



tecolote

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Tecolote is the official newsletter of the New Mexico Kachina Chapter of the Society for Technical Communication. Our mission is to advance the profession of technical communication across New Mexico by increasing networking among professionals, creating opportunities for members to improve skills, and recognizing technical communication excellence.

Time to Volunteer

At the chapter level, we look to install new administrative council officers and committee chairpersons to begin a new term on July 1. Our chapter is in the process of accepting nominations and self-nominations for several positions. Thank you again to those chapter members who have agreed to continue serving on our council or to serve for the first time!

The chapter president's position is still not spoken for. The primary qualification to be our chapter president is a strong desire to do so. Leadership experience is a helpful quality, but not a minimum requirement because "we learn best by doing" and it has been my experience that STC is a safe place to learn leadership!

If you are thinking "maybe," please contact either Jonathan Price, myself, or Judy Prono. We will tell you what is involved with being an STC chapter president and why we are grateful that we had the opportunity to serve.

Thank you and have a great summer!

Bob Johnson

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We welcome submissions from Kachina
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Are You Visible Enough?

Feel neglected? Overlooked? Ignored?

Perhaps you need to make your department more visible. That's what Christine Granger and Austin Skaggs argued in their webinar, presented at Ktech on March 28th. Reflecting their own experience driving an "improvement initiative" at their company, PDI/Enterprise, they offered five steps to showing the rest of your organization how valuable you really are.

1. Gather Perceptions

Granger and Skaggs urge you to start with a survey of other people in your organization, to collect their impressions of your group. Ask questions like:

- What is our role?
- How well do we fulfill that role?
- What is your perception of our department?
- What is your perception of the documentation we turn out?

Assure your respondents of absolute anonymity, so they do not fear retaliation, or hurt feelings.

Granger and Skaggs found that the rest of their company thought the group did not understand the business very well, or the product. Writers were considered little more than grammarians.

So what good was their group, anyway? The technical writers discussed this feedback, and decided to identify their own values—to the rest of the company, and to the customer. Accuracy, timeliness, and user friendliness were their top three.

2. Do the Vision Thing

The team had to answer the metaphysical question: why do we exist? They came up with a mission statement, to define their current goals. For example, one sentence read, "To provide accurate, timely, and user-friendly testing, documentation, and training that exceeds industry standards."

And where did they want to go? The vision statement articulated where they wanted to be in five or ten years. For each goal, they laid out a general path forward. For instance, to challenge the way people in their company viewed the group, they decided to expand their job roles, and pursue professional development through reading, training, classes, and special projects working with their customers.

3. Make It Visual

Turn the mission and vision statements into a graphic that you can post on the intranet, tack up in the lunch room, include in your styleguide, and publish in end-user documents. You have to keep coming back to these goals, to make them live.

4. Communicate

Meet one-on-one with every stakeholder, every manager, and explain your initiative. Be prepared to answer questions such as:

- How does this affect our organization?
- How can the organization help?

5. Expand Your Roles

Make sure these new roles are aligned with your vision—and endorsed by management. Then encourage people to follow their own talents and interests. Explore areas such as graphics, usability, content management—whatever will give you greater value to the company, while growing your own skills.

Developing Interactive Computer-Based Training in Half the Time

April 11, 2007 — Kevin Siegel presented an STC webinar on getting the most out of Captivate when you are recording screen activity and creating onscreen training.

Setting up Your System

Kevin recommends setting screen resolution to 1024 x 768, then defining the capture area as 800 x 600. Vanilla is the flavor:

- Desktop Theme: Windows Standard
- Active Title Bars: One color
- Captions: Fade-In Only

One caption per slide

Kevin also recommends turning off some features:

- Auto Size Captions
- Calculate Caption Timing
- Full Motion Recording.

He even suggests fudging the framerate to 20 frames per second (rather than the default 30) to reduce file size, and speed up the action.

Planning Your Time

If your goal is just to show a concept, without demanding that the user do anything, you will walk through the actions in your lesson, recording the screen activity with Captivate (including the mouse movement), then add captions and, if you want to, highlight boxes. Kevin estimates that for a short concept, your development time would be about 10 hours.

If you want to assess whether the users understand what they are supposed to do, you need to create a simulation that invites them to interact. You will probably add hotspots and remediation (captions to give advice when the user makes a mistake). Development time is another 10 hours.

But Kevin argues against doing a pure Demonstration, and then a pure Assessment. He reasons that a demonstration does not demand much user interaction, so people fail to engage; and assessments often leave the user wondering what to do. Better, in his estimation, is a combination of the two. The hybrid includes a demonstration with captions, and immediate assessments, step by step.

Tips

Kevin recommends limiting yourself to one caption per slide, to make it easier on yourself during editing and production, breaking audio clips up into small chunks, mating audio clips to the captions, and then putting the audio clips into the slide background.

To edit all your captions at once, in Word, Kevin recommends exporting project captions and closed captions to a Word table. You can make your changes in the column called Updated Text Caption Data, then save the Word document. In Captivate, import the captions from the Word document.

STC Webinars

The Kachina Chapter presents these lunchtime learning seminars free of charge to members and students, although any and all contributions towards the expense of presenting them are appreciated. Attendance is free for STC members and students; \$10 for non-members.

All webinars take place on Wednesdays from 11:00 am to 12:30 pm.

RSVP to Jonathan Price in advance at jprice@swcp.com or 254-4148. We must have a minimum of five members signed up to purchase these presentations. If we do not receive enough indications of interest, we will cancel the webinar.

May 2, 2007 — Choosing the Right Usability Technique (to answer the right question).

Presenter: Whitney Quesenbery

Location: KTech (old building), corner of Eubank and Gibson, Albuquerque.

You may view a description of upcoming STC web seminars on the Society's website at <http://www.stc.org/seminarsList.asp>.

Upcoming Admin Council Meetings

Saturday, April 21 — Administrative Meeting, 11 am (just before the Panel for Students)0000

Location: 108 Humanities, UNM Main Campus, Albuquerque

Upcoming Events

April 15, 2007 — Announce New Slate of Officers and Chairs.

Saturday, April 21, 2007, 12:00 to 2:00 — Panel for Students.

If you know a student who wants to get into a career in technical communication, suggest attending our panel discussion. Experienced writers, editors, and managers will discuss how they got into the career, what they look for in resumes, what to put into a portfolio. We'll also be giving awards to the top students of technical communication at UNM, New Mexico Tech, and NMSU.

Location: 108 Humanities, UNM Main Campus, Albuquerque

May 13–16, 2007 — STC Annual Conference, Minneapolis, MN.

<http://www.stc.org/54thConf/>

Calendar events are listed at the time of printing and cover the next few months of activities. Some events may change. Please check the STC Kachina Chapter website for updates at www.stc-nm-kachina.org. STC Kachina Chapter members will receive periodic email updates with locations and sign up information. If you would like to list an event in the next Tecolote issue, email jprice@swcp.com with event information.



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