

BLUE PENCIL

SOCIETY FOR TECHNICAL COMMUNICATION
NOVEMBER 1996

PITTSBURGH CHAPTER
VOLUME 33 NUMBER 3

Column One

A message from Kevin Sunderman, President of STC Pittsburgh

+++ **Odds and Ends** +++

We're trying the Sampler Platter of meeting places this fall as we experiment with different options for our get-togethers.

We had been able to meet for many years at Carnegie Mellon University, but now we're cast out into the cold cruel world by their new policy of not providing meeting space to outside groups during the school year.

What makes the world even colder and crueler is that CMU gave us the meeting space free, with just the food costing us. Now we have to be like all other groups and actually pay for our meeting rooms. Life is so unfair sometimes. . .

+++++

Speaking of paying for meeting rooms, part of your STC dues goes toward that sort of contingency. The cost to you for a meeting is nominal and may not cover all expenses for the evening. Our chapter receives a rebate from the Society of \$28.50 for each member (\$12 for each student member) of the chapter.

So in addition to financing the work that the Society does, your dues finance our chapter work as well, including meetings, awards, raffle prizes, correspondence, and printing and mailing the Blue Pencil.

+++++

In a rather self-selected group, the 25 or so members who attended the September meeting at the downtown Engineers Society overwhelmingly indicated that they preferred a

meeting place that was downtown, mostly for its central location.

I'd like to hear from anyone else who has a preference for meeting locations, whether in town or not. Give me a call or an e-mail and we'll try to do what's best for the most members.

+++++

Our new meeting format also received good reviews with quite a few positive comments on the shorter meeting time and the less expensive (and somewhat less formal) dinner.

Again, I'd be glad to hear any further comments, pro or con, regarding these changes.

+++++

Finally, our November meeting will draw on our greatest resource: each other. Working together to help each other is the main reason we exist as a chapter. So come on out and share your experiences, or just listen to the experiences of others to become better equipped as a technical communicator. Together we'll face that cold, cruel world. ✍

Chapter Publications Competition Resurrected!

Entry Deadline Monday, December 2, 1996

Thanks to senior member Carol Zera, the Pittsburgh Chapter STC Publications Competition has been hauled out of mothballs and aired out for a new season. With the help of past Publications managers Chris Keefer and John Clark, Carol is coordinating the effort to return the competition to its former status as one of the premiere showcases of the best work in technical communication.

However, because the entry deadline is only a short time away, you'll have to hustle to get the proper submission forms and prepare your entries. Do it now!

Contact: Carol Zera
(412) 837-9033

P.S. Also, volunteers are needed for judging and helping with the awards banquet. ✍



Comment Cards

At the September meeting, the STC Pittsburgh chapter leadership began using comment cards to collect feedback and suggestions from attendees to help develop meetings that members can really benefit from.

"Great topics. Good discussion. Nice group of people."

"Like earlier meetings; first meeting started a little late, keep dinner short and on time."

"I like the new meeting format (shorter, less expensive dinner). I resolved to become active in the organization this year, so feel free to call on me for assistance. [Ed Note: We will!] I prefer downtown meeting location."

"I like the shorter meeting times (although I thought we were having a buffet dinner?)"

"I like to vary locations."

"LOCATION IS VERY CONVENIENT. A SWEETEN OF DESSERT WOULD BE NICE."

"Good schedule - keep it up. Try for less formality in serving dinner (smaller tables, stand-up eating, buffet, etc.)."

"It's great to be among writers---I'd love to learn more about what one needs, above and beyond basic excellent writing skills, to be a marketable writer: What computer knowledge? What subject area knowledge? etc."

"I like the meeting downtown (but would go to other places) and the lighter meal. Early format is good."

"LIKE THE DISCUSSIONS OF PITTSBURGH RELATED ISSUES AND TOPICS. LIKE THE VARIOUS TOPICS DISCUSSED."

"Like meeting downtown. Like the open discussion format. Like the whole idea of trying something new."

"Thanks---introduced me to some of the issues and concerns of the writing profession."

"Could we maybe arrange with ICS and such to make sure our meetings don't overlap?"

"I love the new format! Place possibilities: the Strip District?"

"One hour does not seem like enough time to really discuss issues---90 minutes?"

storing that information. Since no data is lost, the compression GIF uses is called "lossless."

The simplest way to store a picture is to list the value of each pixel. For instance, the first row of pixels of a flag of the USA might be stored as:

blue blue blue blue blue red red red red red red red red red red

The same picture stored in GIF style compression would be:

5 blue 10 red

You can see how this would take up less room and still keep track of the value of every pixel. However, GIF compression would not save you much room if every pixel is a different color. This is important to remember---GIF will save you the most room if your picture contains large areas of the same color.

The GIF89a version adds a few features to this format that you can use for special effects. The most common of these are "transparent" images, interlaced images, and complex images.

Transparent GIFs. Transparent images have a special command line in the file that defines one of the colors used in your image as a background color. When this image is loaded into a browser that understands the command line, the browser does not display the background pixels. Instead, it turns those areas of the graphic transparent. This allows you to create images that look irregular in shape, even though the picture is actually rectangular.

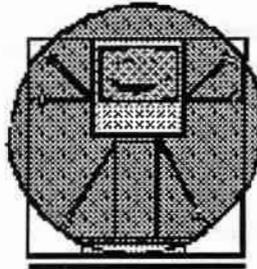
Choose a background color that is not used anywhere else in the picture because all areas of that color will be made transparent, even if they're not part of what you consider the background. If you're familiar with the way the TV weatherman is superimposed on the computerized weather map, then you understand how a transparent color works. The weatherman stands in front of a blue screen, and a computer replaces all of the blue parts of the picture with a weather map. If the weatherman

How To . . .

. . . Use Graphics on the Web, by Elliott Evans

Although text content is "the meat" of a good Web site, nothing makes a Web page more attractive than a sprinkling of graphical garnish. Using too many pictures makes a page take longer to load, but it's fairly easy to strike a balance between attractive and fast.

The types of graphics in wide usage on the Web include GIFs and JPEGs.



GIFs

GIF stands for Graphics Interchange Format. Compuserve developed and popularized this format, which has two main versions: GIF87 is the simpler version, and GIF89A is the more complex. GIF is a compressed format, meaning that GIF files take up less storage space than some other file formats. GIF saves information about every pixel; it just uses a more compact method of

continued on Page 5

Use Graphics on the Web
continued from Page 4

wears a blue tie, the computer also replaces his tie with the weather map.

Only one color can be named as the background color, which is important if your graphics program “anti-aliases” your images. Anti-aliasing is used to create a softer look where different colors border in your picture. Instead of a sharp line of red pixels on a blue background, the program puts some purplish pixels between them, making the line look smoother and more like a line instead of a jagged row of pixels. However, if blue is the transparent color, the red line will still be surrounded by the purplish haze because the anti-aliasing program doesn’t take transparency into account.

Interlaced Images. Interlaced GIFs are not smaller than standard GIFs, nor do they load faster. Their main advantage is that they load more attractively in many browsers. GIF87 files store each row of the image in order. When a browser displays the image, it draws the first row, then the second row, and so on until it reaches the bottom.

An interlaced file stores every eighth line of the file, then every eighth line starting with line four, then every fourth line starting with line two and finally all of the remaining lines. When a browser displays an interlaced image, the image looks like it is gradually fading in. First, there is a rough sketch, and then the details of the picture resolve. The benefit of this method is that once half the file is loaded, the reader can see a low resolution version of the whole picture, instead of a high resolution of the top half. This allows the user to make more intelligent decisions about whether to wait for the entire picture to draw.

Images can be both interlaced and transparent.

Complex Images. GIF89a images can actually be composed of more than one image. This was originally intended so that several images could be combined into a single file, making the set easier to download. For instance, if you had four images that were each 50 pixels by 50 pixels, you

could combine them into a single 100 by 100 image.

Web page designers discovered that if they omitted the instructions to reposition the images next to each other, each image would display in order, on top of each other, making a simple four frame series, like a flip book. This is most commonly used to create simple animations.

Complex images can contain any combination of interlaced and transparent images.

JPEGs

The Joint Photographic Experts Group (JPEG) format uses a different kind of compression to store a picture. Instead of the lossless compression that GIF uses, JPEG uses what is called “lossy” compression—data that the compressing program decides has little impact on the quality of the picture is discarded. For instance, if only two pixels of an image are off-white among hundreds of white pixels, the program may decide to store those pixels as white instead, saving a little more space.

As a result of this intentional data loss, JPEG is not the best format for storing graphics when the detail is important. However, JPEG is probably the best format for photographic images, which can afford to lose much detail before becoming unusable.

Most editors with JPEG capability allow you to choose the level of compression used for the image. You can then save several versions of the graphic at various levels of compression and compare them to find the best balance between file size and image quality. ✍

How To . . .

. . . Write it Right (reprinted from Family Circle, 6/27/95)

English Professor Michael Strumpf may be the most popular man on the campus of Moorpark Community College in California. Every week, about 300 people call his office, home of the Grammar Hotline, for answers to questions about sentence structure,

punctuation and proper forms of address.

Strumpf fields calls from government types, television producers, students, and even secretaries to the President of the United States. In his 24 years on the hotline, Strumpf has saved thousands from grammatical gaffes. The 500 most asked questions are gathered in his book, *The Grammar Bible* (Random House).

Got a grammar dilemma? Call (805-378-1494) or fax (805-378-1499) the hotline between 8:00 a.m. and 12:30 p.m. (PST). ✍

How To . . .

. . . Practice Safe Computing, by George Hayhoe, STC Associate Fellow, George Hayhoe Associates, <http://www.scescape.net/~gfhayhoe/index.htm> or (803) 642-2156



Although I panicked when I discovered that my system was infected with the Concept virus (courtesy of an e-mail message with attached Word file from a transPacific

client), it was relatively quick and easy to fix by reading the information at Microsoft’s Web site and then downloading a virus definition update from my antiviral software vendor’s Web site.

Practicing safe computing is vitally important these days.

- Be sure you have antiviral software installed on your system, keep the virus definitions up to date through monthly downloads and scan your system for viruses at least weekly.
- Download and install the Microsoft ScanProt macros for their products if you use them.
- Never download or run an executable from an unknown or unreliable source. Major vendors and online services scan files available for downloading from the Web and FTP sites, but users

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Air Capital JOURNAL

A publication of the STC Air Capital Chapter

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Using Conditional Text in FrameMaker™ to Create Multiple Versions of a Document

by Sylvia Walker, Symbios Logic Inc.

Sometimes we need to create several documents that have a significant amount of common text and graphics. If we create a separate file for each version, we not only use unnecessary disk space, we also duplicate work when revisions to the common text are made. Instead of having a separate file for each version, you can create one file that contains all versions. Therefore, when changes are needed that affect one or more versions, you only make changes to one file and each version is updated.

The Conditional Text feature in FrameMaker allows you to create multiple versions in one file by using condition tags for both text and graphics. The file will contain two types of text: Conditional and Unconditional. Conditional text is text that is identified, or tagged, for a specific version; Unconditional text is

common to all versions and requires no identifying tag.

You identify conditional text with a condition tag that you name and define using elements such as color, underline, and change bars. This tag determines how the text is displayed so you can easily identify one document version from another. Conditional text can be turned on or off, so you can view all versions of a document at the same time or hide one or more versions and view the others.

At the February 5 meeting, I will discuss the following topics and present a hands-on demonstration:

- Planning a conditional document
- Creating condition tags
- Applying condition tags
- Working in a conditional document
- Archiving a conditional document

Below: Condition Tag dialog box

Below: Condition Tag dialog box

Tag: ConditionName

Condition Indicators:

Style: As Is Color: As Is

Set Delete Cancel Help

How To...Use Graphics on the Web (reprinted from the November 1996 *Blue Pencil* newsletter created by the STC Pittsburgh, PA, Chapter)

By Elliott Evans, Pittsburgh Chapter Website Coordinator

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Using Graphics, continued from p. 4.

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Learning about Your Candidates, continued from p. 3.

(Mary:) In fact, I believe that we must stop being "problem solvers" and become "opportunity anticipators." I've told my company's clients to stop producing "deliverables" and to start producing "usables." If we start looking ahead to how we can contribute new and better solutions to our clients, we'll earn the respect we want.

- The challenge of balancing our lives. This one is as old as work itself, but it will continue to challenge us. We need to learn to be good to ourselves, to pay attention to the nontechnical communicator parts of our lives, and to have a good laugh. I love technical communication and think the success of the Society is vital to the profession, but I also know that my family, my friends, and my health are even more important.

This article is posted on the STC WWW page <http://www.stc-va.org/> where you can download it if you prefer receiving the information in electronic format.

If you would like more information about the STC Nominating Committee, please contact

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BLUE PENCIL



Indexing in FrameMaker

by Elliott C. Evans

FrameMaker, that perennial favorite in the technical documentation world, has several features that aid in the creation of indexes for your documents. You still have to decide what entries will appear in your index, but FrameMaker automates the index generation process, and enables you to change the formatting of your index just as easily as you would any FM document.

Inserting Index Markers

As usual, the first step is to actually create your documents. Once you have text to index, it's easier to figure out what your index entries will be. I usually save the insertion of index markers until I have completed the document, and then swoop through and add them all at once.

What's an index marker? It's how you tell FrameMaker what entries are going to be in your index. These markers are inserted into the document at the point to which the index will refer readers. By keeping the indexing information within the text, FrameMaker can assure that the index is always pointing to the correct place in the document, even if the chapter, section, or paragraph is moved. If sections are removed from a document, the related index entries are removed also.

Index markers are added using the 'Marker' dialog. This dialog is accessed by choosing "SpecialMarker..." from the menu. The dialog has two parts: the

'Marker Type', and the 'Marker Text'. Since we're inserting index markers, make sure the type is set to "Index". To insert the marker, you put the insertion point into the document at the spot where you would like the marker to appear, enter the text for the index entry in the dialog box, and select "New Marker".

For instance, if your document contained the sentence, "To continue, select a moose type from the menu," and you wanted "moose type" to be referenced by the index, you would:

1. Place the insertion point next to the word "moose." (If you're using a mouse, click next to the word.)
2. Access the 'Marker' dialog.
3. Make sure that the Marker Type is set to "Index".
4. Enter the text "moose type" as the Marker Text.
5. Select "New Marker".

If you wanted the text "moose type, selecting" to appear in your index as a second level index entry, use the Marker Text, "moose type:selecting". If you later add sections and markers for "moose type:changing" and "moose type:point size", these three entries will all appear together in the index as:

moose type
changing (page #)
point size (page #)
selecting (page #)

(Continued on Page 4)

Membership Directory Update

Last Call for Member Profiles!

Please have any comments on your membership profile returned to Mike Giunta by **January 31st**. If no comments are received, your profile will be published as is. Also, contact Mike if you have not received a draft of your profile.

Mike Giunta can be reached at:

Phone: 412-288-7580
Fax: 412-288-6485
Email: mgiunta@aisystem.com

or mail comments to his attention at

STC-Pittsburgh
PO Box 133
Pittsburgh, PA 15230

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Employment Opportunities

Instructional Designers

ProTech Professional and Technical Services has a unique opportunity for individuals interested in joining a 35 person multimedia development team using the newest technology to develop computer-based training, sales and marketing tools for national clients.

Job Locations

Schenectady, NY; Erie, PA; Salem, VA; Greenwich, CT

Position Responsibilities

- Establish and maintain contact with Subject Matter Experts.
- Perform needs and task analysis.
- Identify project goals, and objectives.
- Define requirements for user inter-

face and interaction.

- Define requirements for support documentation.
- Design storyboards.
- Design and write measurement devices.
- Design reference materials, such as glossary and course index.

Technical Skills

Education: B.S. in Education, Communications, Engineering. Master's degree in Instructional Technology preferred.

Experience: Two to five years instructional design (Master's thesis may be substituted for work experience).

Computer knowledge: Working knowledge of IBM compatible PCs, MS

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Benefits

ProTech Professional and Technical Services offers a competitive compensation and benefits package including employer paid medical, dental, term life insurance, matched 401(k), pension, paid vacation, holidays and personal days.

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518-382-2036
perrych@protechservices.com

(Continued on Page 6)

Indexing in FrameMaker, Continued from Page 1

The page number containing the index marker will be displayed in the index, and is updated automatically every time you generate the index.

Generating the Index

When you generate an index for a FrameMaker document, FM goes through the document and creates a list of all of the index markers that exist in the document, and on what pages they appear. This information is then inserted into a separate index document. If you have several documents bound together by a book file, you can generate a book wide index.

Formatting the Index

The format of the index is controlled in two places, the paragraph format catalog and the reference pages.

Reference Pages

The "IX" reference page defines the physical construction of the index. Each

paragraph of text on the page describes how FrameMaker will create and order the index. If you are creating a hypertext index for an online document, you can change the syntax of the hypertext commands used by altering the paragraph tagged "ActiveIX". If you want to change the index headings, alter the paragraph tagged "GroupTitlesIX." If you want numeric entries to appear at the end of the index, alter the paragraph tagged "SortOrderIX."

Changes you make on the reference page will be applied the next time the index is generated.

Paragraph Format Catalog

As in regular documents, the formats in the paragraph format catalog define the way entries appear on the page. "GroupTitlesIX" is the format used for the alphabetic headings in the index. "Level1IX" and "Level2IX" specify the formats for the index entries. It's easiest

to alter these formats while viewing their related entries on the reference page.

Advanced Index Tricks

Most of the advanced uses for the index are utilized when creating a hypertext index for an online document. For instance, replacing "" on the reference page with "" will create an index without page numbers. In a print document, this is a disaster, but in a hypertext document this makes each index entry simply a hypertext link.

"Thumb tabs" are also useful for navigating within a hypertext index. You can place hypertext buttons on the master pages of your index with the marker text of "gotolink A", "gotolink B", etcetera which will jump directly to that group title.

Elliott C. Evans is a technical writer with six years of FrameMaker experience going back to version two. His consulting rates are reasonable, contact "eeyore+@cmu.edu". 