

Devil Mountain Views

Newsletter of the East Bay Chapter of STC
November/December 2003

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What's in a Mark?

In your home, do you use tissues or Kleenex? It makes a difference, as **Dara Golden** points out in her article exploring the intricacies of trademarks.

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To kick off our membership drive, **Suzanna Laurent** shares some not-so-obvious benefits of joining STC.

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Ask Elaine: A Matter of Style

Elaine Parrish tells us that editing is not always an exact science, but rather an art form that depends on many factors. But, do beware if your editor uses *Larry, Moe, and Curly's Guide to Talking Better English!*



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About Devil Mountain Views

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

For more information about STC, go to the [Society web page](#).

DMV Basics The East Bay Chapter newsletter is named after a local landmark, Mount Diablo, in Northern California. With a few exceptions, all distances in California are measured from that point, called the Mount Diablo Meridian. The East Bay Chapter serves the cities along the 680 corridor and the east/west part of 580. City-wise it's Vallejo to Pleasanton, Tracy to Oakland and Fremont. We have members from each of those places.

PUBLICATION POLICY

We are always interested in sharing technical communication trends and information with our readers. For details, contact the Acting Managing Editor, [Becky Rude](#).

PUBLICATION SCHEDULE

Devil Mountain Views is published bimonthly, five times a year (September, November, January, March, May). e-Devil Mountain Views, an email supplement to the newsletter, is published once per month.

ARTICLE SUBMISSION DEADLINES

Sep/Oct 2003 issue – Aug 2, 2003
Nov/Dec 2003 issue – Oct 2, 2003
Jan/Feb 2004 issue – Dec 2, 2003
Mar/Apr 2004 issue – Feb 2, 2004
May/Jun 2004 issue – Apr 2, 2004

WRITER'S TEMPLATE

If you are submitting an article, please download our [template](#) to use as a guideline for writing your article.

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Articles may be reprinted provided credit is given to Devil Mountain Views and the author, and two copies of the publication are mailed to [Becky Rude](#) or the mailing address listed below.

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Product Types: Only advertisements for products or services related to technical communication can be placed on the EBSTC web site and Devil Mountain Views.

Format: Ads must be in either GIF or JPG format.

Dimensions & Rates: The following rates are valid for one month on the EBSTC web site or one issue of the newsletter.

336 X 280 = \$150

468 X 60 = \$120
160 X 155 = \$80
120 X 60 = \$50

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Payment: Payment must be received by the [East Bay Chapter treasurer](#) before the ad is run. Payment can be made by check.

Inquiries: If you have questions or want to start your ad, please contact [Becky Rude](#).

MAILING ADDRESS

Becky Rude, Acting Managing Editor, 665 Oak Circle, Pleasanton, CA 94566.

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DMV History **Note:** We will update this section as our chapter archives are updated. If you were a Managing Editor during a time frame that is missing from the history, please [let us know](#).

Year	Notes
2003–2004	Acting Managing Editor: Becky Rude
2002–2003	Managing Editor: Ashwini Tharval Best of Show, Most Improved, Distinguished Technical Communication awards in the STC International Newsletter Competition.
2001–2002	Managing Editors: Ashwini Tharval and Becky Rude. The newsletter is launched online in Web format. Award of Merit in the STC International Newsletter Competition.
1999–2001	Managing Editor: Teresa Washburn Award of Excellence in the STC International Newsletter Competition.
1997–1999	Managing Editor: Kelly Walker Award of Excellence in the STC International Newsletter Competition.
1996–1997	Managing Editor: Melody Brumis Newsletter name changed to <i>Devil Mountain Views</i> . Susan Moxley won the contest held to rename the newsletter. In July 1996, a spoof issue called <i>East Bay Flame</i> is published.
1995–1996	Managing Editor: Bruce Robinson An offshoot, the <i>Twig</i> , is published by President Gwaltney Mountford to supplement the <i>East Bay Log</i> .
1994	Newsletter name changed to <i>East Bay Log</i> .
1962	The <i>Pacifica News</i> was published in the fall in the year the <i>Pacifica</i> chapter was founded. (The chapter was renamed to <i>East Bay</i> in 1982 under President T.R. Girill.) ▲

Ask Elaine: A Matter of Style



by [Elaine Parrish](#)
 DMV Copyeditor

If you have an editing question you'd like to see addressed in a future column, please submit it to [Ask Elaine](#).

I'm constantly being asked questions like the following:

Which is correct: Web site, web site, or website?

In a phrase like, "A, B, C and D" should there be a comma after C?

Isn't it wrong to write "Everybody has their pencil"?

The answer to all these questions is a definite "It depends."

Writers are often dismayed or even suspicious when they hear this answer. Editors are supposed to store the answers to questions like these in our heads. If we don't know the answer to a question, we are expected to look it up in one of the many reference books that clutter our desks and bookshelves. And every editing question is supposed to have an answer—ONE answer: yes or no; right or wrong; comma or no comma.

Well, it may come as a surprise, but editing is far from the exact science many writers believe it to be. Yes, many editing questions do have specific answers. There's just no way, for example, that you can write a sentence containing a subject-verb disagreement or a blatant misspelling without incurring the wrath of the editorial red pen. However, there's an entire class of editing issues for which there are no cut-and-dried, right-or-wrong answers. These are matters of style, and their answers depend on which particular style guide you're using.

The Right Style Guide

It's been observed that if you ask five different editors the same editing question, you'll get six different answers—not only because editors are an opinionated bunch, but also because they're probably all using different style guides. There are dozens of style guides to choose from. Your selection will depend on discipline, media, target audience, availability, number of writers involved, personal preference, and many other factors related to your specific project.

Take, for example, the third phrase posed at the beginning of this column. Depending on your age and where you went to school, you were probably taught to write either **Everybody has his pencil** or **Everybody has his or her pencil**. But believe it or not, no less an esteemed authority than the

Chicago Manual of Style gave its blessing to the **everybody/their** construction, recommending in the 14th edition that the singular use of **they** and **their** be revived, and pointing to its use by a long list of respected writers. (For the record, they have reversed this opinion in the newly published [Chicago Manual of Style, 15th edition](#).)

“Pick and Stick” Assuredly, some style guides are better than others, and it’s always safer to stay with one that’s respected in the industry. I’d tend to value the style judgments in [Strunk and White](#) more highly than those in, say, *Larry, Moe, and Curly’s Guide to Talking Better English*. But the most important thing to keep in mind is that, in matters of style, consistency reigns. Your readers probably won’t care whether you write **Web site**, **web site**, or **website**, but they could become annoyed or even confused if you fail to use the same styling throughout the project. In other words, pick one style and stick to it. Your readers—and your editor—will thank you for it.

Lots of people have sent me the following snippet from a so-called Cambridge University study. No doubt you’ve seen it too.

Can You Raed Tihs?

Aoccdrnig to rscheearch at Cmabrigde Uinervtisy, it deosn’t mtttaer in waht oredr the ltteers in a wrod are, the olny iprmoetnt tihng is taht the frist and lsat ltteer be at the rghit pclae. The rset can be a total mse and you can sitll raed it wouthit a porbelm. Tihs is bcuseae the huamn mnid deos not raed ervey lteter by istlef, but the wrod as a wlohe. Amzanig, huh?

Although the “Cambridge University research” part is likely an urban legend (see [Urban Legends Reference Pages](#)), this does bring up an interesting point: just how much importance should be given to correct spelling? I’d be interested in your thoughts on this subject. If you’d like to voice your opinion, please e-mail me at [Ask Elaine](#).



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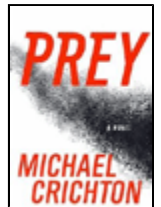
Book Review: Prey



by [Richard Mateosian](#)
 Senior Member, Silicon Valley

[Prey](#) by Michael Crichton (Harper Collins, NY, 2002, ISBN 0-06-621412-2, \$26.95)

In this novel, Michael Crichton, already famous for his earlier works, *The Andromeda Strain* and *Jurassic Park*, places current technologies into a completely plausible situation, then develops the story into an engrossing thriller. Somewhere in the process he crosses the line from believable to unbelievable. I'm not sure of the exact point in the book when I started to feel that way, but by the time I did, I was already hooked.



Synopsis

Forman, fired for blowing the whistle on questionable corporate accounting practices, has been an unemployed househusband for many months when his former company calls him to consult. They have sold Forman's software to another company, which is having trouble with it. The new company, it turns out, is Xymos, the firm for which Forman's wife is a marketing director. She looks at Xymos as her last chance to make a fortune, and she has cut a few corners to bring the story to this point. She should have read some of the project management books that I reviewed recently in this column. They could have saved her a lot of trouble, but then there would be no story.

Forman heads for the remote desert facility where the problem is, and he finds that Xymos has used agent software that Forman's team had developed at the first company. The software produces agents that exhibit predator-prey behavior, but Xymos has put the agents to another use—a military contract to create a spy camera made from a swarm of billions of nanomachines.

Unable to solve the problem of how to prevent air currents from disrupting the swarm's structure, Xymos has turned swarms loose in the desert to see if a solution emerges as they evolve. Through a series of plausible circumstances, the swarms can use solar power and already carry with them their means of manufacture when Xymos turns them loose. They multiply and evolve at a rapid rate. Adaptive behaviors emerge. Humans become their prey, and it looks as if they have a good chance of wiping us out. From this point, the novelist takes over and carries the story forward to its conclusion.

Added Suspense

Prey reminds me of a book that was one of my favorites when I was an avid science fiction fan, about 50 years ago. In Hal Clement's novel *Needle*, two members of an alien race come to Earth—one a fugitive and one a pursuing police officer. Members of this alien race live by symbiosis, a relationship in which they and their hosts help but never harm each other. The fugitive has violated this rule. This contributes to the danger that leads to the book's exciting conclusion. In *Prey*, one strain of the evolving swarms of nanomachines develops a behavior much like symbiosis, contributing added suspense to the climax.

Familiar Concepts Explored

When I read *Prey*, I thought of many books I have read and concepts that I have

explored over the years.

Daniel Dennett in *Consciousness Explained* talks about the parallel architecture that the billions of neurons of the brain have organized themselves into. Adaptive self-organizing systems are at least as ancient as humans, but we have only begun to understand such systems in the last decade or so. *Prey* reminds us that humans are not necessarily the only creatures capable of pursuing their own goals powerfully and efficiently, to the detriment of their fellow Earthlings.

Mitchel Resnick, in *Turtles, Termites, and Traffic Jams—Explorations in Massively Parallel Microworlds*, says that no leader directs birds to fly in formation or ants to form trails from their nests to food sources. Instead, large numbers of independent entities, each following simple rules, produce the large-scale patterns that we observe. This is the principle that makes Crichton's *Prey* plausible.

In *Darwin Among the Machines: The Evolution of Global Intelligence*, author George Dyson tries to understand many of the themes that underlie *Prey*. He starts with the work of Thomas Hobbes, over 350 years ago. Hobbes' Leviathan is a group intelligence representing the future of human society. Hobbes believed that life arises from the physical behavior of the underlying objects. The parts of the body give rise to a person whose life and thought are of a higher order than those of its heart, nerves, or muscles. Similarly, people, their institutions, and their machines give rise to a group intelligence of even higher order. This, of course, is what happens with the swarms of nanomachines in *Prey*.

In the April 2000 issue of *Wired*, Bill Joy discusses three technologies in which our progress is outpacing our ability to control them: genetics, nanotechnology, and robotics. He calls attention to some of the possible consequences of these technologies: plague, intelligent germ warfare, out-of-control self-replicating robots, and many others. Michael Crichton relies heavily on all three of these technologies, and on some of the possible consequences Joy calls attention to, to create the nightmare scenario in *Prey*.

Highly Recommended

Prey is an enthralling thriller, but it is also an elaboration of many threads of thought in computer science and in the ethics of science. I highly recommend it. ▲

This review originally appeared in slightly different form in the May/June 2003 issue of *IEEE Micro*.
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Chapter Activities: Strategic Plan in the Works



by [Becky Rude](#)
 President-Elect

The EBSTC council has been working hard since summer on a strategic plan that will guide the chapter through the next three years. To start the process, the council did some brainstorming to come up with chapter strengths and weaknesses. One of our greatest strengths is that we have a very friendly chapter wherein we try to avoid cliques and make everyone feel welcome. We realize that a big weakness is low chapter meeting attendance, but aren't sure why this is so.

One big step we've already taken is to send out a survey to all members to try to determine why meeting attendance is low. We've asked for your opinions on how meetings should be run, what topics you're interested in, how much you're willing to pay for food at dinner meetings, and other relevant issues. We will be publicizing the results of the survey and using it as a basis for changes.

Here are other plan highlights:

Mission The mission of the East Bay Chapter is to provide a forum for members to network, build professional skills, and stay current in the field of technical communication.

Plan Goals Our goals are to:

- Strive to be a chapter of distinction
- Become a resource that is valued by members, employers, and the community
- Build a strong sense of chapter community
- Improve chapter communications

Strategies Following are a few things we plan to do:

- Increase meeting attendance to average 35% of chapter members
- Participate in a community project
- Increase chapter membership by 20%
- Increase volunteer participation
- Improve communications on the chapter web site
- Develop leadership depth and a "leader career path"

The plan is ambitious and it will definitely stretch our chapter to meet our goals. However, Susan and I have complete faith that we can do it with all the talent and energy in our chapter. If you want to hear more, you can see the complete [EBSTC Strategic Plan](#).

If you'd like to help with any activity listed in the plan, or if you have ideas

you'd like to share, please [let us know](#).

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Meeting Report: September 2003

by [Susan Curtzwiler](#)
 EBSTC Member

Building High Performance Teams



Ron Person, owner of enMind Training Performance in Santa Rosa, California, presented the methods of Building High Performance Teams at the EBSTC September 2003 meeting. Attendees listened intently to his comments about the value of having clearly stated goals and people who have a firm commitment to the team and the project.

Ron wrapped up the evening with *After Action Review*, an interactive session wherein each member of the audience submitted their own one-line summary. The most popular comment, submitted by Jane Jones, was to have a session discussing Lessons Learned. Jane won a \$25 gift certificate to Amazon.com from Ron.

The following is a summary of some of the tips Ron passed along to EBSTC members.

Qualities in High Performance Team Building

Commitment to each other and commitment to the common goal are two important qualities needed for team building. You're the manager of a new project and you need the best team working with you—one that is experienced, goal oriented, and dependable. Use the Basic Team Requirements (below) to build your staff and bring the project to fruition.

Basic Team Requirements

The basic team requirements are small size, a meaningful purpose, specific performance goals, a common approach, complementary skills, and mutual accountability.

Small Size

Developing a team of only six to eight people is optimum to encourage improved communication. Remember to allow for someone to drop out for any reason. If the group changes, try using available talent in other departments. Adding a new person to the mix puts valuable time at high risk.

Meaningful Purpose

When the purpose of the project is explained, a sense of pride and ownership develops within the team. Regardless of the purpose—to put a man on the moon or explain how to assemble a bookshelf—define a common goal. The team now has a meaningful purpose—to meet the deadline and to work with quality and commitment.

Specific Performance Goals

Clearly define the assignment and the timeline, including reviews, benchmarks, and the final deadline. Be sure to discuss the scope, schedule, and available resources, and allow time for questions. This type of exchange, initiated by management, will give the team an understanding and ownership of the purpose and goal. After finding the high-performance goal, the slogan and industry-specific terminology will naturally evolve.

Common Approach

Developing an approach is critical to the success of any project. Consider the following to keep the team on track:

- Stick to the budget
- Use highly skilled people at their best use
- Understand communication methods
- Establish disciplined work processes
- Ensure agreement on file and naming formats

Complementary Skills

In addition to the selected skill set, there will be additional needs to complement the job.

Does your new team collectively have the necessary skills? You may need to borrow talent from other in-house departments. See how you can best harvest the following:

- Technical and functional expertise
- Problem-solving and decision-making skills
- Interpersonal skills for good communication

You may need to consider which skills can be learned and also have a contingency plan for skill dropouts (if someone leaves).

Mutual Accountability

A good team will want to have mutual accountability. Each team member will demonstrate the following:

- Individual responsibility
- Accountability to the team
- A shared responsibility to work for the common good of the project

Encourage the team to know when to ask for help and identify if the need is for resources or a skill. There is no shame in asking for help to avoid delays; the problem is when someone pretends that everything is okay and then causes a huge work crunch at the eleventh hour. ▲

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Director-Sponsor Report: Commodity Writer or Strategic Communicator?

by [Rahel Bailie](#)
Director-Sponsor for [Region 7](#)

Panel Discussion Topic

This month, I found myself in Portland, Oregon, for the STC board meeting and the [Willamette Valley's](#) season kick-off meeting, which the chapter organized to coincide with the board meeting. The topic was the future of technical communication, a panel discussion that included a workforce analyst, two STC board members, and two local technical communicators who weathered the turndown in the economy and who embody the characteristics of career survivors.

As context for the panel discussion, it happens to be that Oregon is the hardest hit state of all the U.S. Many software development jobs have been sent offshore, and the technical communication jobs that accompanied those jobs dried up, as well. Even in companies retaining their North American-based staff, the constant effort to trim "waste" continues to erode jobs in departments seen as cost centers.

Commodity Writing

Commodity writing is the type of technical communication characterized as the creation of formulaic documentation on demand, and is closely tied to writing code. Companies are increasingly comfortable outsourcing both of these tasks. Those are the jobs being sent offshore, as evidenced by the surge in job openings on STC job boards in the Asia-Pacific countries.

Strategic Contributors

Increasingly, the jobs that remain are for *strategic contributors*, technical communicators who can be entrusted to look beyond the pages of their manuals, beyond the screens of documentation, beyond the department of documentation, and even beyond the GUI. These strategic contributors look at the product from a business point of view and ensure that their contributions to the company's product also contribute to the company's bottom line. The actual contribution may be content, user-centered design, or specific communications products, but the content arises from a perspective of problem solving. The successful strategic contributor is recognized by management as a valuable part of the team, and may be part of the management team.

What impressed me were the remaining panelists, who embodied the principles of strategic contribution. **Sheila Reitz**, a contractor for an Oregon power company, made a conscious choice to move from commodity work to strategic contribution. Using a performance-based resume—coincidentally, I discuss these techniques in "Using a Resume to Showcase Your Talents" in the September/October 2003 issue of *Intercom*—Reitz demonstrated her ability to contribute her analytical and communication skills documenting work flow processes. As a result, her first phone call to user-test the new resume format resulted in landing a dream contract, when her tester exclaimed, "We need you!"

Common Quest

The landscape for technical communications has changed, and will continue to change. Whether you are a technical communicator outside of North America who is benefiting from the windfall of technical writing jobs coming to your area, or a technical communicator called upon to stretch your imagination, the quest is the same one posed by Dick Bolles, author of *What*

Color Is Your Parachute?: Which of my skills fills the changing needs in the local market, and how can I market myself to meet those needs? ▲

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Editor's Message



by [Becky Rude](#)
Interim Managing Editor

Hello Readers!

Well, even after my best pitch [last issue](#) to entice one of you to become the new editor, I'm still here! Here's what we're planning for the remaining issues this year. Instead of a permanent editor, we'd like to try a "guest editor" experiment where you're editor for one issue only. This idea will allow people to test the waters to see whether they really like being the editor, and will also allow people to become involved without a big time commitment. And, with editing one issue, you can still get your name on [Google!](#) If this idea interests you, please [let me know](#).

Advertise with Us!

DMV hasn't been accepting advertisements for a couple of years. We are happy to announce that we are once again accepting advertisements!

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Procrastinating on the Web

And now, let's move on to other important things. As we all know, the Web is a wonderful tool and has become an integral part of our lives. We hear a lot about web sites that can help you do your work, but what about those that help you avoid your work? To fill in this knowledge gap, I'd like to share a couple of web sites I visit when I'm procrastinating.

Being One of the DNRC

I've received the Dilbert Newsletter for quite a few years now and find that it usually arrives in my inbox just when I need a good laugh. You can sign up for the newsletter on the [Dilbert web site](#). It's published every couple of months or whenever Scott Adams gets around to writing it (I wonder if he's a procrastinator?). When you sign up, you become part of Dogbert's New Ruling Class (DNRC).

My favorite part of the newsletter is Individual Quotes, which consists of

hilarious mixed metaphors that are (supposedly) true quotes from the work place. And, as Adams says, even if they're only urban legends, it's still funny. Here are a few examples (as you see, I like the animal-related quotes):

"I've been running around like a chicken with my legs cut off!"

"The monkey is in their court."

"There's more than one way to lick a cat."

Indulging in Procrastination

Another site I just discovered is NotWriting.com. Although we know it's human nature to procrastinate, this site really takes it to a higher plane. The tag line is "What would happen if a writer, unable to write, got the idea to write the things he does when he really should be writing?" The author, Christopher Orcutt, puts into writing what so many of us do (procrastinate), but try to hide.

Take a few minutes to read his commentary section, which is like a Seinfeld episode—it's about nothing really, but still entertaining. For instance, his very complete review of the fall TV lineup (not everybody loves Raymond), or his journal of a day when he got up at 4:00 a.m. to write, but couldn't seem to get started and spent the whole day doing anything but writing, or his confession of things he left off his grad school application.

Share Your Favorites

Do you have favorite web sites for procrastinating? I'd love to hear about them. [Send](#) them to me and I'll share them with other readers.

Thanks for taking time to read our newsletter. I hope you enjoy it!

Becky ▲

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Letters to the Editor



We'd love to hear from you with comments, suggestions, and stories we should know about. Write to [Becky Rude](#), Interim Managing Editor.

*[Editor's note: The following letter is in regard to Karin's [book review](#) of Steve Krug's book *Don't Make Me Think*. Steve is hosting [workshops](#) in conjunction with [Lou Rosenfeld](#), which we posted on our web site.]*

Becky...

Thanks from me, too. And please thank Karin for the generous review. Very nice job on the site, too. As a long-time (ten years) tech writer myself, I have to admire any newsletter that has an entire column about apostrophes (or is that apostrophe's?) No wonder you received the Best in Show award. (I won the best user manual award in the international STC, for the last manual I wrote back in '89, so I know how much it means.)

Steve

[Editor's note: The following letter is in regard to Susan's article [Alternative Jobs or Alternative Job Search Methods?](#)]

Hi Susan:

I read your article on the outsourcing of technical writing. I often ask myself the same questions you raise in your article, about whether or not to even stay in the business. After my independent contracting business in Santa Clara ended in 2001, I had a really tough year in 2002, being unemployed for most of it. Finally, after doing some traveling and soul searching, I am currently technical writing in Taipei, Taiwan! I'm making a fraction of what I used to, but for Taiwan, it's a pretty high salary, about 27K U.S.

I am seeing the outsourcing of our line of work firsthand. The company I work for hires writers out of the Philippines and India. And a few Westerners, including myself. I keep asking myself, "How am I going to remain competitive?" and "Will I ever be able to go back to California?"

I don't know about the second question, but you helped to answer the first one. We just got a new tech pubs manager here, and one of the reasons for replacing the old one was because he did not use "metrics." You're right, aside from knowing the latest programs, ROI has really become popular. I would just like to add one of my own points "to stay viable in the market": Marketing—more important now than ever before. A simple resume will no longer do it. When networking, either in person, by email, or over the phone, you must market yourself as a confident problem solver, and show samples of how you do this.

Thanks for your article, Susan.

Daniel Enciso

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Employment News: Job Search Assistance



by [Ken Evans](#)
EBSTC Employment Manager

The Bay Area is one of the most intensely competitive job markets in the world. Thousands of well-educated, extensively experienced, and highly skilled workers from all over the world want to live here. Most of them are not independently wealthy, so they need employment. The result is a large number of well-qualified applicants pursuing a limited number of jobs. That's the bad news. The good news is that most of these applicants don't know how to efficiently get a job.

Commercial Companies

Near the front of any large newspaper's employment classifieds section, you often see ads for companies that promise to help you market yourself, mine the hidden job market, and get the elusive interviews. If you go to these organizations, you'll find fancy furnishings and elegantly dressed staff who will greet you, stroke you, soothe you, and present you with impressively packaged literature—for several thousand dollars.

If you don't have (or don't want to spend) that much money, a much better value is available. Some years ago, an astute state employee persuaded California's Employment Development Department (EDD) that most workers are trained to *do* a job, but very few have been trained to *get* a job.

State-Sponsored Help

The result was a network of state-sponsored job search operations that are associated with most large EDD offices. They consist of unimposing leased office space, equipped with desks, telephones, computers with Internet access, laser printers, fax machines, photocopiers, meeting rooms, etc. At each location, the program is overseen by an EDD employee (usually assigned half-time). The operation is manned by the job seekers using their talents and experience. Computer experts train those who don't have experience in using computers. Human resources people conduct mock interviews (often videotaped) to help sharpen that skill. Those with sales experience visit potential employers to market the talents of personnel in the program. All facilities and training are available at no cost to the participants.

For job seekers, the EDD program is probably more effective than the very expensive commercial operations. More participants are involved, so there's much more and better networking potential. The information communicated is up to date and unvarnished. You can quickly learn who is and is not hiring, who you want to work for—and, more important, who you don't.

As a participant, I found it very helpful to take advantage of absolutely all the training offered. Every workshop conveys at least some new and useful information. Combining and applying what I learned there enabled me to consistently ace out the competition. As a result, I usually got the interview and frequently was offered the job.

Words of Caution

The networking potential in these programs is excellent. In addition to numerous valuable business contacts, I made several lasting friendships with people I met there. But remember that not everyone is ethical. Some important cautions:

- Never turn your back on your personal belongings. If you go to the rest room, take your stuff with you.
- If you use the office equipment to produce resumes and cover letters, don't discard the extras in the wastebaskets. You never know who might scavenge them to use, misuse, or abuse your personal information.
- Don't store personal data on the computer hard drives. Before you put a data diskette in the floppy drive, be sure it's legibly labeled with your name and phone number. It's easy to get distracted and forget to remove it when finished. This identification will help to get it back to you.
- At large weekly meetings, you may want a placeholder to save your seat. Don't use anything you care about (my device was a manila envelope ballasted with newspaper).

Resources

If you decide to investigate this program, contact your nearest chapter. In the East Bay, different locations of the program have various names:

[Experience Unlimited](#), 367 Civic Drive, Pleasant Hill 94523, 925-602-7700

[ProNet](#), 39115 Liberty Street, Fremont 94538, 510-794-3681

[ProSearch](#), 675 Hegenberger Road, Oakland 94621, 510-563-5310 ▲

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Member Spotlight: Hillary Russak



by [Melody Brumis](#)
 Immediate Past President

Hillary is one of the first people you'll see when you attend our monthly meetings. As Vice President of Arrangements, Hillary works with the chapter treasurer to greet you at the door and collect your money. Having transferred into the East Bay Chapter because it's so friendly, Hillary is continuing the chapter's welcoming tradition. You'll likely be greeted by Hillary at a meeting soon, but here's a head start on her story.



Hillary Russak accepting her Kenneth M. Gordon Scholarship award

Read about the [Kenneth M. Gordon Scholarship](#).

STC Scholarship Winner

Hillary is a student in the SF State Technical and Professional Writing Bachelor's Degree Program and a recent recipient of a \$2,000 Kenneth M. Gordon Scholarship award. This scholarship is sponsored by the Society for Technical Communication and is available to students in technical communication degree programs. Hillary has been a working technical communicator for ten years, which was reflected in her scholarship application. While the selection committee requested one recommendation letter from a teacher in her program, Hillary supplied three. She also submitted five examples of her work (four more than requested) and a detailed description of her future plans to contribute to the field of technical communication.

In addition to the award money, which will pay for textbooks, Hillary also received a year's student membership in STC and paid fees for participation in two special interest groups.

On the Job

Hillary creates documents and documentation strategies for occupational safety and environmental protection at Stanford Linear Accelerator Center (SLAC). SLAC, a collaboration between the U.S. Department of Energy and Stanford University, is one of the world's leading laboratories for

designing, constructing, and operating facilities used in high-energy physics and synchrotron radiation research. Hillary primarily writes policies, procedures, articles for the lab's newsletter, and content for the [web site](#).

Recently, Hillary moved from a full-time management position to part-time work to complete her degree, which she's been working toward (one class at time) since 1996. She plans to graduate in 2004.

Hillary's current work at SLAC is a project to develop and communicate the site's "Policy on Policies," for which she is building a web site with tools "to help policy creators at SLAC make useful, accessible policies and procedures for the site."

Before coming to Stanford, Hillary worked at a pharmaceutical manufacturing company, Syntex. She worked in occupational health and safety, which made for a smooth transition into her similar subject matter at SLAC. Hillary learned technical writing on the job at Syntex and decided to return to school for a degree in technical communication (her early education had been in music). When asked about her original career path in music, Hillary admitted that "I wanted to be a rock star, but technical communication seemed like a more realistic direction, given my actual skill set."

Hillary also has worked as a senior technical writer at an e-commerce company, has private clients for whom she does book editing, and does grant writing on a pro bono basis.

At Home

Hillary lives in Oakland with her partner, Maree, who is a forensic CPA. They share their home with two cats and a rabbit.

Favorite Web Site

[Plumbdesign Visual Thesaurus](#)

For Fun

Hillary writes poetry and has had some published; one poem is available online in the [Sand Hill Review](#).

She is also passionate about both motorcycling and rabbits, "but not in combination." Hillary (and her rabbit companion, Toadie) are members of the [House Rabbit Society](#). Toadie is a six-year-old, house-trained Holland Lop.

In terms of reading interests, Hillary enjoys non-fiction books for amateur naturalists and books about the Enneagram. Her current favorite writer is Diane Ackerman, author of *A Natural History of the Senses*. The latest fiction book on Hillary's nightstand was *The Poisonwood Bible* by Barbara Kingsolver. ▲

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Networking

- [Northern California STC Chapters](#)
- [Changing Times](#)

Northern California STC Chapters



There are six active Northern California STC chapters. Each chapter meets on a different Wednesday or Thursday so you can attend all the meetings. Contact the respective presidents for more information or visit the chapter web site.

Wednesdays	Chapter	President
Week 1	Sacramento	Jeff Simon
Week 2	Berkeley	Joe Devney
Week 3	San Francisco	Susan Becker
Thursdays	Chapter	President
Week 1	East Bay	Susan Harlan
Week 3	North Bay	Rolfe Dlugy-Hegwer
Week 4	Silicon Valley	Fred Sampson

Changing Times

by [Marsha Howard](#)

EBSTC Professional Development SIG Manager

Market conditions are changing for high tech workers, and this includes us. To survive, we must change as well. These changes might be as simple as adding a new tool to our professional arsenals or as sweeping as moving to an entirely new and different communications career. Perhaps they will be a combination of both.

New Name for SIG

In keeping with this willingness to change, the EBSTC Networking SIG has a new name: *EBSTC Professional Development SIG*. The new name reflects the SIG's expanded focus. Whereas its original purpose was networking to support job seekers, now the SIG will support and encourage our personal evolutions as we transform ourselves to remain marketable.

Monthly Meetings

It's easy to remember when we meet because it's exactly a week after our chapter meeting.

What:	EBSTC Professional Development SIG meeting
When:	Second Thursday of the month at 11:45 a.m.

Where:	Willow Tree Restaurant, 6513 Regional Street, Dublin, 925-838-9111
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Join the SIG Yahoo Group

Because the group is private, you can't find it using the search function. If you'd like to join, send us an [email](#). ▲

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Society News

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

For more information about STC, go to the [Society web page](#).

STC Salary Survey Every year, STC surveys a random sample of its members who work as technical editors and writers in the U.S. and Canada. The survey gathers information regarding salaries and benefits.

According to the survey, the mean (average) salary for technical writers and editors in the U.S. rose from \$59,700 in 2002 to \$61,730 in 2003 — a gain of 3.4 percent.

The mean salaries for different employment levels are as follows:

Entry	\$43,260
Mid-Level, Non-Supervisory	\$54,510
Mid-Level, Supervisory	\$60,510
Senior Level, Non-Supervisory	\$68,590
Senior Level, Supervisory	\$72,340

California salaries by zip code are as follows:

94	\$80,000
940	\$85,000
941	\$75,480
945	\$80,000
95	\$80,000
950	\$85,000
951	\$81,000

See the complete [STC Salary Survey](#).

First STC Academic Salary Survey

This year, STC conducted its first salary survey specifically for members working in academia. The survey results are broken down by a number of factors, including academic rank and number of years of teaching experience. The survey also addresses benefits and job satisfaction. The mean salaries for different ranks are as follows:

Professor	\$71,360
Associate Professor	\$58,840

Assistant Professor	\$44,220
Instructor	\$42,610

See the complete [STC Academic Salary Survey](#). ▲

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President's Message



by [Susan Harlan](#)
 EBSTC President

Deals for You!

EBSTC is announcing the 2003 Membership Drive for November and December. This is the start of a serious effort to increase membership by 20% over the next three years. This membership drive will also benefit current EBSTC members. Here are two deals for you.

- Deal I: **Two-for-\$30** Special: Bring a non-STC member to a dinner meeting in November or December, and both you and your guest can attend for \$30.
- Deal II: **Free Dinner Meeting**: If your guest joins EBSTC by February 1, 2004, then your name will be placed in a drawing for a free dinner meeting.

STC in Transformation

When you read about our membership drive, what is your reaction? We talk about offshoring and job losses in our newsletters. It's a common subject among the Professional Development SIG for our out-of-work members. It is also mentioned in chapter meetings. Why, then, do we need a membership drive? STC membership normally increases when times are good, the economy is moving ahead, and jobs are abundant. But is there any future for a society like STC in the current economic times?

Well, why not look at the T in STC from another perspective—such as T for Transformation? Now the message is clearer about what STC can do for its current and future members. The Society is in the midst of Transformation in the Communications industry.

Whether you are a business analyst, a grant writer, or an instructional designer, you are all involved in communication, which requires some kind of technology to produce. That's the message we want to send out now. STC membership offers a long list of benefits. Check this out on the [society web site](#). If you are a member, you probably know this list by now. If you would like to introduce the idea of membership to a friend or co-worker, then you can use the web site as a resource.

Think about it, and then act! Think of someone you know in the communications field who has never been a part of STC, or the East Bay Chapter. They might be interested in the programs, networking with other members, participating in a SIG, or just doing some volunteer work.

Great Opportunities

Speaking of volunteer work, did you know that we have some open positions? This year the list is longer as some volunteers have moved on while others are tied up with work. Descriptions of volunteer duties and the

amount of time required for these duties are listed on the [Volunteer](#) page of the chapter web site.

The list includes the following positions:

- Newsletter Managing Editor
- Newsletter Writers
- Advertisement Manager
- Membership Manager
- Education Manager

If you have some time and interest in contributing to your chapter, or if you want to enhance your resume, receive a byline, and/or get more references, then why not volunteer?

Basically I'm asking for two things from you:


- Bring a guest as a possible member
- Volunteer for an open STC position

But remember to look at the payback opportunities. There are deals for bringing a guest as well as for taking a volunteer position. So, we are not asking you to do something without any benefit to you. Sound fair? I hope so—because your help is needed!

Thanks,
Susan ▲

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Devil Mountain Views 
Newsletter of the East Bay Chapter of STC
November/December 2003

Chapter Activities: Congratulations to New Members



Let's welcome our new, transfer, and reinstated members!

- Nadine Barter Bowlus
- Janet Bran
- Aaron Marcus and Associates
- Robert Peterson
- Thomas M. Williams

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What Do I Get for Belonging to STC?



by [Suzanna Laurent](#)
Associate Fellow, [Oklahoma Chapter](#)

These are some "brainstorming ideas" about what STC members "get for their money" besides the award-winning web site and publications:

Get Ahead

STC can give you a definite career edge. When selecting promotion candidates for new positions, companies see the leadership experience you gain from an active professional association. STC helps you stay abreast of the changing industry and all that entails.

Develop New Skills

Discover hidden talents and test them in a supportive, noncompetitive environment. Hundreds of STC members have started their own businesses. Thousands have enhanced their careers thanks to the negotiating, planning, organizing, and public speaking skills learned through participating in STC chapter activities.

Learn to Lead

Through STC you can learn, practice, and perfect your leadership skills, preparing yourself to achieve your long-term leadership and career goals. Managing committees and serving as an officer allows you to learn so many other things too, like working with people who have diverse personalities, time management, creative decision making, and the list goes on.

Build a Support Group

A corporate marketing coordinator once told me, "I enjoy my profession, but STC gives me an opportunity to associate with other technical communicators in a wide variety of fields. I really enjoy the diversity." Friendship and networking are a very important part of STC. With members employed in every field, the opportunities to network and establish contacts throughout your community and around the world are invaluable. In times like these when the economy is uncertain, that support group becomes even more important if you are seeking employment.

Make a Contribution to Technical Communication

Take the opportunity to contribute wholeheartedly to STC's efforts to create new opportunities for technical communicators, design the future of technical communication, and make a difference in our field. STC is 50 years old, and it is through the efforts of many dedicated members that we

have been able to improve the profession for all technical communicators. Our chapters provide scholarships, community participation, education, friendship, a friendly support group, and just plain fun!

Now when someone asks you, "What do I get for belonging to STC?" I hope this article gives you some new ideas to give them. ▲

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Half-Full

by [Adrienne Tange](#)
 EBSTC Member

Gina Devon, ex-StoryLine Technical Writer, grabbed the last stack of her prized editing books from her metal office desk and dumped them into an empty cardboard box. This morning, Bill Stern, her manager, had entered her cubicle looking pale and grim and told her that StoryLine was laying off all its employees and closing their San Francisco office.

Most StoryLine employees were not surprised by the news, except for maybe naive Carey Reed, a thirty-something technical writer who worked with Gina. Management had run through the startup's funding at lightning speed. However, the timing of the closure had stunned and angered Gina and the others.

They could have at least waited until after the holidays, Gina thought bitterly. Instead, they lay us off two weeks before Thanksgiving! Finding a job during the holiday season in this economy will be impossible.

As Gina placed the last of her books in the box, Carey walked by and stood dejectedly at her cubicle entrance. "I guess you were right."

Gina eyed her empty cubicle for anything she had missed. She then looked at the younger woman, noticing the frozen smile on her face. Gina wanted to rub it in but knew that wasn't the right thing to do. Carey had always annoyed her—partly because Carey was young, cute, and thin while Gina, twenty years older, felt old, plain, and frumpy—and partly because Carey was eternally optimistic and Gina was forever pessimistic. She had warned Carey that the company would probably shut down, but the young writer refused to believe it. Carey always saw the glass as half-full while Gina saw it as half-empty.

Gina sighed. "I wish I wasn't right."



The younger woman, her blue eyes misty, stepped over and gave Gina a quick hug. "Don't worry, Gina. With all your experience, you'll find a job in no time. Besides, it's a blessing we were let go. We didn't enjoy being here anyway, so let's look at it as a chance to make a career change."

There's that annoying Carey-optimism, Gina thought. That's easy for her to say. I have a family to support.

But Gina held her tongue. She was too angry to argue with Carey. She just wanted to go home and change into her comfortable gray sweats and lie on the couch. They said their goodbyes and then Gina grabbed her purse and the hefty box, steeling herself for the long walk to the BART station in the rain.

Gina stood in the lobby watching through the large glass doors as the rain fell on the city street. Gray clouds and a steady light drizzle shrouded the

city. Pedestrians in their black and gray London Fog raincoats hurried along the wet sidewalks to avoid getting soaked. The entire landscape looked like a giant, dreary watercolor painting created only with shades of gray.

Or maybe that observation is a reflection of my mood, she thought.

Gina set the box on the carpeted floor and covered her frizzy shoulder-length brown hair with the hood of her navy raincoat. She then picked up the box again and ventured out into the wet, cold weather.

As she strode quickly down the street, she thought about the adjustments she would have to make with her budget. She thought about how she would have to tell the kids that there would be fewer presents under their tree at Christmas. And she thought again about what a rotten time it was to be laid off.

Lost in thought, Gina stepped off the curb into the crosswalk on Market Street without looking. Suddenly, someone yanked her back up onto the sidewalk, causing her to drop the box with a loud thud. Within seconds, a large truck sped through the crosswalk, spraying a sheet of dirty water onto her.

A thin middle-aged man helped her up and looked at her anxiously. He had short strawberry blond hair and was very tall and slightly hunched over, like a cattail bowed by a strong breeze. "Lady, you need to watch where you're going!" Rivulets of water were dripping down his face. Gina saw a black leather computer case and an open black umbrella next to him on the cement.

"You know, he just saved your life." An old woman with a clear plastic rain hat tied snugly over her short white hair looked at her with concern. She was standing right next to the man. The woman rummaged through her large brown purse, pulled out a tissue, and handed it to Gina. "Here, wipe your face."

Gina took the tissue and started automatically wiping her face. She looked down at her coat, splattered with mud and water. She was sure she looked awful.

"What—what happened?" she stammered, her heart beating like mad.

"You almost got hit by that truck! It ran the light and almost hit you while you were in the intersection," the man said. "You're lucky to be alive."

"Yes, you are very fortunate," the old woman said, nodding in agreement. "This must be your lucky day."

Lucky day! Boy, are you wrong, Gina thought.

Though thoroughly rattled, Gina thanked the man profusely for saving her life. She then explained that her day had started off badly with the StoryLine layoff and that she had been distracted by it.

The man nodded sympathetically when she told him about the layoff. "Here's my card," he said, pointing to his name, *Trevor Langer, VP of Engineering*, printed in small blue type. "When you feel up to it, call me. I

work at Interval, which I am sure you know is StoryLine's main competitor."

Gina shoved the card in her pocket and thanked them both again. She then looked carefully both ways and crossed Market Street.

Lucky? she thought. *This is the worst day of my life! I get laid off from my job and almost get hit by a truck. Of course, the Careys of the world would argue that it's a matter of perspective. They'd say that losing this job could be a blessing and, sure, I was almost hit, but this man just saved my life.*

As Gina mulled this over, walking the last block toward the station, she noticed a man dressed in dirty torn clothes, his face caked with a layer of grime, huddling under an overhang. He stared at her as she approached him and then shuffled over to her.

Gina winced inwardly. Would he badger her for money?

"Lady," the man rasped, his face beaming with excitement, "if you need a hot meal for Thanksgiving, the shelter down the street is giving out free food!" He lifted a dirty finger and pointed to a brick building down the street.



Why is he telling me this? Gina puzzled. Suddenly, she guessed the answer. Because of her appearance, her dirty face and wet mud-spattered clothes, he thought that she was homeless like him.

"Thanks for the tip," she smiled. The man insisted on writing his name down so that she could say he sent her there. Gina felt in her pocket and found a business card and pen, which she handed to him.

The homeless man scribbled his name on the card and handed it back to Gina. She thanked him again and prayed that nothing else would happen on the way home. Luckily, nothing did.



The next morning, while sipping her morning coffee at the kitchen table, Gina called the number on the card that Trevor Langer had given her. Interval was one of the few profitable software firms in San Francisco. When Gina started to remind him of who she was, Trevor stopped her. "Yes—hello!" he answered warmly. "How are you doing?"

Gina thanked him again for saving her life. She wanted to repay him for his good deed, but Trevor wouldn't hear of it.

"What I could really use is a technical writer to help on a project. Hey, you wouldn't happen to be one?" Trevor joked.

This is weird, Gina thought. She explained that she was indeed a writer. They discussed the project and set up a time for an interview. Gina couldn't believe her good fortune.

"I guess yesterday was your lucky day," Trevor quipped.

“Yeah,” Gina joked back. “Some homeless guy even told me where I could get a free Thanksgiving dinner. I guess I looked homeless myself. The weird thing is that his last name is Langer just like yours.”

There was silence on the phone. For a second Gina was afraid that she had offended Trevor.

“His last name was Langer?” Trevor asked.

Gina explained how he had written down the name “Charlie Langer” on the card.



“Oh, my God!” exclaimed Trevor. “Maybe yesterday was a lucky day for both of us. That man sounds like my father, Charles Langer. My family and I have been looking for him for years. Finally, this year we can spend Thanksgiving with him.”

And at that moment, Gina looked at her half-full coffee cup and thought of Carey. ▲

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What's in a Mark?

by [Dara Golden](#)
 EBSTC Contributing Editor

Dara Golden is the former Interim Editor of [Connection](#), the Silicon Valley Chapter's newsletter.

A colleague once asked, "Why should I care about trademarks?" There is no definitive answer. Legal personnel say it is important to acknowledge your company's trademarks and a courtesy to acknowledge other trademarks. Some technical writers say that to ensure technically accurate documentation, all trademarks must be acknowledged and attributed properly. This article addresses what trademarks are and how writers can ensure that trademarks are used properly.

Trademarks: What Are They?

A trademark or mark is any word, phrase, symbol, design, sound, color, or combination of these adopted and used by a company to identify its product (trademark) or services (service mark) to distinguish them from products and services made, sold, or provided by others. A registered trademark means that a company has filed the mark with the United States Patent and Trademark Office (USPTO) and has protection from the office.

The following table provides a summary and examples of the different types of trademarks.

Type	Symbol	Description	Examples
Trademark	™	Used to identify a product from a specific company	Microsoft (company name) "Pepsi, the choice of a new generation" (phrase) Colorful peacock (NBC's logo) "You've got mail" (AOL)
Service Mark	(SM)	Used to identify a service provided by a specific company	Merry Maids (cleaning service)
Registered Trademark	®	Trademark or service mark protected by the United States	KLA-Tencor (company name) McDonalds' Big Mac (hamburger)
Trade Dress	®	Distinctive packaging for a product or service	Kodak's yellow for film packages McDonalds' yellow "M" on a red background for its restaurants
Collective	®	A mark used by members of a	Girl Scouts of America

Mark		group or organization	
Collaboration Mark	®	A symbol, name, or device used by an organization to vouch for products and services provided by others	UL (Underwriters Laboratories certification of electrical standards) Good Housekeeping Seal of Approval

Trademark Limitations

It's important to note that trademarks often acquire a secondary meaning regarding quality. For example, many consumers will choose a name brand over a generic because the name brand is perceived as being better or having a respectable company behind it—such as Tropicana Orange Juice instead of All-Brand Orange Juice.

Companies spend a lot of money to defend their products or services and to prevent other companies from copying them. McDonalds Corporation has successfully fought companies over using the McDonalds logo and colors to promote paint stores and hotels. While it is unlikely that a consumer would get a fast-food restaurant confused with a paint store or hotel, a red and yellow sign with an M could lead consumers to think they were getting McDonalds food and then be surprised if they didn't.

It is important for companies to ensure that their trademarks are used properly and that the trademarks do not fall into "common usage." Examples of common usage are kerosene and yo-yo. Once these referred to specific brands, but are now used generally. Recently, Kimberly-Clark Corporation took out ads in magazines directed to writers providing guidelines on the proper usage of the name Kleenex for their brand of tissues. Why is common usage bad? It is better for companies when people refer to their specific brand instead of a generic. A classic example is "Kleenex" vs. "tissues"—"Would you like a Kleenex?" or "Would you like a tissue?" Kleenex refers to a specific brand of facial tissues, while tissues could be any brand.

So, it's important for companies to protect their trademarks, but what can technical writers do to ensure proper trademark usage? Writers can review trademark guidelines with company lawyers and ensure that there are guidelines for acknowledging and using trademarks in documentation.

Consistency Guidelines

Following are a few guidelines to help you apply trademarks consistently.

- Create a trademark list.
Include not only your company trademarks, but also trademarks referred to in documentation, such as UNIX, Sun Microsystems, and Adobe.
- Verify trademarks.
Ask your company's lawyers which products are trademarked and/or registered trademarks. Also ask which products of other companies should be acknowledged in text and how.
- Create trademark guidelines.
Ensure that all writers follow proper trademark guidelines. This includes where trademark acknowledgement is to be made (copyright page,

footnote, or appendix) and how trademarks are acknowledged (such as “Linux is a registered trademark of Linus Torvalds” or “All trademarks are the property of their respective owners”). Have your company’s lawyers review the guidelines to ensure agreement.

- Update the trademark lists.
As trademarks can become registered marks, check with your company’s lawyers to ensure that the marks are still accurate.

Writing Guidelines

Although companies have different trademark guidelines, below is a list of generally accepted writing guidelines.

Do

- Use the proper symbol. Don’t use a registered mark when the mark isn’t registered.
Wrong: Sun Microsystems Java®
Right: Sun Microsystems® Java™
- Use trademarks as adjectives, not nouns.
Trademarks modify the product, such as Crayola™ crayons and Staples® copy paper.
- Spell the trademark the same way it is registered.
Wrong: Air Port Card.
Right: AirPort Card.
- Use trademarks consistently.
Don’t use both Unix and UNIX.
- Trademark the first instance of the word.
Wrong: The newest Barbie® doll has all Barbie® accessories included.
Right: The newest Barbie® doll has all Barbie accessories included.
- Superscript the marks or, at minimum, use parentheses around the mark.
Wrong: Crayola™, Red Hat R
Right: Crayola(TM), Red Hat(R)

Don't

- Use a trademark as a verb.
Wrong: Google for it.
Right: Perform a search
- Use a trademark as a plural.
Wrong: JavaStations
Right: JavaStation systems
- Abbreviate trademarks.
Wrong: MSWord.
Right: Microsoft Word.
- Use puns.
“A tip of the Red Hat” might be used in Marketing, but don’t use it in documentation.

While it is part of a company lawyer's job to ensure that trademarks are used properly, it is part of a technical writer's job to ensure that trademarks are properly attributed. ▲

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