

D i g i N e w s

Technical Writing and Communication | Science Writing | Professional and Technical Editing
 Information Design | Publishing Institute | Programmer/Writer, Programmer/Editor
 Professional Tester and Product Support Specialist

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**Software
Tools for
Technical
Writers and
Editors**

**JOB TRENDS
What to
watch**

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Software Tools for Technical Writers and Editors

By Jeff Barber

To succeed as professional technical writers and editors, we must demonstrate our expertise in three areas: writing skills, domain knowledge, and software tools.

We are developing our writing skills in our jobs, here at BCC, and through volunteer work. We gain domain knowledge—familiarity with particular industries, technologies, and methodologies—from our work experience, education, hobbies, and personal interests. The question is, what software tools should we know how to use in today’s marketplace?

To answer this question, I queried BCC instructors and Puget Sound employment agencies. I also reviewed BCC textbooks, job listings, and software product literature on the Web.

Three themes emerged from my research:

- Learn the primary software applications
- Learn more about the industries and genres that interest us
- Decide where to focus our efforts

This article will discuss each theme. Think of what follows as a guide rather than an authoritative reference.

See Software Tools, 11

JOB TRENDS: What to Watch

By Claire-anne Wood

As many of us earn our BCC certificates and look forward to using our new skills, we need a clear understanding of what’s happening in our marketplace. That is, we need to understand how global changes are influencing hiring trends, particularly here in the Puget Sound area and what steps we need to take to succeed in this new marketplace.

From reviewing the various online job resources, technical communication (TechComm) agencies, and professional organizations (please see references at end of article), several trends are evident:

- An increase in the demand for product development here in North America (which translates to a recent increase in TechComm jobs)

- A continuation of outsourcing jobs to overseas markets
- An emerging market for more complex, “non-routine” job skills

Let’s start off with some good news.

Increase in demand

According to *USA Today* “Employment of writers and editors is expected to increase faster than the average for all occupations through the year 2010,” as demand grows for special interest, niche publications.

See Job Trends, 9

Step Into the Programmer/Writer World with .NET

By Jeff Marcin

Many technical writers who are looking to work in the software industry do not have the skills, knowledge, or background to be hired. This field requires the combination of strong writing and technical skills. Many writers need to tune up their technical skills.

Take heart. Technical skills can be learned! The following is the first in a series of articles designed to help you improve your technical skills, so you can compete for programmer/writer (PW) positions.

What is .NET?(Dotnet)

Microsoft® .NET is the integration of a series of products and technologies developed by Microsoft Corporation. .NET-enabled systems use industry standard technologies to communicate data over the Internet. .NET organizes and utilizes these technologies to make building and using computer applications easier and less expensive—from anywhere in the world.

A cornerstone of .NET technology is the *object-oriented* hierarchy of *objects* called *classes*. These are contained in the *.NET Framework Class Library*. Exploitation of the class hierarchy enables reusing code, saving time and money, and reducing errors.

Why is .NET important?

.NET makes it easier for Information Technology (IT) departments to write new applications, and interface with existing ones. Integration can take place from every corner of the world, using the Internet. To illustrate the .NET advantage, consider the following example.

Previously, when a company acquired existing systems, or had to send their business information to another company, new applications had to be written. The code was often a *kludge* (computer jargon for a tangled mess of code), introducing many problems including difficult maintenance. Building and maintaining the applications required personnel with varied programming language skills, and these modified system implementations were costly in terms of labor and system downtime.

With .NET technologies, new applications can be sent over the Internet to remote machines, then installed during off-peak hours. Because the .NET compiler uses a Common Language Runtime (CLR), existing programming languages such as C++, C#, COBOL, FORTRAN, or Visual Basic can be used. Available personnel can choose the languages that suit them.

The standard .NET technologies

The secret to .NET is its use of the industry standard technologies described below.

Extensible Markup Language (XML)

XML provides a way to structure data using tags. To link various information systems, data needs to be tagged so systems can identify the data they need to do their jobs.

Web Services Description Language (WSDL)

WSDL is used to describe the functions available from a Web service and how to query them.

Simple Object Access Protocol (SOAP)

SOAP is a protocol (or grammar) that .NET-enabled systems use to communicate to each other the type of data being sent and which system should use the data.

To understand more about these technologies, look up the acronyms on the Web. The Web Services Interoperability Organization (WS-I) governs these standards: <http://www.ws-i.org/>

Ideas for further study

To be a programmer/writer, you don't have to be an expert programmer, but you must understand enough to be able to ask intelligent questions.

Learning about the standard .NET technologies and reading a few articles will go a long way towards helping you find work in the software industry.

One terrific source for information on Microsoft .NET products is the Microsoft Developers Network: <http://www.msdn.com/>

To understand more about programming languages, take these action steps:

- Take a simple programming class
- Learn some basic programming techniques such as reading data in and out
- Learn how to perform an iterative calculation like adding $x + 1$ with a "loop"
- Take a class or get a book about a more advanced language, such as C# or C++

Getting a formal education, such as the Programmer/Writer certificate offered by BCC Continuing Education, is also a good step.



Freelancing: Where Does the Science Writer Begin?

By Adam Van Leuven

You've almost completed your Technical and Science Writing Certificate at BCC, and you're building a nice size portfolio. It's almost time to go out into the world, portfolio in hand, and try out everything you've learned. The science writing courses have really piqued your interest, and now freelance work sounds challenging and exciting. But where do you go to find work as a science or medical writer?

Science and medical writer associations

The following writers' associations should be the first places you look:

- National Association of Science Writers (NASW)
- Puget Sound Science Writers Association (PSSWA)
- American Medical Writers Association (AMWA)
- American Medical Writers Association, Northwest Chapter (AMWA-NW)
- Society for Technical Communication (STC)

Each of these associations has a Web site with job information and links to job search engines. The AMWA-NW Web site, in particular, has an extensive list of links to other associations and job resources.

Adi Ferrara, the Secretary of AMWA-NW, and an instructor of the *Researching for Science Writing* class here at BCC, points out that each association tends to post a different balance of full-time and freelance work.

She says, for example, that AMWA seems to post mostly full-time jobs, while on the AMWA-NW and NASW Web sites the full-time and freelance jobs seem to be more proportional. Ferrara explains, "I subscribe to several lists. Companies submit the job description, and it echoes to all the people on the list."

Additionally, the NASW Web site invites its members to peruse the job listings. You'll also find links to fellowships, workshops, internships, and organizations with an ongoing need for freelancers.

Pharmaceutical Companies

The pharmaceutical industry is the largest employer of medical writers. This is where you will find the highly specialized field of regulatory writing where a science background is extremely helpful.

Tracy Wrey, former president of AMWA-NW, says, "I write regulatory documents for biotechs and small pharmaceuticals that are preparing submissions for the FDA and other regulatory agencies." But for those new

to the medical industry, freelance and full-time work, Wrey adds, "is available for writers and editors who prepare medical newsletters, white papers, patient education material, abstracts for Web sites, translations of technical articles, and news articles."

CME Provider Companies

Continuing Medical Education (CME) is continuing education for medical professionals. This industry is another big employer for freelance medical writers.

According to Ferrara, "There are companies that specialize in CMEs and usually hire freelancers to do the work." The Accreditation Council for Continuing Medical Education Web site is a good place to start looking for CME employers. The Web site lists, by state, all of the employers that create accredited CME content.

"The catch-22 is getting into a place that doesn't require prior experience," concedes Ferrara. But, she urges, "They are always looking for people. You need to find a company that will give you a foot in the door."

Agencies

The agency can keep you connected with a steady stream of freelance work. To team up with an agency, Ferrara notes, "You either submit your resume, or they contact you because they found your information in, for example, the AMWA membership or freelance directories." The agency contacts freelancers when there is work that fits their profile.

"Those are terrific places to get into because they usually provide a steady income. The income varies, but the jobs are always there," says Ferrara.

You can find out more by hooking up with a mentor or any of the BCC science writing instructors such as Adi Ferrara, Susan London, Annette McCully, Kim McCullough, or George Bukota.

Magazines and newspapers

You can't just call a magazine and tell them you have an idea for an article unless, of course, you have an inside contact. You have to submit a query.

Ferrara suggests getting the book *Writer's Market*, which is published yearly. "Not only will it tell you how to write a query," she says, "but it will tell you what each magazine is looking for, what their pay is like, and what rights they buy."

To contact a newspaper, you can just call or email.

Find a Mentor

Is working with a mentor really that important?

Well, according to Ferrara it is. "It's essential! It's really essential." She states emphatically.

"Susan London (a science writing instructor here at BCC) sort of took me under her wing and showed me the ropes. I don't think I would be where I am today without her help. [Working with a mentor] takes a lot of the guess-work out of freelancing," says Ferrara.

Unfortunately, when it comes to mentor programs, there really isn't anything formally in place at any of the writer associations or here at BCC.

The best place to start is at the AMWA-NW meetings. You don't have to be a member to attend the meetings at the regional, AMWA-NW chapter. Ferrara adds, "The

regular educational meetings are free to anyone who wants to come, and we always have time to network and socialize before we begin. Come to our meetings; get on the AMWA-NW mailing list. That would be a great place to start."

Enjoy

So, jump in! Get started right now. Let your genuine curiosity for science launch you into a new career where you'll find more personal satisfaction than you ever dreamed from learning and writing about science.

Talk to the instructors; join up with the associations; find a mentor; find your niche and enjoy.

Searching for a Job Online

By Jeff Barber

Many of us in the BCC Technical and Professional Communication Program are searching for work or changing careers.

This article will discuss using online resources to aid our search for full-time and contract positions. Topics include networking, working with agencies, submitting a resume online, and assembling a portfolio. Let's get started by taking a look at the big picture.

Looking at the big picture

There are three primary types of work for technical communicators:

- Contract work through an agency
- Full-time employment
- Freelance work

The BCC Career Center offers a workshop entitled *The Hidden Job Market*. Statistics presented in the workshop reveal that most jobs are not advertised. The majority of people find full-time jobs in today's market through networking; working through agencies is an effective alternative for finding contract work.

Our BCC instructors tend to agree this holds true for technical communication (TechComm) professionals.

Why use online resources? Here are five reasons:

- E-mail is the primary form of communication for many technical professionals; it's a great way to follow-up with someone or send a thank-you note
- Technical communicators in today's market are expected to be e-mail and Internet savvy

- Many companies no longer advertise technical positions in print media; we can only find them on the Web
- Employment agencies list their job openings online
- Professional organizations use e-mail and the Web to promote meetings, list jobs, and keep members informed about developments in the field

Using online resources to supplement face-to-face networking activities is very important for technical communicators. In fact, one BCC instructor finds steady contract work using online resources exclusively.

Networking

Here are several ways we can use online resources to assist our networking efforts.

Join professional organizations

There are numerous professional and technical organizations where we can network with our peers.

Here's a great Web site that lists ALL the organizations in Puget Sound:

<http://www.iloveseattle.org/ils/groups-main/tech-science.html>

The premiere professional organization for technical communicators is *The Society for Technical Communication (STC)*. The STC home page includes links for jobs, career options, salaries, and related topics: <http://www.stc.org/>

The STC Puget Sound chapter hosts a Web site that includes event and employment listings. The chapter holds monthly meetings where you can improve your skills and meet working professionals: <http://www.stc-psc.org/>

Form e-mail lists with other students

Several instructors recommended that we support each other in finding work by passing on success tips and job leads that do not fit our areas of interest and expertise.

Working with agencies

The following agencies place technical communicators in Puget Sound. We can learn about the local job market and our profession by visiting their Web sites. And, working professionals tell me most of the employment in today's marketplace is contract work. Most companies hire TechComm contractors through an agency.

Sakson & Taylor (S & T)

<http://www.sakson.com>

If you are new to the field, S & T's site has great advice:

http://www.sakson.com/looking_for_work/new_in_field.htm

Volt Technical Staffing

<http://jobs.volt.com>

The Write Stuff

<http://www.writestuff.com>

Linda Werner and Associates

<http://www.lwerner.com>

Modis (formerly Wasser)

<http://www.modisit.com/specialties/technicalcomm.asp>

Technical Communications Consultants

<http://www.tccink.com>

Agency representatives tell me that client companies typically request TechComm contractors with five or more years of professional experience. However, we can build a resume, job skills, and a reputation with the agency by pursuing related opportunities. For example, using our software skills in a production job will help us gain experience and build relationships that could lead to the job we truly want.

Submitting a resume online

We should know a few things about transmitting our resumes and cover letters over the Internet to ensure that the recipient is able to read what we sent.

Use Notepad to create an ASCII version of the files.

Follow these guidelines:

- Remove any formatting or special characters
- Use ALL CAPS for your name and job titles
- Emphasize section headers with a full line of asterisks above and below
- Separate sub-sections with two short lines of dashes
- Replace bullets with a single asterisk
- Each line of text should be 50 characters maximum in length

Avoid sending file attachments via e-mail. If they have been specifically requested, we should include our resume and/or cover letter text in ASCII format in the body of an e-mail.

When using a company's Web site, we should paste our ASCII resume into the text box provided, even if they ask for a file attachment.

Important note: some companies use a third-party service provider to process resumes submitted to their Web site. Be aware that errors can happen on these sites, especially when using file attachments.

When submitting a resume via a Web site, it's worth a phone call to confirm that the company received the resume. And while we're at it, we can practice our networking skills with the receptionist or HR manager.

Assembling a portfolio

BCC instructors and agency representatives agree that assembling a portfolio, and customizing it to meet the needs of a prospective employer, is the most effective way to demonstrate our skills.

Here's a great tip from Walter Campbell, a BCC instructor: "Create a well-developed, thoughtfully organized portfolio containing samples directly relevant to the position(s) the student will seek. More than a mere a collection of samples, a portfolio should be a deliberately crafted narrative that not only tells what the student *has done* but also demonstrates what the student is capable of doing."

We may be asked to e-mail a PDF version of our portfolio or a link to our portfolio Web site—yet another way to use online resources in our job search.

Conclusion

For TechComm professionals, online job search skills are invaluable. Combine these skills with networking, agency relationships, and a strong portfolio. That job we are searching for will be ours before we know it.

**DigiNote—****TechComm Job Titles in Puget Sound**

Technical specialties

- | | |
|-------------------------|--------------------------------|
| • Programmer/Writers | • Programmer/Editors |
| • Usability Engineer | • Indexer |
| • Medical Writer | • Science Writer |
| • Technical Writer | • Technical Editor |
| • Project Manager | • Program Manager |
| • Documentation Manager | • Localization Program Manager |

Marketing Communication Marcom: Sales Letters

By Mike Klassen

You have the potential to make over \$100,000 each year if you understand and can put into practice the concepts outlined in this article. Do I have your attention? If so, I've succeeded with the first goal of a sales letter—an enticing promise.

I'll bet you've thrown away hundreds of sales letters that have arrived in your mailbox. However, companies that market to people through sales letters make millions of dollars each year—not everyone is throwing away his or her “junk mail.” Direct marketing is a huge industry and the writers who know how to create winning sales letters are well paid.

Let's look at five common components of a sales letter.

- **The Promise**—Right from the start, you need to let the reader know what he's going to get. Will he double his income? Will he lose weight easily? If the sales letter came from a non-profit organization, maybe the promise is that underprivileged children will get the help they need if the reader contributes money. Often, the promise is made in the headline of the letter. If the promise isn't enticing, the letter usually gets dumped in the trash.
- **The Picture**—“Get rich” sales letters are famous for creating great pictures. If you buy the money-making product, you'll be on your way to working just a couple hours a day, sitting on the deck of your beach house, and cashing large checks each week. Or maybe the picture is of taking your business to a new level if you subscribe to a particular business magazine. The goal is to get the reader to see herself better off in some way if she buys the product or service.
- **The Proof**—Promises and pictures are fine, but without any proof to back them up, you'll have difficulty making the sale. If the sales letter relates to health, then research findings or testimonials by people in the medical profession would be useful. Comments from actual users of the product or service also serve as proof.
- **The Unique Selling Proposition (USP)**—Why is this product or service the best solution for the reader? This is what's called the unique selling proposition, or USP. If you're selling a business-oriented newspaper, why is your paper better than the competition? Is it price? Is it content? If you're selling real estate, what makes you better than other agents?

- **The Close**—As the saying goes, you need to seal the deal. You need to make the offer attractive enough so that the reader takes action—right now. If the reader puts down the letter, he might never pick it up again. Maybe you offer a 50 percent discount if he calls within the next week. Or maybe the first 200 people to respond get a surprise bonus.

Space doesn't allow us to get too deeply into the common components of a sales letter. And there are other things to consider, like the layout of a sales letter and determining your target audience. Finally, don't forget the postscript (PS). Look carefully at the sales letters you get. You'll probably find that most have a PS and there's a reason for that.

How does a technical writer make the transition to marketing communication (Marcom) and writing sales letters? If you're a technical writer, you may be writing “after the sale” information like instruction manuals or support documentation. The Marcom writer has the task of helping make the sale. That's a different mindset. As we've discussed in a previous *DigiNews* article, Marcom writers need to use a little hype at times. This may be difficult for a technical writer who is used to dealing strictly with unemotional facts.

However, sales letters are quite common in the technical arena. The latest software or hardware needs just as much promotion as the latest diet supplements, book clubs or political campaigns. There's a need for awareness that the product or service is available and that it's worth spending money on. Sales letters are a part of that promotion.

If you work for a company that has a marketing department, ask if they have sales letters you can look at. You could even offer to help on the next letter. And I know a couple of people who have taken sales letters sent to them from local charities and offered to rewrite them if the letters weren't particularly effective.

If you want to explore sales letters further, I'd recommend Dan Kennedy's book, *The Ultimate Sales Letter*. It's a straight-forward guide to creating sales letters. (And he tells you why you want to include a PS.)

If you'd like to learn more about Marketing communication, join us July 16th for a Marcom workshop. The 3-hour course will give you an overview of the Marcom field. Register at <http://www.conted.bcc.ctc.edu>.

DigiNote—

Special thanks to the following people for their valued input for this issue:

Adi Ferrara
Bill McDonald

Bret Pyle
Carol Berdan

Instructor Profile

By Ron Goulter

Richard Buchmiller is in the Instructor Profile spotlight this quarter. I learned about Richard from Gloria Campbell at our “kick-off” meeting for this issue of the *DigiNews*.

Ron: What classes do you teach at BCC?

Richard: “I teach C++ For Technical Writers, C++ Programming–Level 1, and C++ Programming–Level 2.”

Ron: How did you become a teacher at BCC?

Richard: “My wife, Carol, was first approached by Adele Becker (the Director of Work-Related Programs for BCC’s Continuing Education program) about developing the C++ for Technical Writers course. Adele received a tip from one of the contract instructors at BCC that Carol Buchmiller was the person for the job. She (Carol) said she just happened to know someone,” Richard says laughingly, “Referring her to me.”

Richard explains that Carol is a well-known technical writer, and past president of the STC-PSC (Puget Sound Chapter).

Richard says it followed, after he was approached to develop the C++ for Technical Writers course for BCC, that he was approached about teaching at BCC.

Ron: How long have you taught at BCC?

Richard: “I’m not sure .” Richard has been teaching at BCC for about six years.

Ron: Can you give us a summary of your experiences or background in this area?

Richard: “I started programming in 1960.” Richard tells me that he had developed software for a number of years. He started exploring C and C++ in 1989 at the University of Washington while working for Boeing. His teaching career got started at Boeing in 1995 after he pitched the idea for an off-hours C++ teaching program.

Richard saw his opportunity to teach while working with the “production” code that Boeing was using at the time.

His exposure to C++ programming in the classroom was so different from that being used at Boeing that he initially didn’t think he knew enough about it (C++). It turned out that he knew much more about C++ than he thought he did. Thus, the opportunity to teach presented itself.

Ron: What traits, in your opinion, are necessary to be successful in the area that you teach?

Richard: “I treat my subject like it is an art form, and I do the majority of my code samples on-screen in freehand and let the students help find the mistakes as we proceed.”

He also uses humor to keep the class entertained, as well as interested in the subject matter. “With a subject as dry as C++, it is important to hold the students

attention. If I look around the room and see students with their head back and eyes closed, it’s my fault.”

Ron: What do you do, outside of BCC, related to your teaching?

Richard: “I teach at the University of Washington, Puget Sound Center (where Boeing is the client), and occasionally for Microsoft. I also tutor individual students on occasion.”

Richard is deciding whether he wants to teach C# (*see-sharp*)—which is what Microsoft is moving to—or leave that to the younger crowd.

One of the factors that will have an impact on Richard’s decision to teach C# will be the time he likes to devote to one of his hobbies. Richard enjoys cross-stitching!

Thinking about that, it fits in well with a detail-oriented person like Richard. He is quite accomplished in his hobby—as one of his works won “Grand Champion” at the Puyallup Fair last year.

You can see a sampling of his work at the Cross Stitch Corner at 138 105th Avenue Northeast, near Bellevue Square. Also, you’ll have an opportunity to see 20 pieces of Richard’s work on display at a cross-stitch show at the La Conner Quilt Museum January 14–March 14, 2005.

It sounds to me like Richard is a “Grand Champion” in his own right. Thank you, Richard!

DigiNote—

Purists may argue that these creative specialties are not a part of technical communication, but when you visit the agencies’ Web sites, you may see these job titles listed. Some of these positions are not full-on writing or editing positions, but they rely heavily on those skills.

- Desktop Publisher
- Interaction Designer
- Producer
- Instructional Designer
- Copy Writers & Editors
- Content Coordinator
- Content Writers & Editors
- Associate Producer

Students' Success Stories

By Ron Goulter

From Carol Berdan:

I was introduced to Carol (a technical writer for Northrop Grumman in Lakewood) last fall by Wes Whitbeck (featured in the last issue of *DigiNews*) when I shared a carpool to BCC with them.

Ron: When did you first consider a career in technical communication?

Carol: I first considered this career when I was working in technical support at a software development company. I noticed and began correcting grammar and punctuation errors, style issues, and inconsistencies in the user guides and marketing information. Pretty soon the president made sure all documents went past my desk. I absolutely loved editing the material.

Ron: Was this a career change?

Carol: I'd call it morphing. I continued with technical support but did more and more editing. I began to realize that there were actual jobs out there in which I could edit all day long.

Ron: What drove you to make the change?

Carol: I made the change when I was laid off due to a great decline in the company's sales. I was the last in my group to go. Being laid off, though, was the best thing that could have happened to me. My next two jobs were doing contract editing at Microsoft and Boeing.

Then, after September 11th, I was laid off again, and this time I couldn't find work, so I decided to go back to school. BCC's Technical Writing and Communication certificate program interested me and seemed to be the logical path to follow.

Ron: Which do you prefer—writing or editing?

Carol: After having been an editor for five months at Northrop Grumman, and then moving into their writing group, I have to say I prefer editing at this point because I'm good at it. I want to become a good writer, too, and have as much fun with it as I have had with editing.

Ron: Were you able to take advantage of any previous experience?

Carol: I would say that years of previous experience have helped me get to where I am today. Working in technical support to better understand what users want and need plus my knack of finding those pesky mistakes and inconsistencies have definitely helped me ease into the world of technical editing and writing.

Ron: How many interviews did you have before landing your current job?

Carol: Two. I interviewed with both the Federal Aviation Administration and Northrop Grumman around the same time. The day I accepted Northrop Grumman's offer, the FAA called with their offer. What a lift *that* was!

Ron: Was there anything in your portfolio or resume in particular that you think gave you an edge?

Carol: What I feel made my portfolio "impressive" (to my interviewers at both the FAA and Northrop Grumman) was that it included everything I needed, thanks to BCC's (free) Portfolio Preparation class, and especially to Lynn McManus. Lynn is an expert instructor, knows this topic inside and out, and makes the class interesting and useful.

Ron: Was this a good move for you?

Carol: Entering and completing BCC's Technical Writing and Communication certificate program certainly helped me move forward. Working at Northrop Grumman has been an interesting and beneficial experience.

I have since started the Programmer/Writer certificate program, which I am still working on. Thank you BCC!

From Ivan Weiss:

After 30-plus years in newspaper editing, I studied Technical Writing and Technical Editing at BCC. I learned more about writing and editing in my 18 months at BCC than I had learned in 30-plus years in newspaper work.

Was I asleep all those years? Hardly. But newspaper work was all intuitive. Technical communication is systematic. It has to be. The written word is so much more powerful when there is a purpose, a plan, and a technique behind it. Moreover, those elements must be portable, and documented, so that each subsequent practitioner does not have to "reinvent the wheel."

I put everything I learned at BCC to work immediately in my next job, as a Business Agent for a Teamsters local. There I had to write contract language, and letters to employers. I had to write instructional material for shop steward and member education. I had to write Web site content, where usability was paramount. I had to exercise proper project management. If this is not technical communication, I do not know what is.

I learned to think systematically, and to plan ahead instead of just reacting. But most of all, I learned that the more I learn, the more I learn how much there is yet to learn. Onward.

"Thanks to BCC's (free) Portfolio Preparation class, and especially to Lynn McManus."



"I put everything I learned at BCC to work immediately in my next job."

Job Trends

Continued from page 1

“Opportunities should be best for technical writers and those with training in a specialized field.”

When I visited Quintessential Careers (a job search engine for tech careers), my query for technical communication jobs in Washington yielded 426 matches!

Sound Off, the newsletter for the Society for Technical Communication, recently stated, “The increase in North American development jobs is encouraging for North American technical communicators.” Marketing, user interface and instructions, and product documentation require that “communication jobs are kept in close proximity to the development jobs.”

At Volt Engineering and Technology Services, a tech placement agency in Bothell, Erin Lastala told me that even though Microsoft says they will continue to hire offshore, there has been a definite increase this year in requests for technical writers and editors. This is because the development of programs like Microsoft Tablet PC, Xbox, Pocket PC, and their new version of Windows *is done here*.

The April 29th edition of *The Wall Street Journal* tells us Microsoft will add 3,500 U.S. jobs in the fiscal year ending June 30. Qpass Inc., another Seattle-based software company, is adding thirty people to last year’s seventy new hires to handle demand for their new cellphone technology. Furthermore, even though “The gains to date are tiny—fewer than 20,000 jobs since late last year,” there is “a significant shift. For the first time in several years, more workers are being hired than are being fired.”

Continuation of outsourcing

While software development may be increasing here, the outsourcing of jobs to overseas companies will continue. As the software industry is maturing, its profit margins are narrowing.

In order to satisfy market demand for discounted products, the software industry—where so many technical communicators are employed—is compelled to trim its largest cost: its labor force. This in turn has produced a glut of highly qualified tech writers competing for fewer jobs.

According to Kate Harper at Microsoft, “A lot of really excellent people are out of work.” Because the tighter economy has made it harder to get the funding needed for new projects, TechComm managers have to meet more aggressive deadlines with no additional resources.

New Market

Okay, so where does that leave us? What exactly is the next job market?

According to economists Frank Levy of MIT and Richard Murnane of Harvard, the new marketplace will key on jobs that are *non routine*. “Jobs that require flexibility, creativity, and lifelong learning . . . will stay in demand . . . and stay in the U.S.” In their new book, *The New Division of Labor: How Computers Are Creating the Next Job Market*, the authors claim that two kinds of jobs will be impossible to “routinize”: one involves complex pattern recognition, the other relies on complex communication skills.

Robb Reynolds of Milmanco is looking for someone with, “a passion for using technology to meet the user’s need or remove errors; the courage to try lots of new, scary things; and an absolute obsession for excellence.” But he’s also struggling to find a balance between a capable staff and a reduction in costs.

The focus is shifting—according to Joan Lohmann, employment manager at STC—to business process roles needed in-house, such as analysis skills, contracting, negotiation, compliance, financial, and accounting skills. The bottom line: “We will need to reinvent what we do in our professions.”

In conclusion, I think it’s fair to say that while the road ahead for technical communicators remains challenging, the word from professionals on the inside track is “network.” The successful job seeker will most likely have done a substantial amount of networking. Quintessential Careers tells us that 80 percent of candidates are finding their jobs this way.

For job seekers who are flexible and willing to work the system, the potential for success is encouraging. Some great tips on networking can be found in the January 2003 (Volume 2, Issue 1) edition of *DigiNews*.



Resources

Erin Lastala, Volt Engineering & Technical Services,
Bothell

Honora Wade, Digital Eve, Seattle
<http://www.digitaleveseattle.org>

Freelance Work Exchange
<http://www.freelanceworkexchange.com/index.html>
Quintessential Careers
<http://www.quintcareers.com>

SoundOff, the newsletter for the Society For Technical
Communication, Puget Sound Chapter
<http://www.stc-psc.org> (Dec-Jan and Feb-Mar issues)

USA Today
<http://www.usatoday.com/money/jobcenter/front.htm>

The Wall Street Journal (April 29, 2004)
<http://www.wallstreetjournal.com>

Wired Pen
<http://www.wiredpen.com>

DigiKnow?

By Adam Van Leuven

DigiKnow? Save your individual course certificates! You'll make life a lot easier on yourself and, more important, Gloria Campbell. Those certificates are proof that you've completed the class, and you'll need them when you pick up your Technical Communications Certificate. Besides, you've worked hard for them.

DigiKnow? Gloria Campbell, Faculty Coordinator, will be available during the months of May and June.

- Thursdays 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.
- Room 135 at the North Campus
- Phone number: 425-564-2943

If you need advising, program applications, or final certificates for the Technical Communication program, contact Gloria. It's a good idea to make an appointment via email at either: gcampbel@bcc.ctc.edu or Gcamp2965@aol.com.

DigiKnow? The DigiNews newsletter is always looking for new people to join in. This is a real opportunity to cut your teeth and gain some real experience working on a newsletter. In addition to putting together your own articles, you would have the opportunity to use other skills that you've learned, such as working with all levels of editing, and the newsletter layout.

Get in touch with Gloria Campbell to find out more about the DigiNews.

DigiKnow? The Society for Technical Communication's (STC) latest event:

On June 6–9, The International Association of Business Communicators (IABC) will hold its International Conference 2004 at the Westin Century Plaza in Los Angeles, California.

Visit the STC website for a list of the many upcoming events: <http://www.stc.org>.

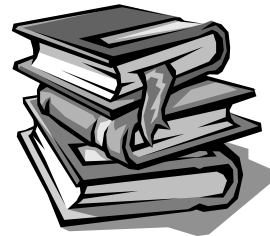
DigiKnow? The STC newsletter is looking for article writers. This is a good second opportunity for getting published (the first being *this* newsletter). But you'll need to be a member first. Contact Diane Boos, the newsletter manager, via email at dboos@drizzle.com or phone 425-277-1878.

DigiKnow? One of our graduates, Debra Borchert, just had an essay published in *The New York Times*. It's called "Too Close for Comfort," and is in the *Lives* column of the Sunday Magazine section of April 11, 2004.

DigiKnow? To join STC at the student price, just go to the STC website and print out an application. You must include a copy of your class registration or get an abstract from the customer service staff at BCC. An instructor signature is no longer required.

DigiKnow? The Technical Communication programs reached their 7-year anniversary this Spring Quarter. In 1997 we started with one class—Fundamentals of Technical Writing—taught by Craig Sanders. By fall of 1997 we offered seven classes, gradually building to the present level of seven programs with as many as 40 classes some quarters. .

DigiKnow? The summer schedule for the Technical Communications program is out. We have a NEW 3-hour class on Marcom writing. And we're offering a class for teenage writers in non-technical writing. So hurry up and get in on the fun!.



Software Tools

Continued from page 1

Learning the primary software applications

In 1999, the Society for Technical Communication (STC) conducted a survey of its membership. The results: the two most commonly used software applications were Microsoft Word and Adobe FrameMaker. This holds true today in the Puget Sound marketplace.

When we learn a software application, we also learn:

- A company's philosophy and standard user interface, thus making it easier for us to learn the company's other applications
- Principles of technical editing and publishing
- Principles of visual design, such as the use of styles, tags, and graphics
- Terminology and methodology for specific knowledge areas; for example, learning photo editing using Photoshop will make it easier to use Paint Shop Pro for photo editing
- Methods for single-sourcing (using one content source to produce print, Web, and online documentation), an important issue in today's marketplace

By learning Word and FrameMaker, we will know the primary tools of our trade. We will also reinforce the principles of technical writing and editing we are learning at BCC—principles that apply to any software application and any job.

Learning more about the industries and genres that interest us

Based on our professional background, skills, and interests, we can specialize in one or more industries and genres.

Our industry focus may require us to master multiple genres and software tools. For example, a technical communicator serving the software industry could be expected to know online help, software documentation, technical editing, and Web content design.

Industries

The Puget Sound marketplace employs technical communicators in these industries:

- | | |
|-----------------|----------------------|
| • Software | • Internet |
| • Computers | • Telecommunications |
| • Financial | • Medical |
| • Digital Media | • Wireless |
| • Aerospace | • Scientific |
| • Medical | • Financial |

Genres and software tools

Genres are specific types of documentation included under the umbrella of technical communication. Most industries and companies employ multiple genres to communicate with customers and internal staff.

Industries tend to standardize on software applications. So do companies. To get the real facts, we must talk to people who work in the industries and companies that interest us to find out which software tools they use.

To get started, here is a generalized list of genres and the corresponding software tools (BCC does not offer courses in the Software Tools listed in *italics*).

Genre	Software Tool
All genres	Microsoft (MS) Office
Content management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MS Excel • MS Access
Interaction design (user interface)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MS Visio
Marketing communication/high-impact color publishing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adobe InDesign
Online help	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MS HTML Help • <i>RoboHelp</i> • <i>XMetaL</i>
Process documentation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MS Visio
Project management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MS Project • MS PowerPoint
Science writing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Scalable Vector Graphics</i>
Software and computer documentation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MS Visio • Adobe Photoshop • A screen-capture utility like <i>SnagIt!</i> • HTML • XML
Technical editing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adobe Acrobat • HTML • XML A .NET language: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • C++ • C# • VB.NET
Web content design	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Macromedia Dreamweaver MX • MS FrontPage • MS Office 2003 XML features • Adobe Acrobat • <i>XMetaL</i> • HTML • XML

DigiNews

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DigiNote—

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Deciding where to focus our efforts

Now comes the hard part. Where do we focus our time, money, and effort?

To help guide us, we can develop a vision and an action plan by asking ourselves these questions:

- What do I want to do?
- What industries interest me?
- Who are the leading companies in those industries?
- What genres interest me?
- Which software tools are used in the industries and genres I've chosen?

Gloria Campbell and the BCC instructors are available to help guide our decisions. Remember, they are working TechComm professionals.

Conclusion

Our mastery of software tools is one key to our professional success.

BCC offers courses in Microsoft, Adobe, and Macromedia software skills, as well as HTML, XML, and the .NET programming languages.

For current courses, check the BCC Continuing Education catalog or the Web site under "Computers" and "Technical Communications."

Happy skill-building!

PS: The employment agency representatives who responded to my query emphasized that students should know HTML and XML.

DigiNote— Agency links

These agencies place a broad spectrum of IT and technical professionals, and occasionally place technical communicators:

http://adecco.smartsearchonline.com/jobs/process_jobsearch.asp
<http://www.teksystems.com/>
http://endeavourllc.com/4_1.html
<http://www.genesis10.com/contact/Seattle.html>
<http://www.greythorn.com/>
<http://jobs.hallkinion.com/employee/>
<http://www.yoh.com/career.cfm>

These agencies focus on marketing and creative talent placements:

<http://www.artsource.com/about/bellevue.asp>
<http://www.creativeassets.com/newsite/main.asp>
<http://www.creativegroup.com/OfficeLocations>

Regional job boards

<http://www.bridgewaycareer.com/seattle-recruiters.htm>
<http://seattle.craigslist.org/wri/>
<http://classifieds.nwsources.com/classified/>
<http://www.scn.org/employment/temp.html>
<http://www.seattle24x7.com/jobs/jobs.htm>
<http://www.stc-psc.org/employment.html>
<http://www.wa.gov/esd/work/jobs.htm>
<http://www.worksourceskc.org/>

National job boards

<http://www.careerbuilder.com/>
<http://www.computerjobs.com/>
<http://www.dice.com/>
<http://flipdog.monster.com/>
<http://hotjobs.yahoo.com/>
<http://www.monster.com/>
<http://www.net-temps.com/>
<http://www.technicalcommunicator.com/>