

APPROACHING TECHNICAL MARKETING PRESENTATIONS

Submitted by Jessi Strawn, STC-Central Iowa Newsletter Editor



In the *Technical Communication* article “Creating Marketing Slides for Engineering Presentations,” Ann Jennings provides insights for using presentation slides to persuade and inform. The article is directed towards technical communicators who create marketing presentations, which is a unique challenge because the presentation serves multiple purposes—building relationships, securing a contract, and gaining support for projects.

Jennings walks readers through basic sales and marketing terminology, helping create an understanding of what intended audiences will have in mind as they listen to a presentation. From there, she moves into ideas on presenting text on slides, focusing on

using sentence headlines that make claims and supporting that claim with visuals and text within the slide. She suggests a solid organization for the presentation, including title, overview, section, body, and conclusion slides. Throughout her discussion, Jennings gives tips on how to draw in the audience with the business ideology the audience maintains.

If you are new to writing persuasive business proposals (whether a long request for proposal or an abbreviated presentation), I recommend you read this article and pick up the book *Writing winning business proposals: Your guide to landing the customer, making the sale, & persuading the boss* by Richard C. Freed, Shervin Freed, and Joe Romano. The

book provides a practical approach to developing proposals, contains worksheets and checklists, and the knowledge proves to be useful in dealing with anyone, whether they are subject matter experts within your company or clients who have hired you as a consultant. ●

MARCH 23 COMMUNITY MEETING

HUMANIZING TECHNICAL COMMUNICATION: THE USES OF HUMAN FORMS IN PICTURES

This presentation will examine using human forms in technical communications, most notably instructional materials, including the purposes human forms serve, the conventions for using human forms, and the consequences of NOT using human forms.

When: March 23, 2009, from 5:30 to 7:30 p.m.

Where: Grand View University, Roldholm Room

RSVP: By noon on March 19 to Sara Smith (smith.sara@principal.com).

Fee: \$15 member/\$25 non-member/student members free ●

STC-Central Iowa is a community within the Society for Technical Communication (STC).

Visit www.stc.org for more information about STC.

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NOTES FROM THE PRESIDENT

Submitted by Alisha Sauer, STC–Central Iowa President



STC–Central Iowa has enjoyed a great season, and we’re wrapping up with some exciting programs, including a visit from STC fellow Charlie Kostelnick in March, Technisource representative Heidi Myers in April, and a year-end wrap-up meeting at Latin King in May.

STC MIDWEST REGIONAL CONFERENCE

We’ve made great headway with the STC Midwest Regional Conference planning committee. A survey to gauge community support for a regional conference has been sent out to the membership of each participating chapter, and we’re looking forward to getting the results.

If community support is strong enough for a Midwest regional conference in the western

suburbs of Chicago, look for a call for papers later this spring. The conference theme is “Retool & Renew: Managing Your Technical Communication Career in Today’s Challenging Marketplace,” and will feature hands-on workshops and informative presentations on the latest developments and best practices in technical communication. STC–Central Iowa has many talented and experienced technical communicators, and I hope to see your responses to the call for proposals.

If you are interested in serving on a conference planning committee, contact me.

ELECTIONS

It’s time for STC–Central Iowa elections, and we’ve got many open positions. We will

be opening the floor for nominations on Monday, March 23, so consider running for one of the following positions.

- Vice President
- Secretary
- Treasurer
- Webmaster
- Membership Manager
- Newsletter Editor
- Employment Manager

If you are interested in serving on the administrative board for 2009–2011, please contact me or another board member right away for more information about the responsibilities of volunteering. It is a very satisfying experience and will give you the opportunity to work with technical communicators in the area and at the national level. ●

DESIGN A T-SHIRT CONTEST

Create an original T-shirt design that reflects our central Iowa community. You could win a \$25 gift card and the recognition of your peers!

How to enter

Submit an electronic file (.jpg or .gif) to board@stc-centrاليowa.org by April 10. You may enter multiple designs. Be creative and have fun!

Winning

The STC–Central Iowa Board will determine the winning design. Winner will receive a \$25 gift card and recognition at our April 15 meeting.

Guidelines

- Please keep file sizes under 500 kb.
- You may include the new STC logo in the T-shirt design, but keep it smaller and separate from the chapter logo/design; download from www.stc.org.
- Contest submissions are the property of STC–Central Iowa. ●



A REVIEW OF *CASCADING STYLE SHEETS: DESIGNING FOR THE WEB* (3RD EDITION) BY HAKON WIUM LIE AND BERT BOS

Submitted by Michael Gernes, STC—Central Iowa Immediate Past President



Back in 2006, I was working on a Web site project in my time off and had just discovered the many unexpected browser-compatibility problems that a WYSIWIG-built site can experience. After some research, I concluded that getting a better grasp of CSS would offer a way forward. So when I found out that the creators of the style sheet specification—Hakon Lie and Bert Bos—had written a guide, I picked up my own copy.

Although I'd thumbed and skimmed at the bookstore, it wasn't until I got home that I realized what a good choice I'd made. *Cascading Style Sheets* isn't just a reference book, it's an excellent self-teaching text. That's exactly what I needed at the time.

Lie and Bos begin with a brief history of HTML and what Web design was like in the days before style tags were introduced. Although this could seem tedious to an experienced designer (which I certainly was not), they present a clear narrative case for the splitting of content and formatting that CSS allows. It also serves as a good refresher on basic HTML tags.

Chapters 2–4 cover the principles underlying CSS, especially its syntax and the

inheritance rules that govern which HTML elements are formatted. They digress slightly for a discussion of best practices, though this sets up some of the design principles presented throughout the book. They then return to the topic of selectors, which are used to apply formatting to particular elements and classes of elements.

Chapters 5–10 teach the essential tools for CSS design: working with font and color, the CSS 'box model,' and spacing and positioning of elements. The book tends toward incremental lessons, introducing a broad concept in one chapter, fleshing it out with examples, and then incorporating that concept into the next chapter. Although this may seem a self-evident instruction model, I'm sure I'm not alone in finding many similar technical guides dense and uninviting.

The remaining chapters (11–18) present advanced or supplemental information. This includes techniques for converting an HTML-formatted site to CSS, formatting for printing considerations, advanced cascading rules, external style sheets and a discussion of XML. There are also appendices for use as an HTML quick reference and a

system color guide.

For me the book's usefulness has proven a lot more enduring than my project. Reading it helped me to grasp the philosophy behind CSS, how to use HTML properly. It's even helped me diagnose formatting problems in my day job, where we exclusively use RoboHelp to create our WebHelp files.

The material presented is excellent, concepts are deeply explored, and the writing is clear and concise. If the book has a weakness, it's in layout. A small number of the chapters appear disjointed in sequence, for example the authors save their discussion of CSS handling of HTML tables until chapter 17.

Perhaps this is because table use is discouraged in current Web design, so the information is presented as supplemental. It could have been presented earlier, in the discussion of HTML or saved for an appendix. That's a small quibble, however. This book remains a valuable reference for any technical communicator who needs to work with cascading style sheets or dabble in Web design. ●

ASKING YOUR BOSS TO PAY FOR YOUR SUMMIT REGISTRATION

If you're working for a large organization, you probably need to request the approval of your manager or supervisor to attend the summit and have the expenses covered. Despite the poor economy, it is possible to have your company invest in your professional development.

HERE'S HOW

Acknowledge that your company has been impacted—as all companies have—and is looking for ways to get the most bang for its buck. The Summit is a cost-effective conference that will help your company reduce expenses in usability, translation costs, structured authoring, project management of reports and publications, as well as several other areas.

List at least a dozen or more sessions from the Preliminary Program that will provide the greatest benefit to your company. (A listing can be found at www.stc.org.)

HERE'S THE BONUS THIS YEAR

You get all sessions—not just the ones you attend—but ALL sessions. With so many sessions to choose from, the challenge has always been to attend only the higher priority ones.

This year, in addition to the proceedings, STC is capturing the content of the entire conference (excluding panel discussions and roundtables) and will provide access to the captured audio and visuals to every attendee for free after the conference to share with their office colleagues. This exponentially increases the meeting's value and underscores why you should attend.

The meeting planning team has done all it can to book the conference in an affordable venue. The discounted conference room rate is \$174 for single or double occupancy (21 percent less than last year's rates). There is also a food court in the mall next to the

hotel. And the MARTA train will transport you directly from the airport to the hotel for only \$2.

With the current economic condition, everyone at your company is being asked to contribute and control costs wherever possible. Point out how this conference is a small investment that will enable you to increase your value.

Emphasize how the sessions will provide you with more knowledge, such as information about structured authoring, editing, automated publishing, Agile scrum techniques, and how to meet the legally required product documentation regulations for EU. Tell your boss how this knowledge will enable you to handle a specific project with a direct, positive impact on the bottom line. ●

WHO WILL BE STC INTERNATIONAL'S NEXT...

2nd Vice President? Treasurer? Board Members? Nominating Committee?

Do you know the candidates? Take this opportunity to get to know the individuals running for elected office at the society level. Visit the Candidates' Page at www.stc.org/candidatesFAQ/index.asp. You can review the candidates' biographies, ask them questions, and view their responses to questions posed by other members.

The 2009 election will be held from March 10, 2009 through April 9, 2009. To vote, go to <https://eballot.votenet.com/stc>, and log in with your STC member number and the random password sent to you in the informational e-mail sent to you from STC International. ●

LOOKING TO TOMORROW - NEXT MONTH'S ISSUE

How is your company using social networking? Do you instant message during the work day? Have a Facebook page for the company? Share the trials and tribulations of social networking around your office for the March issue.

As always, you can submit an article on any topic. Remember, whatever you have to say, we want to hear it. Articles are due by 5:00 p.m. March 27. Please e-mail submissions (or any questions)

to jessi.strawn@gmail.com. Include a brief bio and photo (if you are willing) with your submission.

Perspectives invites writers to submit articles they wish to be considered for publication.

NOTE: By submitting an article, you implicitly grant a license to this newsletter to run the article and for other STC publications to reprint it without permission.

Copyright is held by the writer. In your cover letter, please let the editor know if this article has run elsewhere, and if it has been submitted for consideration to other publications. ●

JOB OPENINGS

A new contract/consultant position, as well as a full-time job opening are posted on the STC-Central Iowa job board.

Check them out at www.stc-centraliowa.org/jobs. ●

STC-CENTRAL IOWA BOARD

Alisha Sauer (asauer@shazam.net), President
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Chris Thiessen, Employment Committee Manager

PERSPECTIVES INFO

Perspectives is a monthly publication of STC-Central Iowa. The newsletter is published monthly, from September to May, and is produced by volunteers of the Central Iowa community.

If you are interested in volunteering as a copy editor, photographer, advertising manager, or for any other position, contact the newsletter editor, Jessi Strawn (jessi.strawn@gmail.com).

Creating and supporting a forum for communities of practice in the profession of technical communication.