. I have no experience with SnagIt yet.

Others recommend SnagIt as an often used software for this purpose. It offers specialities like 'text conversion' which converts text blocks (e.g. on the Windows desktop) to machine readable text, video capture and Active Capture for capturing web pages and (otherwise) unprintable long lists. But I couldn't find an interconnection to a scanner.

For those of you who would like to read more, I have a WINZIP file with all comments (Screens1.zip, 8 kB) or a self-expanding ZIP-file (Screens1.exe; 38 kB) available for you on request (please email me at: springer.h@geod.geonet.de).

Thanks again for joining this little discussion.



Last Minute News

Content of earlier TC-FORUMs

We have installed the content of earlier TC-Forums in our website www.tc-forum.org

You'll find there the papers (by issue, topic, author) and you may download what you are interested in.

Address Administration

Please send correspondence re. subscriber administration for the TC-Forum paper version (e.g. new subscription, address change...) to subs_tc-forum@tc-forum.org

Distribution

The paper version is distributed world-wide by regular mail. A quicker access to the most recent content is available on our website. Mailing list subscribers will receive a message about any updates of the website.

TC-Forum Website

If you've visited our website recently, you may have identified some changes in the layout of the pages and the navigation. What you can't see is the change in the software behind the changes, and the new programming using this structure-oriented software.

With this software we can offer our subscribers to publish larger portions of information to be downloaded by interested readers instead of mailing them to everybody. Our webmaster has agreed to prepare a brief description of the fundamentals of the software for a future issue of TC-FORUM.

TC-Forum Mailing List (tcf-gen) Addresses

There has been a quiet period during the last weeks - very few emails have been distributed. I've been asked whether we have excluded some of our subscribers from the list - not at all! The system has sent emails to all subscribers (399 on 23 April).

I receive a handful of messages every week telling me an address has failed to receive our email or is (no longer?) valid. In some cases I could verify the situation by individual emails but I have no real alternative to unsubscribe addresses which cause error messages more than three times. Please understand that - and be careful to inform the mail server on address changes to continue receiving the emails. It's so easy:

Send an email to majordomo@listserver.tc-forum.org

With two lines of text:

- unsubscribe tcf-gen <your last subscribed address>
- subscribe tcf-gen <your new email address>

That's all.

Discussions in the TC-Forum Mailing List

Our mailing list has developed greatly with many interesting subjects being discussed over the past few months. For example:

1. Localisation
2. Definition of the "user"
3. Further development of the TC-Forum mailing list
4. Object-oriented documentation
5. Screen shots which also show the cursor (mouse pointer)
6. Attachments



We look forward to many more such lively discussions - they show what a big international family we are and give an idea of what a wonderful event it will be when many of us will meet at our next "real" meeting, Forum 2000 in London.

Archive is Active Now

We now have our archive online which records all emails distributed during one month. You can download all entries of one month to investigate what has been discussed:

Send an email to majordomo (as above) with "index tcf-gen" in the body text. The system will send you a reply with one line per file available - at the end of each line giving the file-name like „tcf-gen.archive.9904“ for the April 99 archive. To receive this month's archive send an email to majordomo with

"get tcf-gen <filename>" in the body

where <filename> is "tcf-gen.archive.9904" in case you request the April 99 archive.

You then receive an ASCII file readable with any editor.

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

24 – 28 August 1999
Innsbruck (Austria)

5th International Congress on Terminology and Knowledge Engineering

TKE '99, Multimedia and Content for a New Millennium

organized by:

- Association for Terminology and Knowledge Transfer (GTW)
- International Information Centre for Terminology (Infoterm)
- International Network for Terminology (TermNet)

(Details have already been printed in TC-Forum 3-98 p.19)

Further information available at:¹⁾

30th August – 3rd September 1999
The 12th European Symposium on Language for Special Purposes LSP '99

"Perspectives for the new millennium"

Details have already been printed in TC-Forum 3-98 p.20; New Information (April 99) is available from²⁾

17-19 September 1999
The '99 ISTC Annual Conference

Leicester University Conference Centre
Developing partnerships for the future

The '99 Conference will focus on the outside world beyond the confines of our own work, and in particular on the links or partnerships that we can make with that outside world. If you would like to present a paper / run a workshop along the general theme, or on any other topic of interest to the professional communicator, or simply register for the Conference, please contact Carol or Georgina at the ISTC office for further details. Further information is available from³⁾

September 29 - October 2, 1999
Universidad de las Americas
Cholula/Puebla, Mexico

Technical Writing in the Americas: Ending and Starting a New Millennium
The 4th Congress of the Americas

The Latin American Congress of the Popular Culture Association/American Culture Association is currently seeking proposals for presentations on International Issues in Technical Writing. We are especially interested in papers on issues that affect tech writing and trade between the US and Mexico or other Latin American countries, but any international issues will

Professional Events

be considered as well. Presentations can be in either English or Spanish.

To submit a presentation, send a proposal of not more than 500 words, and a one hundred word abstract to:⁴⁾

To learn more about the Congress, visit our website at: <http://gente.udlap.mx/~rich/congress99/index.html>

**30-31 October 1999, Nagaoka
Institute of Design, Japan
4th ASIAN DESIGN
CONFERENCE
International Symposium on
Design Science**

The Japanese Society for the Science of Design, the Korean Society for Design Studies, the Chinese Institute of Design, and the Design Research Society, are pleased to announce the 4th Asian Design Conference - International Symposium on Design Science.

The conference aims to promote international exchange of research findings in the field of design science. All papers and presentations are to be in English.

For further information contact: 4thadc@syst1.ti.chiba-u.ac.jp
(In English or Japanese)

**24 - 26 November 1999, Mannheim:
tekomp-Conference
Technical Information in the
World-Wide Web**

International delegates are very welcome.

For further Information visit www.tekom.de

**12 - 14 June 2000 London, England:
Forum 2000
Technical Communication
Leading the Way**

INTECOM is pleased to announce FORUM 2000, which will be held from June 12 to 14, 2000 at the Commonwealth Centre in London. This unique conference invites technical communicators worldwide to participate in a multifaceted discussion of our profession. If you have ideas to share, or if you are interested in what other professionals will be doing and thinking, FORUM 2000 is for you.

Details on Forum 2000 have already been printed in TC-Forum 3-98 p.16 - 17

The Program Committee requests urgently to ask the following contact persons for details before submitting proposals.

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pegre1@abbeynational.co.uk;
+44 1908 343388 (fax from Europe) or
Ellen Fenwick
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**Deadline for proposals:
1 July 1999**

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<http://gtw-org.uibk.ac.at>

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3) ISTC Conference '99
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