Tough Talk from Herb Cohen: *Negotiate This!*

By Ron Nelson

While the line attributed to Leo Durocher, "Nice guys finish last,"[1] may not invariably be true, often enough it seems so. Conversely, mean guys win, according to this way of seeing things. However, many "nice guys" (and "nice gals") can and do succeed professionally and personally as a result of various sources of strength, like an ability to observe carefully, a reflective nature, and a refusal to engage in Machiavellian activities.

The physician-poet William Carlos Williams once remarked, "In my world there are no classes but the good guys and the bastards."[2] In that comment he is guilty of the logical fallacy known as "false dichotomy" ("Live free or die" on New Hampshire license plates—there *are* other alternatives). At the same time he identifies a fundamentally important duality that manifests itself in many forms, for example, in behavioral patterns like Type A-Type B, active-passive, and perpetrator-victim.

This kind of thinking is essentially Hegelian, that is, it is based on a thesis (e.g., this plan is great) confronted by an antithesis (this plan is terrible), resolving itself in a synthesis (this plan is pretty good but it has some kinks to work out). That synthesis becomes a new thesis, confronted by a new antithesis, etc. ad infinitum. Hegel's dialectic can be regarded as one of the crucial bases of learning.

This admittedly philosophical introduction is important to understanding Herb Cohen's new book, *Negotiate This! By Caring, But Not T-H-A-T Much* (New York: Warner Business Books, 2003). With a no-nonsense yet often humorous writing style, Cohen articulates an interactive approach to situations that relates well to the role of the professional communicator and to communication in general. It is tantamount to a philosophy of life worthy of study, since it offers valuable insights into the important question: How best to conduct myself in any given situation, professional or otherwise? The answer to that question involves nurturing a combination of gentleness and toughness, as well as caring about things but putting them into perspective.

In this book—a follow-up to *You Can Negotiate Anything* (1980)—Cohen presents sound advice for steeling the self with strengths, in effect tempering niceness to avoid being a pushover, while fostering a sense of self-respect and cooperation. The result is effective communication.

[1] For two somewhat conflicting versions of the origin of the line "from The Lip's mouth," so to speak, see Leo Durocher (with Ed Linn), *Nice Guys Finish Last* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1975, pp. 13-14) and Gerald Eskenazi, *The Lip: A Biography of Leo Durocher* (New York: William Morrow, 1993, p.229).

[2] Linda Wagner, ed., *Interviews with William Carlos Williams* (New York: New Directions, 1976, p. 83)

Rudy Joenk

This Issue

We welcome a new column, *Thinking Globally, Teaching Locally*, by Kirk St.Amant. The author focuses on techniques for teaching students about culture and communication. In his first article he uses the Internet to illustrate cross-cultural differences (page 12).

I'm always interested in receiving proposals for single articles or columns. See the information for authors farther along in this column.

AdCom

This year the AdCom convened by conference call on 24-25 January (see the meeting summary on page 8), and will meet in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, 21-22 May, and after IPCC 2004 in Minneapolis, Minnesota, 2-3 October. PCS members are always welcome at AdCom meetings.

History

In my note about AdCom meetings in the January/February issue I neglected to mention that complementary to the reduction to three from four annual meetings in the early 1990s was the introduction of two-day meetings.

Potpourri

Remember the "slithy toves"? Ed McBain, author of the 87th Precinct mystery novels, has reached into the second verse of Lewis Carroll's poem Jabberwocky for the title of his new book: *Frumious Bandersnatch*.

Inspired by the appearance of *crapulent* in A.Word.A.Day, Mark Stenglein created this celebration of holiday meals: "This succulent and opulent food and poculent wine is leading to crapulence, corpulence, and flatulence." AWADmail issue 28 January 2004.

Computer Haiku

A crash reduces
Your expensive computer
To a simple stone.

Three things are certain:
Death, taxes, and lost data.
Guess which has occurred.

There's more at *http://www.funny2. com/haiku.htm*; seems like Sony has replaced some of the Microsoft error messages on its Vaio computers with Japanese haiku.

In January the American Dialect Society (*http://americandialect.org*) posted its words (or phrases) of the year:

Word of the year: *metrosexual*, a fashion conscious heterosexual male

Most useful: *flexitarian*, a vegetarian who occasionally eats meat

Most creative: *freegan*, people who eat only what they can get for free

Most euphemistic: *pre-emptive self-defense*, an attack made before a possible attack

Eats, Shoots & Leaves by Lynne Truss has become a bestseller in Britain. This humorous guide to punctuation will be published here by Gotham Books in April.

If you haven't seen enough examples of misused quotation marks, visit *http://www.juvalamu.com/qmarks/. Colorado Daily*, 26-28 December 2003.

Readers of the Feedback section of *New Scientist* were invited to invent

Taking Care of Business

If you read my inaugural column in the January/February issue of this *Newsletter*, you may remember my being concerned with our many challenges ahead. And, you probably asked yourself, what is the PCS leadership doing about them? Well, I'm glad you asked, because that is the topic of this column.

Financial wizardry consists basically of a good combination of two things: increasing revenues and decreasing expenditures, and that is not exactly rocket science. I believe that Bill Gates once said that the concept of "revenues minus expenditures equals profit" is so obvious that many people just don't get it. Well, rest assured, your PCS leadership grasped this concept long ago and, although as part of the IEEE, a 501(c)(3) organization, we cannot have profits, we can use a little surplus in our reserves to fund initiatives or to face difficult times.

As you may know, our revenues consist primarily of membership dues, conference surplus, and royalties from our intellectual property, that is, the publications and their electronic versions on Xplore. These revenues can grow only by meeting the expectations of our members and the public at large. If we attract (and retain) members, the dues revenue increases; if our conferences are attractive to our audience (within and outside the IEEE), we get a surplus; and, luckily, our publications produce meaningful royalties because of their high intellectual value and quality.

On the expenses side, we started cutting back long ago, at least in those areas over which we have direct control. As for the infrastructure services provided by the IEEE, currently we pay only for what we use based on the new IEEE financial model. The AdCom used to have more members and the meetings used to be more frequent. The meetings were all in-person and, for most AdCom members, involved travel expenses that were only partially subsidized by PCS with an annual amount to be split among the meetings. Some members actually got rewarded for not attending all meetings by having the full subsidy for fewer meetings, but those were very few. I understand that other (larger) IEEE societies are more generous with their subsidies (e.g., full reimbursement). However, I remember meetings when I and many of my fellow AdCom members had to pay a good portion of our travel expenses ourselves, or rely on our employers for financial assistance.

Effective in 1998 the AdCom was reduced from 21 to 18 members. Also, the meetings were eventually reduced from the five or six a year in the early days of PCS to the current three, with one coinciding with the annual conference. With these changes we saved on travel expenditures but also created additional work for the smaller AdCom and ended up with less time to run PCS business. Fortunately, technology has helped. We now conduct a lot of routine business, including voting, using e-mail, something that our predecessors did not have just a couple of decades ago.

In 2000 we experimented with yet another cost-saving idea: virtual meetings. We met using electronic media: NetMeeting and a free telephone connection, courtesy of a corporate sponsor. Since then we have repeated the teleconference each year at around the end of January. We have saved not only money, but also the canceled flights, delays, and inconvenience of traveling in the middle of winter.

As meetings chair last year I organized the virtual meeting in January using the IEEE's service alliance with PlaceWare. That virtual experience was much better than with NetMeeting because we could do online polling, have recording capability, share applications, and display PowerPoint slides to keep everybody focused on the task. You, too, can use this service for your meetings with other IEEE members. From the *http://www.ieee.org* portal, select Volunteer Resources and then Internet Conferencing (under Electronic Web Services).

Our first meeting of 2004 (24-25 January) probably cost only USD 50 for the PlaceWare setup fee, again thanks to a free telephone connection courtesy of a corporate sponsor. I don't think that we can have meetings any cheaper than that.

> Our publications produce meaningful royalties.
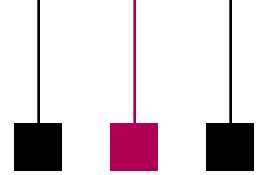
On the revenue side, we cannot positively impact our finances in the short term. Based on the feedback from the IEEE membership research project, however, we intend to continue offering value to current and prospective members. As our membership grows and our conferences attract participation, we will earn the resources to maintain a healthy financial situation. We had to raise PCS dues for 2003 and we have to revisit the issue again for 2005. We must find out if what we receive in dues and publi-

cation royalties is enough to cover the cost of the value that we provide to members.

In contrast with larger IEEE societies that have executive directors and paid staff, we at PCS rely exclusively on volunteers. It is the AdCom members who chair most of the committees and run all PCS activities. We occasionally get volunteers outside the AdCom to chair conferences, and when they do they become ex-officio members of the AdCom. So, in essence, PCS business is done

exclusively by (AdCom at-large or ex-officio) volunteer members.

As you can see, the AdCom is taking caring of business and using our resources frugally. Now, if we can only grow in double digits this year by reaching the IEEE members who haven't yet heard of us, we can become a significant presence within the IEEE. However, I don't think that we will ever hire an executive director. They are just too expensive and …well, volunteers (like your AdCom members) work for you for free!

From the Editor

(continued from page 2)

and define new scientific words. Among the winners (20 December 2003) are:

Coyotus Interruptus A momentary suspension of the law of gravity… as experienced by Wile E. Coyote…. Jacqueline Jaeger Houtman, Madison, Wisconsin.

Monotologue A lecture or presentation delivered by one person on one subject with one viewpoint in one tone and one rhythm. Jim Watt, Birmingham, U.K.

Terarist Presenter who intimidates his audience with large numbers. David Craig, Edinburgh, U.K.

Seen in a career e-newsletter: an article titled "Tell 'em Your a Writer."

Julane Marx in *World Wide Words*, 20 December 2003.

The *Washington Post* asked people to (1) change one letter, (2) delete one letter, and (3) add one letter to a given word and provide definitions for the results. One of the winners for the word *newspaper* is (30 November 2003) Milo Sauer, Fairfax, Virginia:

> *Newsparer:* an editor for *The Express*
>
> *Ewspaper: The National Enquirer*
>
> *Newspamper:* A low-cost diaper substitute

Some good non-three-pack examples are *Redskeins*, strings of consecutive losses; *Mountainfop*, a hillwilliam; and *Mantique*, an item a guy keeps from his bachelor days.

Deadlines are the 15th of the odd-number months.

In *Language Visible* David Sacks describes the evolution of each letter of the alphabet through various alphabet systems and shapes and explains some of the associations each letter has had to people past and present. *World Wide Words*, 18 October 2003.

Language, n. The music with which we charm the serpents guarding another's treasure. *Twice, adv.*, Once too often. Ambrose Bierce in *The Devil's Dictionary*.

Presently, adv., doesn't mean now or at present. It means soon, before long, any minute (hour, day) now, forthwith, shortly, keep your shirt on, faster than you can say Jack Robinson, or when I'm darn good and ready. Patricia T. O'Conner in *Woe Is I*.

What's in a Phrase?

By Brad Connatser

"Sixty zippers were quickly picked from the woven jute bag" is a *pangram* or holalphabetic sentence (contains all letters of the alphabet). "Some men interpret nine memos" is a *palindrome* (reads the same backward as forward). *Schott's Original Miscellany*; see the review by Michael Brady on page 16.

Information for Authors

One thousand words makes a nice page-and-a-half article, though longer and shorter articles may be appropriate. Proposals for periodic columns are also welcome. Write about what you know, things that you're familiar with. If you live outside North America, consider writing about technical communication in your country. ***You needn't be a PCS member to contribute.***

If you use a wp program, **keep your formatting simple;** multiple fonts and sizes, customized paragraphing and line spacing, personalized styles, etc. have to be filtered out before being recoded in *Newsletter* style. Headers, footers, and tables lead the casualty list. Embed only enough formatting and highlighting (boldface, italics, bullets) to show me your preferences.

If you borrow text—more than a fair-use sentence or two—from previously published material, you are responsible for obtaining written permission for its use. Ditto for graphics. Always give credit to the author or artist.

An idiom is "an expression of a given language that is peculiar to itself grammatically or cannot be understood from the individual meanings of its elements, as in 'keep tabs on'" (*http://dictionary.reference.com/search?q=idiom*). The meaning of an idiom is derived from the entire phrase, which contains words that we may or may not know. For example, when we say, "warm the cockles of your heart," "tit for tat," or "vested interest," we may not know the words "cockles," "tit," "tat," or "vested" but still understand the complete phrases that contain them.

Some books on technical communication issue a blanket warning to writers to steer clear of idioms, especially clichés. Why? Because, according to the authors, relying on idioms

> Idioms have a way of relaxing the formality of language.

indicates a lack of creativity. It is true that in some cases (writing for people who do not speak English very well, for example) idioms should be avoided, but in many cases a judicious application of idioms is perfectly acceptable. For example, when the goal of writing is to communicate information—and not to impress the reader with creative language—idioms have a way of relaxing the formality of language. Informal language, such as idioms and sayings, has a way of adding spirit to the lifeless language we commonly use to present facts.

Some idioms are evolving into an even less formal configuration. For example, consider the idiom "as far as *x* is concerned." I've noticed that the media are prone to leaving off the second part of the idiom, "is con-

The *Newsletter* issues on our Web site (*http://www.ieeepcs.org/activities_publications_newsletter.php*) can be used as examples. Issues are posted about one month after distribution of the print version and now have active e-mail, Web, and table-of-contents links.

I prefer to receive articles by e-mail; most WordPerfect, Word, RTF (rich text format), and ASCII files are acceptable. My addresses are in the

boilerplate at the bottom of p. 2 along with our copyright notice.

Deadlines

The 15th day of each odd-number month is the deadline for publication in the succeeding odd-number month. For example, the deadline is 15 May for the July/August issue, 15 July for the September/October issue, etc. You won't be far off (and never late) if you observe the Ides of May, July, September, and so on.

Negotiate This!

(continued from page 1)

The ploys that he employs to achieve his ends include, but are not limited to, (1) a comfortable diction level, (2) a self- effacing quality that subordinates ego to the greater goal of understanding a situation, (3) phrasing that contains a certain gravitas yet is not overbearing, (4) a sense of humor that frequently emerges in the form of unexpected wording, (5) a creative use of language in the form of neologisms, (6) an ability to encapsulate the essence of content—to abstract the information—in the forms of chapter titles and summarizing points at the end of chapters, (7) apt anecdotes and examples from his own extensive experience, (8) apposite quotations and allusions that lend credibility to the subject, (9) metadiscourse that unobtrusively yet interactively signals the reader as to what is to come, and (10) an inclination to

challenge commonly held but misleading beliefs. These strategies are of course not mutually exclusive, techniques often being interwoven.

Cohen's comfortable diction level comes out everywhere. Early in the book he says, "…I believe my manner of expression is somewhat impressionistic, in that I tend to suggest rather than state. As it is, I'm more comfortable describing, rather than prescribing, behavior" (p. xvi). His use of "I believe," "somewhat," "tend," and the contraction "I'm" contribute to his ease of expression. An appropriate amount of hedging (not overdone) offers a subtle force that can dissipate overly aggressive, threatening language.

The entire book exudes Cohen's humility, a self-effacing quality that is not only admirable (Gandhi, Albert Schweitzer) but also prudent. In a chapter entitled "Whahdja Say?" Cohen recommends training the self to attempt to clarify difficult or confusing points with such words as, "Gee, I'm sorry, you lost me" … "Could you please repeat that?" (p. 41). And in the chapter "Lend Me a Hand" he notes that "There is an inescapable truth about relationships: People appreciate hearing the words 'Help me.' No matter what you may be talking about, the other party has information, expertise, knowledge, or experience that you do not possess. Thus we need them to willingly share what they have, which will facilitate getting to yes" (p. 43). So it makes sense to admit ignorance as a practical matter, no matter how bright we are (or think we are). In the process of assuming a low-key stance, a person may be able

Do I emerge from it gratified after having read it and wiser for having done so?

to transform "an adversary into an ally" (p. 44). In other words, "a softer demeanor can favorably affect the negotiating climate" (p. 45).

His phrasing has a rich content throughout but it is not expressed ponderously. For example, he reminds the reader that "…human beings respond to events as they *perceive* them, not necessarily to objective reality" (p. 167). At another juncture he asserts, "And the road toward fulfillment lies in questioning everything, including what others tell us, and even what we think we know" (p. xvi). And, in speaking of the need to maintain some detachment in stressful situations, he says, "While in the midst of fervent discussion and emotive people, you must try to remain aloof from the turmoil, so as to be able to see the unfolding pattern" (p. 28). He thus addresses the reader directly, almost intimately, to apprise him or her on why a certain distance in relations is necessary. What he says here and elsewhere makes profound sense.

The book is full of humorous passages that work as a result of surprising wording, like "Humor, of course, is no laughing matter" (p. xiv). And, when on a plane with a stressed-out executive concerned about the game plan he and Cohen would use in impending negotiations, the executive blurts out, "'We need more structure —you know, detail, specificity, meat —pith.' At the time, never having

heard the word 'pith,' I was somewhat alarmed" (p.5), Cohen admits. In speaking of not getting overly upset about the hand we have been dealt "courtesy of life's crap shoot," he addresses the topic of noses: "If the purpose of a nose is to smell, you would think the bigger the better. So the best proboscis would be a schnozzle about the size of an eggplant" (p. 44). Of course, the use of humor in professional communication is limited, yet I suspect an occasional light touch would facilitate acceptance of content in some contexts.

Cohen's neologisms are clever. When explaining how he will treat pronouns in the book, he refers to that difficulty as "administrivia" (p. xvi). In speaking of how we tend to devalue ourselves while overrating the accomplishments of the other side—in itself, a subject worth exploring— he refers to that proclivity as the "personal pimple principle" (p. 168).

He encapsulates content in chapter titles like "Bargaining with a Bastard," "Style Supersedes Substance," "Familiarity Breeds Children," "Speed Kills," and, perhaps most important, "The Joy of Detached Involvement"; each abstraction draws the reader in to reflect on the subject matter. He also summarizes content at the end of chapters in lists of "Prominent Points," improving the odds of assimilation through repetition.

Cohen's extensive use of anecdotes and examples from his own experience (global and personal) works to convince the reader that he knows of what he speaks. We can trust what he says.

His quotations and allusions memorably illustrate points at every turn, for example, Alexis de Tocqueville's "Never abandon mature design to gratify a momentary passion" (p. 325) and Arthur Miller's "We are in the world, but the world is also within us" (p. xiv) and the Prophet Muhammad's "Trust in Allah, but always tie up your camel" (p. 28).

Cohen's metadiscourse smoothly signals and draws the reader into the appropriate frame of mind to grasp the content at hand, especially his frequent use of "The point is this:…" (p. 14), "Consider this:…" (p. 62), "Think of it:…" (p. 46), and "A case in point:…" (p. 325). This ploy amounts to an invitation to the reader to become immersed in and reflect on the subject.

> Be able to see the unfolding pattern.

There is a forthrightness in Cohen's willingness to challenge commonly held beliefs, like dressing for success (Molloy). As he puts it:

Nevertheless, when I arrive at the DFW Airport, as I stride off the plane to be welcomed by the parties, I do not say, 'Hi there, here I am, hotshot negotiator from the East ready to take command.' Indeed, to be honest with you, the picture on this book's jacket is about as good as I ever look. Check out that photo and you know right away that I'm not a big believer in 'dressing for suc-

cess.' Never have I been in a situation where people are saying 'no,' 'fuhgeddaboudit,' or 'never,' when suddenly I appear on the scene, immaculately and fashionably attired. Do you believe they look up and say, 'Hey, I love the way that guy's put together. Wow, that matching ensemble, the power tie, the cut and fabric of his garment. Gee, I was going to say 'no' but based on his clothing, make that 'yes' (p. 12).

The ultimate test of a document is: Do I emerge from it gratified after having read it and wiser for having done so? In the case of Cohen's book, the answers are "Yes" and "Yes." Beyond those points, the book is a HOOT!

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There's no place like *http://www. home.com.*

Highlights of the January AdCom Meeting

By Ed Clark

The PCS administrative committee (AdCom) held a meeting via telephone and Web-based conferencing on 24 and 25 January 2004. Thanks to the enthusiasm and dedication of the AdCom members we were able to communicate across several time zones around the world. We had participating members all over the U.S., Canada, Benelux, and even Japan. Tom Orr, our newly appointed Regional Activities chair, lives in Japan and was online from 1 to 5 a.m. both days.

Two new members were introduced to the AdCom: Michaël Steehouder and Kirk St.Amant; both had been elected to at-large terms though 2006 during IPCC 2003. Michaël Steehouder was nominated and confirmed as PCS liaison for Forum 2007. The AdCom discussed the possibility of PCS-sponsored activities for Forum 2007.

The AdCom confirmed the nominations presented by the president. The newly appointed and elected officers, and chairs of PCS activities are listed at *http://www.ieeepcs.org/about_ leadership.php*.

John Carroll, a computer scientist with an affinity for the communication field and inventor of the minimalist model of documentation and training, was selected by the AdCom as winner of the Goldsmith award for 2004.

There was discussion about a new electronic newsletter. This publication should be in place before the current printed *Newsletter* is phased out. Soft launch of the electronic newsletter is planned for September 2004; the tentative goal is to replace the printed version in January 2005.

PCS treasurer Steve Robinson reported disappointing financial results for IPCC 2003, which caused our deficit for the year to increase substantially. The conference was very successful in terms of attendance and presentations as evidenced by the responses to the survey conducted shortly after. However, the hotel room attrition fees and the cost of the food not only negated any possible surplus but contributed about USD 27k to the PCS deficit. This amount, added to the original budget deficit of 12k, results in a total deficit of USD 39k for the current year.

Conferences

PCS has four conferences in various stages of planning and the respective chairs reported progress made since the last meeting. More than 80 presentation proposals have been received for IPCC 2004 in Minneapolis, Minnesota, 29 September– 1 October. Bill Horton will give a lunch talk there on Friday, followed by a (fee) workshop. Visit the conference Web site at *http://www.ardilla. umn.edu/ieee/* for details.

IPCC 2005 will be in Limerick, Ireland, 10-13 July (*http://www.ieee pcs.org/conference/limerick/*); IPCC 2006 in Saratoga Springs, New York,

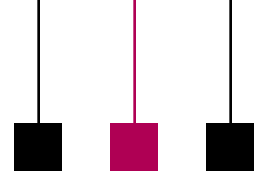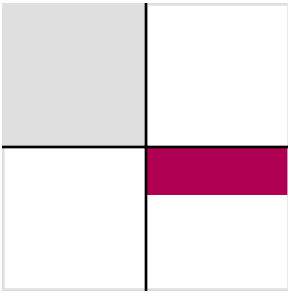23-25 October; and IPCC 2007 in Seattle, Washington, 1-3 October.

Committee Reports

The Web education chair has published an RFP (due 15 March) and has already received several responses. The RFP requests submitters to include a timetable and a list of deliverables.

The former volunteers and globalization ad-hoc committees have been merged into regional activities, with Tom Orr as chair. The new committee will survey regional needs and look for in-region volunteers who can work to serve those needs. The committee will try to attract more international volunteers to PCS. [See the article on the next page that calls for regional contact persons.]

The redesigned PCS Web site (*http:// www.ieeepcs.org*) is up and running and the design is stable. Only a few updates are left to do. We need a Web master to maintain the site on a regular basis. If you are skilled in HTML, SQL, and PHP and are interested in volunteering, visit *http://www.ieee pcs.org/activities_volunteer.php*. More than 80 members have joined the PCS virtual community at *https:// www.ieeecommunities.org/ieee.pcs* and lively discussions are currently in progress on several topics.

INTECOM currently has 14 member societies and two other societies (one in South Africa and one in Brazil) are considering joining. An INTECOM lan-

guage project was released during Forum 2003 in Milan, Italy; it is "Guidelines for Writing English-Language Technical Documentation for an International Audience" and is available on the Web site at *http://www.intecom.org* for anyone to download.

PCS has funding for 2004-2005 for a marketing and publicity initiative. Part will be used to hire a marketing consultant. The AdCom discussed the possibility of publishing an article on communication practices and advertising in the *IEEE Spectrum* magazine.

The next AdCom meeting is 21-22 May 2004, in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and the final meeting of the year will be held during IPCC 2004 in Minneapolis, Minnesota. PCS members are always welcome to attend.

PCS president Ed Clark stepped in as secretary pro tem to prepare this report.

Three Managras to Solve

Can you rearrange these three statements to form new ones? The numbers of words in the rearrangements are shown in parentheses, and you may ignore punctuation.

1. Cash lost in 'em (2)
2. Alas! No more Z's (2)
3. Accord not in it (1)

Answers are on page 19.

New Regional Activities Committee Seeking Representatives

By Thomas Orr

Two of our shortcomings in the Professional Communication Society have been insufficient communication among PCS members at the regional level and little regional activity to address unique regional needs. To improve this situation the AdCom has established a regional activities committee to study these problems and generate effective solutions.

In its first phase of activity, this committee is currently seeking 12 volunteers, one from each IEEE region (see list), to serve as representatives who would be willing and able to perform the following duties through the remainder of 2004:

1. Serve as the contact person for PCS members in the region

2. Work with others in the region to establish appropriate mechanisms for regional communication

3. Work with others in the region to identify member needs

4. Work with the regional activities chair and other representatives to study regional communication and activity issues and design a suitable system to address those effectively

Regional representatives will be appointed by the regional activities chair and approved by the AdCom for an initial term ending 31 December 2004, until a mechanism for selection by regional members can be put in place for 2005. Interested persons can apply for one of these 12 positions by sending e-mail to Thomas Orr, regional activities chair, *t-orr@ieee.org*, with information about personal qualifications. The deadline for applications is 1 May 2004.

To facilitate better communication among and with regional PCS members, regional discussion folders have been set up on PECom (PCS electronic community, *http://www.ieeepcs.org*) for member use. Be sure to join PECom and connect with others in your part of the world.

Further regional subdividing will be considered by the committee during the initial phases of discussion in 2004 for establishment in 2005 to better meet national and local needs in the larger regions.

IEEE Regions*

1	*Northeastern USA*
2	*Eastern USA*
3	*Southeastern USA*
4	*Central USA*
5	*Southwestern USA*
6	*Western USA*
7	*Canada*
8 A	*Europe*
8 B	*Middle East*
8 C	*Africa*
9	*Latin America*
10	*Asia/Pacific, Australia*

* Region 8 subdivided by PCS.

Elizabeth Weise Moeller

It All Started With a Patent

Awarded 17 November 1998, United States patent number 5 838 906 has created quite a stir in the world of Web site developers. The patent, held by Eolas Technologies, Inc., allows a Web browser to show embedded interactive features of a Web page, such as Flash or video. Basically this patent covers what many people know as plug-ins.

Brief History

In February 1999 Eolas Technologies, Inc., sued Microsoft stating that the Internet Explorer browser infringed upon their patent. The use of <EMBED>, <OBJECT>, and <APPLET> HTML tags to embed items such as Flash, QuickTime or Real Video, Active X, Java, and other interactive elements infringes on the patent. The case went to trial. On 11 August 2003 a jury awarded Eolas USD 521 million in damages and ordered Microsoft to change the way the browser handles media. Microsoft immediately appealed, but the ruling was upheld 15 January 2004. Microsoft has vowed to appeal again.

What Is Happening Now?

Eolas would like Microsoft to simply license the technology. Microsoft refused and in August 2003 announced changes to the Internet Explorer browser that would eliminate the infringement issue. As a result, a pop-up box with warnings would appear whenever a user accesses a Web page using one of the three HTML tags. Microsoft is working with partners to identify solutions that would prevent the pop-ups from appearing. That would result in changes to millions of Web pages.

The World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) is also watching the situation very closely. The W3C is the standards-defining organization for the HyperText Markup Language and Cascading Style Sheets (CSS). They are also the authors of the Web Accessibility Initiative, assisting efforts to make the World Wide Web accessible to all.

In August 2003 the W3C created a new working group to specifically address issues created by patents. It is possible that HTML itself may need to be changed. They also took the unprecedented step of asking the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office to review the patent. Even Tim Berners-Lee, acknowledged creator of the Web as we know it, sent a letter to the Patent Office asking for a review. In many of the requests prior art that would invalidate the patent has been submitted as well. The Patent Office has agreed to review the patent.

Eolas's founder, Michael Doyle, said in a September 2003 *eWeek* interview that all these changes are not necessary. He thinks that the Web community should encourage Microsoft to settle and let everyone move forward.

Implications

As a small business that has programmed close to 100 Web sites over the years, we will need to review all our sites to identify the affected ones; speak with those clients, some of whom maintain their own sites, to determine the best way to deal with the issue; and update those sites. Unfortunately, that work will have to be squeezed 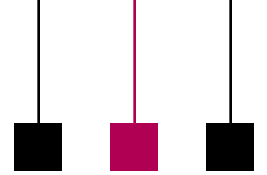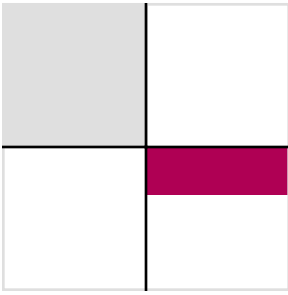into an already busy schedule. We are a small business. Businesses with larger sites, or ones that run solely using Active X or Flash, will be impacted on a much larger scale.

> Watch the World Wide Web Consortium and stay on top of this ever-changing situation.

The implications reach much farther than millions of dollars spent retooling Web sites. Other browsers, such as Opera, Mozilla, and Safari, are also at risk for a lawsuit. Their developers, too, are watching this case closely to see what changes they may have to make. The Mozilla Foundation points out that this case truly highlights the interconnected nature of the Internet. All the pieces are pulled together seamlessly to enhance the user experience. The seamless nature of the experience was shattered by this decision.

Finally, this issue is shedding light on the U.S. patent process and whether an overwhelmed patent staff is able to make judgments on software and Web-business patents. There is currently a patent infringement case working its way through the California court system from a company that claims its patent describes how the .name domains are created and handled. The patent is so broad that it effectively covers the entire Internet.

What Should a Web Developer Do?

Web developers are getting mixed signals. Some developer software manufacturers, such as Macromedia and Real Networks, have posted solutions on their Web sites. Those solutions will prevent users from seeing the warning box in the new version of Internet Explorer. The W3C, on the other hand, is recommending doing nothing.

The reality is that a new version of the Internet Explorer browser is available on the Microsoft Developers Network (*http://msdn.microsoft.com*) for testing. That version requires Windows XP with Service Pack 1 installed.

The best option would be to identify whether your site or sites are affected by the change to Internet Explorer and then determine if the pop-up warning boxes would be too distracting to your user base. If so, you need to implement changes before the new version of Internet Explorer is shipped with Windows XP in early 2004. If not, you should identify which parts of the site are affected and how you will address the issue, should the need arise.

Conclusion

Legitimate patents need to be defended and their owners properly compensated. While the Eolas Technologies patent seems overly broad, there is a chance that the prior art is not relevant and the patent will stand on appeal. In that case

Microsoft and other browser makers will need to either license the technology for plug-ins or adopt changes that enhance the user experience in other ways. The World Wide Web Consortium is the group to watch in this debate. Web developers should follow their advice and stay on top of this ever-changing situation.

Improve Your Acronym IQ!

By Dan Danbom

The excitement was palpable when hundreds of CEOs, CFOs, COOs, CIOs, MBAs, CPAs, Ph.D.s, and experts from PR, IR, HR, and IT convened in LA at the seventh annual meeting of SAP (Society of Abbreviation Professionals) 27-29 August 2003 A.D.

My invitation came by way of UPS on a CD, COD. I played it on my DVD. Good thing, because RSVPs were required.

I was there mostly as a CYA because I was on assignment for a magazine devoted to "business process improvement" and the magazine's ME wanted me to cover the plenary session on what should be the accepted initialism for whatever "business process improvement" describes, and whether those initials should be BPM, CPM, or EPM. Despite the objections from IBM, HP, UBS, UAL, BP, AMDL, AOL, AMX, APA, AEP, AT&T, CIM, CMCI, EMC, EGL, MBNA, HCA, RCA, GM, P&G, MDC, ABC, CBS, and NBC, and official governmental objections from GSA, GAO, IRS, FBI, DOE, EPA, USDA, ERISA, RICO, OSHA, NASA, and the whole damn NASDAQ—despite all their objections—I was the session MC!

They were SOL. Those who didn't go AWOL were reduced to drowning their sorrows at the evening's cocktail party, where they were entertained by the abbreviated musical stylings of a western singer named ROI Rogers.

The party must have been fun because the breakfast sessions on ABC/M, EVA, VBM, DSO, CRM, SCM, and ERP were sparsely attended. I pondered the organizers' EPS.

What would we do without our acronyms? Acronyms (abbreviated code rendition of name yielding meaning) are an invention of the 20th century, attributed to the Bell Laboratories, AKA Ma Bell, which

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An Online Comparison of Cultures

By Kirk St.Amant

I recently asked one of my undergraduate classes, "What constitutes good Web site design?" Several students yelled out "Flash!" while others called for "JavaScripts" and streaming video. I then posed a second question: "What constitutes good Web site design *in France*?"

A hush fell over the class. Several students frantically scanned the room in the hope that someone had the answer, but all seemed to be in the same predicament. After a few moments, one student raised her hand and asked, "Wouldn't it be the exact same Web page, and you'd just change the language?"

That response represents a key problem because technical communication practices increasingly involve localization and translation. For many students, however, those concepts remain abstractions until they encounter such activities on the job. Instructors, therefore, need to prepare students for this aspect of their careers.

One way to achieve this end is to have students compare communication pieces from their own culture with those designed for a different cultural audience. In the past, such comparisons remained restricted to whatever international print materials an instructor could find. Today, however, students can easily access online materials from almost every country on earth. Additionally, the visual nature of Web sites means cross-cultural comparisons can focus on visual elements rather than linguistic ones. Instructors now need to

devise Web-based activities that can heighten student awareness of visual design in culture and communication expectations.

A technique I have found successful is a comparative online analysis of cultures (COAC). The approach works as follows: Students are divided into groups, and each group represents a particular culture. Students then go to the global splash page for an international company (e.g., the Mercedes Benz site at *http://www.mercedes benz.com*). Those pages allow users to access sites designed for markets in particular countries. Students next open two browsers. In one browser they access the U.S. site for that company; in the other they access the company's site for the culture or country they are assigned to represent. Students then individually compare sites and draft a list of differences they notice in design.

Once this review is completed, students assemble in their culture groups to discuss findings. The objective is for them to collectively devise a single list of differences noted by all group members. In these interactions one individual often draws the group's attention to a detail that others have overlooked.

The group next designs an informal class presentation of the differences they have noticed, complete with examples (Web sites, PowerPoint slides, overheads) to illustrate some of the more striking or more interest-
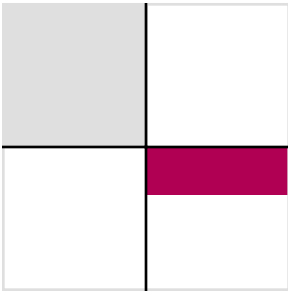
ing differences. Through this activity participants learn that cultures associate different design elements with Web sites. Such a contrast prevents the assumption that there is a U.S. version and a generic international version of a site.

When the presentations are completed, students perform a second round of analysis involving the global or world Web site for a different company and ideally a different kind of product, for example, Sony's *http://www.world.sony.com*. (Such contrast is important because it provides a broader overview of cultural perceptions, one that is not linked solely to a particular company or product.) Students next access the site for the culture they studied earlier and compare the new site they are examining with the checklist they created previously. The objective is to have them determine whether the same design elements are present on both sites. Again participants begin their analysis individually, then meet in groups to compare and discuss findings, and share results with the class.

While this COAC approach is relatively simply, it has important applications to different educational situations. First, learning is based on student observation and analysis of culture. For this reason instructors do not need to be experts on culture and communication, nor must they necessarily provide students with an introductory lecture on the topic. Rather, all the instructor needs to do is men-

> Cultural expectations affect information design.
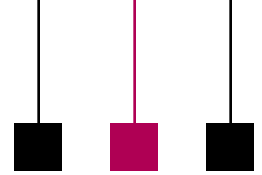
tion that cultural differences can affect communication expectations and then allow students to explore those differences on their own. As a result, COACs can be easily integrated into a variety of technical communication classes or professional training sessions.

Second, instructors can use this COAC approach to develop more advanced exercises. In my classes on intercultural communication, students examine five Web sites designed for the same cultural audience. They next use their observations to develop a localization checklist for reconfiguring a U.S. site for an audience from that particular culture. Students then use their checklists to analyze a U.S. site to determine what aspects need to be changed to meet the expectations of a particular culture. In this assignment students also note additional kinds of materials (e.g., images) localizers would need to revise the site for that cultural audience.

Through such exercises students gain a greater understanding of how culture can affect communication expectations and learn that:

• Cultural expectations are not linked exclusively to language or verbal displays

• Localization processes can be quite complicated and involve several aspects

One more benefit of COACs is that they allow for a great deal of versatility in how they are applied. For indi-

viduals teaching in computer labs, COACs can serve as ideal in-class activities. For instructors in conventional classrooms, they can serve as the foundation for homework assignments or out-of-class projects. The key factor is that the required materials are free and available to anyone with Internet access. Thus students can perform such activities in a variety of settings, allowing for greater freedom in how and when COACs are integrated into the teaching process.

Today's technical communication students will graduate into an increasingly international workplace. For this reason they need to understand how culture can affect communica-

tion expectations. By using COAC-based exercises instructors can heighten student awareness of cultural communication issues and help them realize how cultural expectations affect information design.

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What's in a Phrase?

(continued from page 5)

cerned." For example, "As far as snow, we expect very little accumulation," which sounds strange to me. And we all know about the forced movement toward shortening "In order to" to just "to." However, I find that using the entire idiom is more pleasing to my ear, so I tend to write out the entire idiom, meeting the reader's expectations as well.

On the other hand, what about documents that are going to be translated into a different language or be read by a sizable population of people whose first language is not English? In those cases, avoiding idioms is a must because the meaning of an idiom can be lost in translation.

So what's the bottom line? If your intended audience is native English speakers, then forget the hassle of far-fetched warnings about using idioms. Ignore the know-it-alls who make mountains out of molehills. Keep your chin up and your nose to the grindstone, and you'll make out like a bandit.

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Peter Reimold and Cheryl Reimold

How to Give Technical Presentations to Non-Technical Audiences

Part 1: Five Ways to Beat Stage Fright

Whether you're standing in front of a large group of frowning managers or proposing a new idea to a group of people you know well, it can suddenly hit you: STAGE FRIGHT! All of a sudden your throat dries up, your tongue feels like a solid piece of plasterboard, and your heart is tangled up in your vocal cords. Worse, you haven't a clue what to say. This tidal wave of terror has swamped the few thoughts you had planned to share.

Take heart. You're not alone. Studies have shown that fear of public speaking is *still* the greatest fear in America today. It may be a sad reflection of our society that we consider each other creatures to fear rather than to love, but that is another story, for another day. (And we will tackle it!) Right now we want to beat that fear. Here are five ways to do it.

1. Focus on a single main message

What do you want to tell these people —in one or two sentences? Think about that message and determine to state it clearly and simply. The human mind can focus on only one thing at a time. If you're thinking about your message, you can't think about the fear.

2. Structure your message

Think of a firecracker bursting in the sky. Can you see that big explosion of light and color followed by a trail of stars? That's the structure of your message. Begin with the most important point you want to make: your main message. That's the big explosion. Then immediately follow it up with three key points that prove or explain your main point and give an example of each. That's the trail of stars. This structure *always* works. Knowing that will help you beat the fear.

3. Remember that you're there for them, not for you

Stage fright is simply fear that we will not come across as totally wonderful. Put differently, it's fear of looking stupid. People may not think we are clever, correct, amusing, entertaining, insightful, well spoken …whatever. There are thousands of qualities they may not think we have (and they may be right). The point is that it doesn't matter in the least because the presenter is not there to shine. He or she is there for one single reason: *to give the audience something of value to them*. That's all. Leave your ego at the door and concentrate on telling the audience something they can use. Again, you can focus on only one thing at a time. If you're eager to give them a message that serves them and meets their specific needs, you can't fixate on yourself. If you're not focusing on yourself, you can't worry about how you look to them.

> You can beat stage fright by taking the focus off yourself.

4. Like the audience

Yes, there may be people in the audience who have criticized you previously or who regularly make life at work difficult for you. They may make up 85 percent of the audience. Here's the point: You don't have to dislike them. You have the power to choose how you approach them; *their* behavior does not have to control *your* attitude. If you decide that for the short period of time you're standing there talking to them *you will like them*, no matter what they have done or how they are looking at you now, you will pulverize that stage fright. We may fear enemies, but not friends. If we decide to like the audience, just because we want to, we stop being puppets on their strings. And there's another thing: *It's very hard not to like someone who likes you.* That's a basic law of human interaction. Like them and it will be hard for them— not to like you!

5. Prepare for tough questions

One of the biggest components of stage fright is fear of hostile questions. The remedy is simple: Prepare for them. Long before you give your presentation, imagine the most difficult people who may be in your audience. Take them one by one and state your main message to each. What questions or objections will that person fling at you? Make yourself write

them down. Then prepare an answer. You may have to do quite a bit of research to find an adequate answer, or you may not find one at all. Even if you have no good answer to a tough question, preparing for it can trounce the stage fright. You will be ready for it and you will have a graceful, steady reply, based on thought and effort to be useful,

instead of an unprepared gurgle. Preparation makes all the difference.

Cheryl and Peter Reimold have been teaching communication skills to engineers, scientists, and business-people for 20 years. Their latest book, **The Short Road to Great Presentations** *(IEEE Press-Wiley, 2003), is available at http://www.ieee.org, in*

bookstores, and from Amazon.com. Their consulting firm, PERC Communications (+1 914 725 1024, perc com@aol.com), offers businesses consulting and writing services, as well as customized in-house courses on writing, presentation skills, and on-the-job communication skills. Visit their Web site at http://www.allabout communication.com.

Improve Your Acronym IQ

(continued from page 11)

created the word in 1943 as a way to keep workers abreast of the latest initialized titles for weapons systems and agencies during WW II. You may not have known that Ma Bell was involved in weapons, but I guess she was and could be a real SOB about it.

FYI, *technically, an acronym is a series of initials that makes up something pronounceable*, like RADAR, LASER, SCUBA, FUBAR, BOHICA, KISS, MAD, POTUS, SNAFU, QUANTAS, SWAG, EBITDA, and UNIVAC. Some are so perfect that we would never think of them as acronyms but rather as members of the Society of Just Plain Words, and if you can find a better example here than the USA Patriot Act (Uniting and Strengthening America by Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism), I wouldn't want to play Scrabble with you.

> What would we do without our acronyms?

Abbreviations that can't be spoken as words, such as NFL, EIS, PPM, ICBM, NCAA, TGIF, and IQ, are merely second-rate initialisms residing in the trailer park of language.

Anyway, the first attempt to define acronyms came along in 1960 when a publisher issued the first *Acronyms, Initialisms, and Abbreviations Dictionary*, which, not surprisingly, is known as AIAD. The AIAD had 12 000 entries. It was the IPO of acronyms. Twenty years later, it had 211 000 entries. Today I'd guess it has 4.6 trillion, but that's a WAG.

Acronyms and abbreviations have evolved to be a kind of short-hand, the verbal equivalent of a secret handshake that suggests to people in the know that you, too, are in the know even if you, secretly, know that you know absolutely nothing. No wonder they're so appealing. They have reached their height on the

Internet, where people can conduct entire conversations using little else:

Person 1: GM!
Person 2: GM!
Person 1: BRB.
Person 2: HB.
Person 1: B.
Person 2: WB.

At the rate they're multiplying, many of us will live to see a world where everyone speaks in acronyms. The only debate will be which acronym to pick for what, which brings us back to the BPM (business performance management), CPM (corporate performance management), EPM (enterprise performance management) debate. All describe the same thing. As long as we all understand that, I think we'll be OK.

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Miscellany

By Michael Brady

Dictionaries are fine for definitions, as are encyclopedias for facts. But their entries tend toward the mainstream. Peripheral tidbits often seem to be incomplete or somewhere else. Where, for instance, would you find a Latin abbreviation or commonplace term not in your desk dictionary? Or commonplace French, German, or Yiddish words that frequently pepper texts in English? Or medical shorthand or musical terminology? Most likely, if you've been at the professional communication game a while, you will have assembled numerous references and notes. With time, the problem then is finding what is where.

Fortunately, rescue is at hand: *Schott's Original Miscellany*, published in England in November 2002 and in the U.S. in August last year.[1] As the title implies, its content defies classification. Arguably, its 400-plus entries are the best collection of essential trivia ever published. In addition to the peripheral tidbits, it has intriguing collections of palindromes (words or phrases that read the same backwards as forwards), word pairings, and holalphabetic sentences (containing all the letters of the alphabet); yes, indeed, there are at least six other short sentences like "The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog," the venerable printer's favorite for testing typesetting. And

what writer can resist lifting one of the quotes of Churchill that illustrate the 16 tropes of classical rhetoric, or one of Dr. Johnson's witty remarks, or a pithy pronouncement by a famous philosopher?

There's something for all penchants, from antiquarian paper sizes to pencil hardness to the Chinese zodiac years. Even for us of PCS, who deal with scientific and technical communication, there are useful tidbits that fill the gaps between standard references, including atmospheric layers, radio 10-codes, the Plimsoll line marked on ship hulls, decibel sound levels, pi to a staggering number of decimal places, planet and satellite features, Euclid's axioms, and Asimov's laws of robotics. Even for Scrabble players there's an impressive entry: two whole pages, 10 columns to a page, of obscure short words.

Last year author Schott followed up with *Schott's Food & Drink Miscellany*, published in England in November 2003 and to be published in the U.S. in August 2004.[2] Like

Original, it's a collection of 400-plus entries, from *absinthe* to *zoo fare* (for humans, during the 1870 siege of Paris). And it, too, strays into the realm of essential peripherals, by including cures for hangovers, instructions on the Heimlich maneuver (the emergency technique to aid someone choking on food), and a table of the Body Mass Index.

If you want to know what's in a Big Mac, it's not here but in *Original*. On the other hand, there are many listings of ingredients, from the menu of the Nobel Prize banquet to what the witches in Macbeth put into their pot. The literary touch is strong, with quotes from the famous throughout history, including the redoubtable Dr. Johnson. And there's the practical stuff, including a list of E-numbered food additives, drawings of Italian pasta types, and an explanation of the Harris-Benedict equation for calculating human energy expenditure.

Measuring just $4\frac{1}{2}$ in. by 7 in. and weighing just half a pound each, these compact collections of facts can be read cover-to-cover or used as references, as both are well indexed. For wordsmiths, they are entertaining, handy, and nigh addictive.

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[1] *Schott's Original Miscellany* by Ben Schott, London, Bloomsbury, November 2002, ISBN 0-7475-6320-9, GBP 9.99; and New York, Bloomsbury USA, August 2003, ISBN 1-58234-349-7, USD 14.95; both editions 160 pages hardcover.

[2] *Schott's Food & Drink Miscellany* by Ben Schott, London, Bloomsbury, November 2003, ISBN 0-7475-6654-2, GBP 9.99; and New York, Bloomsbury USA, August 2004, ISBN 1-58234-420-5, USD 14.95; both editions160 pages hardcover.

Low-Tech Does It

"Look what I've got here," a friend of mine told me the other day with the obvious desire to impress me. I was expecting him to produce yet another mobile phone and I was therefore preparing mentally to deliver my usual line ("Wow, even smaller and lighter than the previous one") in an appropriately admiring tone but, to my surprise, what he brought into view was rather larger than the last phone he had been bragging about. After he demonstrated the possibilities, I concluded: "So, it is a phone that doubles as a PDA—a personal digital assistant." "Of course not," he replied, almost offended, "it is a PDA that doubles as a phone." "Ah, but of course," I hurried to add, afraid to get tied up in yet another long argument. "So then," I pressed on, "do you call a lot on your PDA?" "Actually," he said, "I prefer my other phone to place calls." "But being able to call from your PDA is impressive, isn't it?" he hurried to add, probably afraid his previous comment had undermined his case.

Impressive? It certainly is, yes. But is it useful? There is something to be said for convergence of handheld devices, of course, but is it effective? Over the years my technology-loving friend has given me ample display of all he can do with his many gadgets, but no evidence that he is actually doing any of these things regularly—for any purpose other than trying to impress his friends, that is. Like too many people, he is buying and using technology largely for its own sake.

The tremendous progress in hardware and software over the last few decades similarly tempts today's professionals into using unnecessary communication features just because they are available. Instead of noticing a nail sticking out and looking for a suitable hammer to knock it in, we are given a whole set of shiny hammers and desperately look for things to hit with them—things that may not have needed hitting in the first place. In other words, instead of looking for solutions we are asking for problems.

Page layout is a typical example of technology used "because it's there." Texts boast unnecessary colors, making them hard to read; unneeded typeface variations (font, size, style); or impressive but illegible distortions such as Microsoft Word WordArt. Graphs similarly sport unnecessary three-dimensional effects or color gradients, Web sites use interfering background pictures, and slide shows incorporate useless animations, not to mention distracting sound effects.

> Let us strive for technological conciseness.

Equally high on my list of uncalled-for technology is the laser pointer. Bright beams coming out of small, pen-like devices are impressive in their own right (the first laser pointer I got to use almost 20 years ago was a heavy, foot-long, high-voltage helium-neon tube with a battery life of 15 minutes). Still, the tiny red dot dancing around restlessly on the screen does not connect speaker and slide nearly as well as an outstretched arm, prolonged if needed by a visible pointer such as a lightweight stick.

Many of our communication acts need pruning of these impressive but distracting high-tech features, just as much as wordy texts need pruning of unnecessary words. Let us strive for technological conciseness.

Suppressing elements from our creations being emotionally harder than adding to them, the best strategy is probably to start sober. For page layouts, for example, I recommend a first draft with a single typeface at a single size—no bold, italic, or other effect; no color. Once this plain-text layout satisfactorily conveys the document's structure, we might wonder about the added value of other typesetting features. Would some parts benefit from being set smaller or larger? Would some words benefit from a change of face or of color? More often than not, the answer is no.

Among the e-mail newsletters landing in my in-box, my favorite is a plain-text one, admittedly with hyperlinks to longer Web articles. When I recently cited it as an example in a discussion forum on e-zines, others thought I advocated plain text for its faster download. Apparently they could not think of any other advantage. As it happens, I like the newsletter because the authors' effort went into clear writing, not dazzling technology. Low-tech does it.

Dr. Jean-luc Doumont teaches and provides advice on professional speaking, writing, and graphing. For over 15 years, he has helped audiences of all ages, backgrounds, and nationalities structure their thoughts and construct their communication (http://www.JLConsulting.be).

Recommendation: Read This

A new year is upon us and the Professor wants to take this opportunity to reiterate a message that she has communicated in several past lessons. She is packaging it in a new way, however, in hopes that her students will receive it like a welcome gift in the mail and begin following the advice right away.

The message is this: Use *the most effective form of <u>recommendations for users</u>*.

First, the Professor would like to share with her students some *in*effective forms of recommendations and demonstrate just why they are ineffective.

Ineffective form 1: Ambiguous, empty pronoun form

The Professor never enjoys ambiguous pronouns. The pronoun *it*, for example, is often used in ambiguous contexts. Sometimes this word is even used in its expletive form, which is totally meaningless. Examples:

It is best to use the mouse, rather than the keyboard, to navigate through the information.

It is recommended that you use the mouse, rather than the keyboard, to navigate through the information.

To the Professor, that type of recommendation is like scraping fingernails on a chalkboard. To what does the ambiguous pronoun *it* refer? Shouldn't the subject of any sentence be a clear, understandable noun? How

might a translator or reader for whom English is a second language parse this sentence? (The Professor loves to remind her students that ESL readers frequently translate English into their primary languages one word at a time. Therefore pronouns that are ambiguous and empty cause particular problems for those users.)

Ineffective form 2: First-person form

Although the Professor is the first to enjoy novels, personal letters, and e-mail notes that are written in first-person form, she is not one to advocate use of first person in technical writing. And in IBM information, using first person can sometimes create legal difficulties. In the information that she edits the Professor finds too many first-person recommendations. Examples:

Our recommendation is to set the value of MAXVAL to 10.

We recommend a MAXVAL value of 10.

The Professor's problem with this form of recommendation is that users are bound to wonder whom *our* and *we* represent. Do these first-person pronouns represent the writer of the information and his or her family? The writer and writing colleagues? The complete set of people who work on the product to which the recommendation relates? The company that produces the product? The industry? Everyone else in the world but the reader? The Professor stands firm in altogether avoiding use of first person

in any technical information, including recommendations.

Effective Forms of Recommendations

To choose the best form of a recommendation, the professor's students need to consider the context. Most of the situations in the preceding examples would be more effective if they included a label and an imperative verb. Examples:

Recommendation: Use the mouse, rather than the keyboard, to efficiently navigate through the information center.

Recommendation: Set the value of MAXVAL to 10 unless you are using LIMIT=5.

Generally, this label-imperative form of recommendation works well. However, the Professor acknowledges that using labels and direct imperatives isn't always possible. Perhaps the recommendation is included in information that has many other types of needed labels and using another label would dilute the clarity and visual effectiveness of the information. Or perhaps the writer knows that the recommendation isn't a strong one and that it applies to only a small subset of users in rare situations. Using a label in this case might exaggerate the importance of the recommendation.

In such cases the Professor accepts recommendations that do not have labels. Examples:

On a window that has seven other labels of five types (Example, Syntax, Prerequisites, Authorization,

> Provide context or rationale with a recommendation.

and Procedure), the writer can write the recommendation in an imperative sentence like this:

For better performance, run the *xyz.exe* file from the drop-down list rather than from the command line.

For a recommendation that applies to only a subset of users, the writer can clearly state the context (conditions or circumstances) for the recommendation. The writer can then follow the context information with an imperative recommendation like this:

If the three other approaches do not fix the problem, run the program from the command line until you apply the fix to this problem.

The Professor is certain that her students, armed with this lesson about recommendations, will never write an ineffective recommendation again. When, however, her students work on information that someone else originally wrote, they might need to determine the best way to turn an ineffective recommendation into an effective one. For these writers, the Professor offers some sage advice:

Recommendation: When transforming an ineffective recommendation into an effective one, try to include either context or rationale for the rec-

ommendation. State the recommendation using an imperative verb.

All the examples of effective recommendations in this lesson do just that. Providing context or rationale with a recommendation helps users decide whether to follow the recommendation.

The Professor hopes that her students start this year with a commitment to use effective recommendations in their technical information.

*Copyright 2003 by IBM Corporation. Used with permission. Professor Grammar is an advisor to the IBM Santa Teresa Laboratory Editing Council. Each month she sends a lesson to the technical writers at the Laboratory. Many of the Professor's lessons are based on tenets described in the Prentice-Hall book **Developing Quality Technical Information: A Handbook for Writers and Editors**, recently authored by the Council.*

Answers to *Three Managras to Solve*

1. Slot machines
2. Snooze alarms
3. Contradiction

New PCS-sponsored Book

Communication Patterns of Engineers

By Carol Tenopir and Donald W. King

Communication Patterns of Engineers examines how engineers communicate and explores the factors that affect their communication choices. It identifies differences in communication among engineering specialities. It explains how their information use affects their work and how the best engineers use information resources in their work. The authors also discuss several communication models, including a model they conceived and have found useful in their extensive communication research over the years. A discussion of information output, including the importance of writing well, is included. Since the scholarly journal literature is an important resource for engineers, trends observed over the past 25 years in authorship, information seeking, and reading patterns are discussed along with what is happening with the introduction of electronic journals. A comprehensive bibliography of works on engineers' and scientists' communication habits and patterns is included.

Carol Tenopir is a professor in the School of Information Sciences at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville; and ***Donald W. King***, a statistician, is a research professor in the School of Information Sciences, University of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.
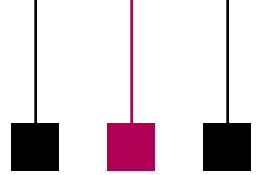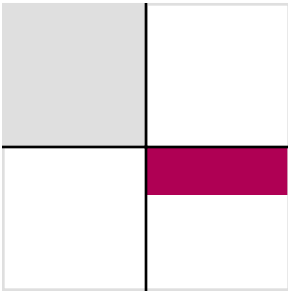
IEEE members receive a 15 percent discount on Wiley-IEEE Press titles purchased at the *http://www.wiley.com* Web site.

Call for AdCom Nominations

By George Hayhoe

The Professional Communication Society is managed by an administrative committee (AdCom) comprising 18 volunteers who work to assure that our society serves its members, the IEEE, and the field of technical and professional communication. If you are interested in a higher level of involvement in PCS and IEEE, I urge you to consider being a candidate for the AdCom. Elections are held each year to fill six at-large positions with three-year terms. AdCom members-at-large must be both PCS and IEEE members (i.e., a higher level of membership than affiliate). Each year, three members-at-large are selected by vote of the members of PCS and three by vote of the current AdCom.

Typically, AdCom members attend three business meetings each year.

For the past two years, however, one of those meetings has been held via conference call. AdCom members also engage in e-mail discussions between meetings.

Each member-at-large has an opportunity to provide leadership in the society by, for example, chairing a standing or an ad hoc committee, serving as a society officer, or playing a lead role in an upcoming International Professional Communication Conference (IPCC). Although AdCom members are volunteers and are expected to seek travel support from their employers, PCS currently provides up to USD 1200 yearly for attending the three meetings; the travel allowance is USD 2000 for AdCom members outside North America.

You need not be a member of the AdCom to play a role in these and other PCS activities. There's plenty of rewarding work for anyone who wants to volunteer by contacting Tom Orr, our volunteer coordinator, at *t-orr@ieee.org*. Nevertheless, for those of you with a special desire and exciting ideas, working with the AdCom can be both significant and rewarding.

If you're interested, or know someone who might be, please contact George Hayhoe, chair of the nominating committee, at *g.hayhoe@ieee.org* by 15 June. You can learn more about our society by visiting *http://www.ieeepcs.org/*.

The author is a member of the AdCom and program chair for IPCC 2004.