



Ragged Left

July-August 2003
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The Monthly Newsletter for the Berkeley Chapter of the Society for Technical Communication

In this issue

Next Meeting

Develop html help: what does it mean? Linda Urban will take us *Under the Hood* on HTML Help this month. Mark your calendar for [July 9](#) to learn about this important topic from an award-winning technical writer, help author, and instructor. No meeting in August!

News & Reviews

Is Acrobat the definitive tool? Guest writer Mike Tarrani [reviews Adobe Acrobat](#) in this month's tools and reviews. Test your knowledge of intellectual property with this month's coverage on [copyright law in the digital age](#).

Resources

Finding [health care](#) can be problematic for an independent technical communicator. Berkeley's own David Alt offers some insights and solutions this month.

Got time? Networking is important tool in our industry, and there are numerous opportunities in in this month's [networking links](#). This month we've found some [new online](#) SIG's for job hunters, API doc writers, and Tools.

Volunteer

Take part in shaping the future of the Berkeley chapter by joining our annual planning meeting. For more information, visit the [chapter news](#).



Monthly Meeting

speakers resources
networking resume review Vo's

Next Meeting: Wednesday July 9, 2003

This month Linda Urban will be our presenter. Linda Urban is an award-winning technical writer, help author, and instructor. She won a Distinguished Award from the 1999 Northern California STC Touchstone Competition for "Scenario Help," an HTML Help System which she designed and developed.

HTML Help "Under the Hood"

The job description says "develop html help", and the requested tool experience is with one or more of these: RoboHelp, RoboHTML, WebWorks Publisher, AuthorIt, Doc2Help, or ForeHelp.

Or perhaps you've inherited an online help project at work, and haven't worked on one before.

So what is it, exactly, that they want? What skills should you learn? Do you really have to learn all those tools? Where should you start? You took a class in Dreamweaver. Does that count? Or perhaps you created WinHelp a few years back. How does that compare to "html help"?

In this presentation, Linda Urban takes you "under the hood" of "html help" and shows you what distinguishes it from any other collection of web pages. She'll point you to some free and low-cost tools you can use to begin creating html help projects. And she'll talk about some of the similarities and differences among the major help authoring tools (HATs) often used in the industry.

You'll learn the differences between:

- Compiled Microsoft HTML Help. (".chm" files)
- Uncompiled HTML Help * Cross-browser, cross-platform "html-based help"
- WinHelp (old Windows-based help)
- Single-sourced documentation, output in print and online versions
- Context-sensitive help

You'll also:

- Take a look at the insides of a Microsoft HTML Help project file, Contents file, and Index file
- See a demo of a small help system being created and compiled into a .CHM Understand what the help authoring tools automate, and why people use them
- Take away a list of references and resources for learning more

Of course, making the shift from developing information for printed documentation to developing online help is more complex than just learning the mechanics. But taking the mystery out of the mechanics is a start.



Software Review By Mike Tarrani

Acrobat 5.0
from Adobe Software
ASIN: B00005ATST
Item model number: 22001438

I've been using this program since version 3.0 and it's so thoroughly integrated into my daily tools that I take it for granted. Version 5.0 was a bit of a challenge to get used to because the user interface dramatically changed from earlier versions. It took me months to discover that all of the features in the earlier versions were in fact still in the application, but were hidden by poor documentation and a less-than-intuitive user interface (compared to earlier versions).

Despite the early issues, I cannot live without this application. One of the features I love most is the security that can be set on a document, which can prevent readers from changing, highlighting and copying content to a clipboard, and printing - or any combination. This allows me to share documents without worrying about my content being 'lifted' and used by others without my permission. More importantly, the password protection is solid.

The feature that transforms PDF files into other formats, such as RTF and HTML, does not do a spectacular job, but I was able to use an older plug-in called Icen Gemini I had purchased for use with Acrobat 4 to overcome those limitations. While the format transformation has some limitations, the forms feature is superb and represents a reason to upgrade to version 5 (or get Acrobat if you're not using an earlier version).

I rate it at 4 stars because of the poor documentation and some of the issues cited above. However, if you work with documents, especially web-based documents, and need to share them across all platforms Acrobat is essential. If you want sophisticated forms handling, then you have yet another reason to invest in this useful tool.

Used with the permission of Mike Tarrani, a technical consultant who can be reached via his [website](#).



Copyright Your Site

Excerpts of an interview with Harvey S. Jacobs of Joyce & Jacobs

When you put original content in print or on the Web, you automatically have a copyright that is protectable, but don't expect to win damages for copyright infringement if you haven't filed with the Library of Congress, says Harvey Jacobs.

On the other hand, expect to be sued if you use a downloaded image from someone else's site even if it doesn't carry the copyright symbol.

The main thing you want to protect is your creative work.

Jacobs says trademarking is often a better choice than copyrighting the words because trademarking protects distinctive features. It also protects your domain name against cybersquatters.

More people violate copyright of Web than of printed material. That's partly because it's so easy to download, say, a captivating image and put it on your site. Even some who know that's illegal do it because they don't expect to get caught. Others don't see a copyright symbol so consider the image fair game.

Jacobs reminds communicators that trademark, copyright and patent laws apply in cyberspace just as they do in print. If you want to use anything from a site not clearly labeled public domain, get permission and, if required, pay a fee.

To test your knowledge of intellectual property, take his [IP Quiz](#). The site also features a useful [Consumer Online Privacy Guide](#) which might be helpful for your Web browsing.

While visiting his site, note his handling of copyright and terms of use. For more information, read [the full article](#), originally published in Writing That Works.

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For reprint or submission information visit our [editorial](#) section



State of the Market: Health Care for Technical Communicators

by David Alt, Berkeley Chapter

Welcome to the Market for Healthcare. You have the right to remain silent.

Technical Communicators, like most people, need Healthcare. Since, in the US, Healthcare is treated as a commodity rather than a right, it should not come as a surprise that buying access to Healthcare in bulk is cheaper than buying it individually.

Because of this (and because insurance companies want to ensure they get paid,) the most common way of obtaining access to Healthcare is through an employer. In fact, since its passage in 1947, the Taft-Hartley Labor Act has mandated that health insurance be counted as compensation, subject to the vicissitudes of collective bargaining. So even through your employer negotiates the rates and availability of your access to Healthcare, when push comes to shove, this "benefit" counts against your salary (despite the fact that copayments and deductibles come out of your pocket, and despite the fact that most employees, especially Technical Communicators, are not unionized.)

So what are your options if you want to be self-employed? Are there ways out of the Healthcare quagmire?

Like other aspects of operating as an independent, it helps to think about Healthcare from the perspective of a professional, rather than an individual. In case you have a difficult time thinking of yourself as a Capitalist and setting appropriate rates, just remember that implicit in any contract (whether it be hourly or fixed-bid) is the sum you must turn over to line the pockets of the CEOs of the Healthcare industry. When you consider that most health insurance policies carry a maximum lifetime benefit on the order of a million dollars, you see that someone like William W. McGuire, CEO of United Health Group, who was paid \$54 million last year, apparently considers your entire life to be worth about a single week of his.

Options for Independents

In case you don't have access to Healthcare, don't take it personally; you're in good company: the U.S. Census Bureau claims that 41 million people lack any health coverage at all, 65 million people lack prescription drug coverage, and that 60 million people lose coverage for some period of time in any given year. It may be unsurprising that medical bills cause 40 percent of personal bankruptcies.

Ironically, as Daniel Pink describes in "[Free Agent Nation: The Future of Working for Yourself](#)," independents' top two choices for obtaining access to Healthcare amount to being dependent: get it through an employed spouse or a former employer. Pink offers some very practical advice about navigating a system that, "doesn't easily accommodate independent workers. So do your research. Run the numbers. And read the fine print."



Networking

resources
workshops
seminars
meetings
classes

STC Chapter Meetings and related groups in Northern California

Visiting other chapter meetings is a great way to expand your knowledge and networking circle. Click the chapter links below for more information on the program, times, and directions for each meeting.

Note: Some chapters rearrange meetings over the summer, so check the website for specific information.

[STC Sacramento Chapter](#) meets the first Wednesday of every month at the Sacramento Hilton.

[STC East Bay Chapter](#) meets the first Thursday at the Crow Canyon Country Club in Danville.

[STC San Francisco Chapter](#) meets the third Wednesday of every month in downtown San Francisco.

[STC North Bay Chapter](#) meets the third Thursday of each month in Santa Rosa. Check the website for the most up to date information.

[STC Silicon Valley Chapter](#) Meets the fourth Thursday of every month at the Four Points Sheraton in Sunnyvale.

[Bay Area Editors' Forum](#) Meets at the Mechanics' Institute, 57 Post Street, San Francisco. The meeting date varies, so visit their website for the most up-to-date information.

[East Bay Editor's Guild](#)

Meets at the Rockridge Branch of the Oakland Public Library, 5366 College Avenue, Oakland. Date varies. For more detailed information, contact Co-Program Director [Alana Laurence Inugau](#).



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New Sigs from the Silicon Valley

Job Hunt SIG

Are you interested in topics related to job hunting? The newly formed Job Hunt SIG offers a forum for writers to discuss all aspects of the Job Hunt and allows Writing Recruiters, Hiring Managers, and Job Seekers to mingle, offer or seek jobs, and get advice from a professional writing recruiter. The Job Hunt SIG offers you a unique opportunity to network with your peers and share frustrations, achievements, experiences, and advice related to job hunting. Online Discussion Group

To join the Job Hunt SIG online discussion group, [click here to enter your email address](#).

SVC Technical/API SIG

This group deals with all the TECHNICAL aspects of a Technical Communicator's job. It offers discussion, tips, tricks, and support for such technical areas as programming, programming languages, coding examples, scripting, APIs, Java, XML, Javascript, networking protocols, and so on. Online Discussion Group

To join the Technical/API SIG online discussion group, [click here to enter your email address](#).

SVC Tools SIG

Are you interested in topics related to Technical Communication Tools? The newly formed Tools SIG offers a forum for writers to discuss topics related to all aspects of Technical Communication Tools and offers tips, tricks, and support for such tools as FrameMaker, RoboHelp, Web Works, and so on. The Tools SIG offers you a unique opportunity to network with your peers and share frustrations, achievements, experiences, and advice related to Technical Communication Tools. Online Discussion Group

To join the Tools SIG online discussion group, [click here to enter your email address](#).



News

region 8 updates stc
Chapter News industry

July-August 2003

Catch up on the latest news from the Chapter, Society, and industry. For more information about STC, the Chapter, and contact information for our officers, visit our [directory](#) section.

Chapter News

Chapter Planning Meeting

Every summer the Executive Committee sits down to plan activities and services for the upcoming year. These planning meetings span two evenings, and are open to all members. This is a great opportunity to get involved in the chapter and have a voice in our direction for the upcoming year.

In past years, we've planned classes, parties, and future speakers. Take part in shaping the next year of chapter activities and programs. Contact our new Chapter President [Joe Devney](#) for meeting time and location.

New Chapter Members

by Rob Peterson, VP of Membership

Please welcome two new Berkeley members: Andrew Brown and Lenore Weiss.

Andrew has been a technical communicator for more than five years but joined STC for the first time this year. His first experience in the field was writing and designing technical marketing communications with an emphasis on graphic design and page layout.

Later, he moved into editing and writing software documentation. He now manages the technical information development group at RSA Security, a software company in San Mateo. Andrew has lived in North Oakland since moving to the Bay Area from Seattle nine years ago. He very much looks forward to meeting Berkeley chapter members at upcoming chapter meetings.

Lenore is the Web Content Manager for AC Transit's Web site, www.actransit.org. She is a former member of the East Bay Chapter where she served as the Outreach Coordinator for their Technical Literacy Project. She has belonged to STC and the East Bay Chapter for many years.

Some of our new members are new or returning to STC and others have transferred from another chapter. I'll be highlighting other new chapter members in next month's edition of the *Ragged Left*.

Society News