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Elections!

Ryan Martin, STC Snake River Chapter President



The STC – Snake River Chapter elections will be held this May. You will receive voting ballots for the election of officers onto the administration council for 2009. We will send the ballots electronically like we did last year to save on postage and paper. STC members who selected either the classic or electronic membership options will receive the ballots.

The following council positions still need volunteers:

- 2nd Vice President (Membership) – Answers questions about STC membership and welcomes new members
- Public Relations Manager – Helps to advertise chapter meetings and other events

The following are elected council positions that have people who are interested in them but chapter members can also run for the positions:

- President – Heads the administrative council and is responsible for all operations of the chapter
- 1st Vice President (Programs) - Develops programs for monthly meetings and schedules speakers, meeting places, and meeting dates
- Treasurer – Maintains the finances for the chapter
- Secretary - Takes minutes at administrative council meetings and prepares correspondence related to chapter business

As someone who has served on the council in one capacity or another, let me assure you that volunteering is very rewarding. You can also use your council service to bolster your resume.

Serving on the council is fun, and we have a great group of people to serve with so I encourage you to please volunteer. Our being able to have new members on the council helps to ensure that the chapter stays strong.

Please email me at president@stc-src.org if you have any questions or are interested in serving on the council.

April

Our April chapter meeting was Wednesday, April 9th, 2008. Our programs manager, Dr. Russell Willerton, gave an overview of readability for technical communicators.

Date: Wednesday, April 9th, 2008

Time: 7:00pm

Location: Boise State University, Liberal Arts Building, Room 206

Lunch & Learn - April 15th

Our April TV IIBA Lunch & Learn was April 15th! Peggy Jordan was our guest and she loves words. She started writing and reading at age 5, hasn't stopped since, and never tires of searching for a better way to say the right thing. As the owner of Working Words Copywriting, Peggy translates rough ideas into clean, clear content for clients ranging from sole proprietors to government agencies to Fortune 500 firms. Peggy is also an expert presenter and facilitator who leads an ongoing series of business-book writing workshops for consultants and entrepreneurs.

Date: Tuesday, April 15th, 2008

Time: TBA (RSVP for confirmation)

Location: Perkins Restaurant at Broadway & Front St.

Our Lunch & Learn program is open to all, but requires an RSVP. Details for the next Lunch & Learn will be available on the website this fall.

Networking Dinner on Indexing - April 19th

Cheryl Landes, president of the Pacific Northwest Chapter of the American Society for Indexing (PNW/ASI), will be in Boise on April 19th for a networking dinner focused on indexing. She will be at the Applebee's near the Boise Towne Center at 7845 West Emerald and invites chapter members (and any others interested in indexing) to join her at 5:30pm.

May

The May activity is the STC annual conference. This year, it's June 1-4. <http://www.stc.org/55thConf/register/index.asp>.

June

The June meeting is a cookout and will be held Tuesday, June 17th (tentative). Russell Willerton, our current programs manager, will reserve the Quarry View Park site for the cookout, or our outgoing president, Ryan Martin, will host it at his house.

SIDENOTES

Corporate Partners

We would like to thank ExecuTrain, H&W, iLevel by Weyerhaeuser (formerly Trus Joist), Barnes & Noble, and Boise State University for generously donating their facilities for chapter functions. We would also like to thank SolutionPro for hosting our website.

Advertising

Limited advertising space is available in The Sidebar. For rates and guidelines, send us an e-mail (council@stc-src.org) with the words ADVERTISE STC-SRC in the subject line.

Web Accessibility and Technical Writing

by Barbara Casaly, Boston Chapter member

Increasingly, organizations have become aware of the need or requirement to post accessible Web content. Some reasons for this mandate include good business practice, the website's customer base, government requirements, fear of legal action, or bad PR for inaccessible content.

Technical writers often write content (HTML-tagged pages or downloadable documents) that is posted on websites. We are in an excellent position to create accessible Web content and documents with the skills we already possess combined with an awareness of how to increase the accessibility of a Web page or document.

This article provides an overview of Web accessibility and assistive technology, and some of the key ways to make content more accessible.

What Is Web Accessibility?

"Accessible" means that people are able to use a Website even under limiting conditions.

To be accessible, content posted on the Web should be:

- Perceivable (by seeing, hearing, or touching). For example, a blind user should be able to use a screen reader to listen to and navigate a Website.
- Operable (device independent). For example, a user who is unable to use a mouse should be able to use the keyboard or some other technology to activate links on a Web page or to move from field to field in a Web form.

Websites are primarily visual media. For the Web, accessibility issues primarily relate to visual limitations (poor vision, color blindness, and blindness) and motor skills (difficulty using or inability to use a mouse or other pointing device). Blind users typically present the greatest challenge because they use screen readers that interpret, or attempt to interpret, the information on the Web page or document and in the underlying code.

Less common issues that affect the use of the Web are hearing limitations, which are an issue for multimedia on the Web. Learning disabilities, dyslexia, and epilepsy also create challenges for the Website user.

Why Should We Care About Accessibility?

In the same way that curb cuts and wheelchair ramps have become more common in providing access to buildings, accessibility of Websites is being scrutinized by individuals and by groups. Organizations are starting to think about accessibility, and lawsuits or threatened legal action require them to think about it and act.

Accessibility, usability, and search engine optimization generally go hand-in-hand. The more accessible a Website, the more usable, and the more likely that search engine crawlers will find and index an organization's Web pages.

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Assistive Technology

Assistive technology (AT) is available to help make Websites more perceivable and operable. Wikipedia describes assistive technology as follows: "AT promotes greater independence for people with disabilities by enabling them to perform tasks that they were formerly unable to accomplish, or had great difficulty accomplishing, by providing enhancements to or changed methods of interacting with the technology needed to accomplish such tasks." Screen magnifiers, such as ZoomText® Magnifier, enlarge screen text. Screen readers, such as JAWS® or Window-Eyes®, read the text on the screen and interpret the underlying code.

It is easy to grasp how the text and graphics on a screen can be enlarged without having a demonstration. The enlargement provides the user with the view of a much smaller portion of the screen and may require more scanning of the screen to comprehend the information.

Screen readers are harder to grasp for someone who has never used one or seen a demonstration of its use. Screen readers present information about the program and document or Web page. In addition, they read alternative text, if available about any images or non-textual elements. The user can access a list of headings (tagged with heading tags) and a list of hyperlinks. Forms, when coded with accessibility in mind, allow the screen reader to associate the field label with the field, and not simply state "text box" with no information about what information to provide in that text box. Tables, when coded to be accessible, allow the screen reader to associate a row, column heading, or both, with each table cell.

Creating Accessible HTML Content

The following are a few tips for making Web (HTML) content more accessible:

- Use heading tags (<h1>, <h2>, and so forth) to give the document structure. Do not use bold, italics, a larger font size, or class attributes to denote document headings. Screen readers can generate a list of headings based on heading tags. Screen reader users can sort the heading list in various ways (document order, heading level order, or alphabetical order), scroll through the heading list, and navigate to a heading on the page to begin reading from that location.
- Use standard HTML tagging, and use the tags for their intended purpose. For example, screen readers interpret lists that use list tags (, , and tags), announcing the presence of a list, the number of items in the list, and each item as it reads through the list.
- Use descriptive text for hyperlinks.
- Screen readers can generate a list of the links on the page, listing the link text in document order or alphabetically. Screen reader users can sort and scroll through the link list and move to a link location on the page or follow the link to its destination. Descriptive and unique hyperlink text makes this list usable. "Click here," "Learn more," or ">>" do not provide any useful information in a link list.
- Provide a text equivalent ("alt text") for images. This text (specified as an alt attribute for the tag) should briefly describe the image. For images with hyperlinks, the text should describe the purpose of the link. For purely decorative images, the alt text should be blank (alt=""), so the screen reader will skip over the image.

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Web Accessibility, Cont'd...

- Do not use color as the sole means of conveying information. For example, use color and an asterisk to denote a required field in a form.
- Use sufficient color contrast between background and foreground and within images. Be aware of the order that text is read by the screen reader. Screen readers read tabular information row by row and from left to right. For data tables, HTML attributes can provide information about row and column headings.

Creating Accessible Word Documents

Technical writers may write documents in Microsoft Word that are converted to PDF for downloading from a Website. The way the document is written and formatted can have significant impact on the accessibility of the PDF file.

- Use a Word template (.dot file) rather than the Normal style with formatting applied to individual paragraphs or characters. Use standard Word styles, such as Heading 1, Heading 2, List Bullet, List Number, and Body Text. Heading styles allow screen readers to generate a heading list that can be ordered in various ways and that allow the screen reader user to navigate to a specific location in the document to begin reading.
- Add alternative text to images. Double-click the image, and from the Web tab, enter the text that briefly describes the image.
- Avoid adding unnecessary complexity to the Word document. For example, adding an image to the header or footer of a document creates problems for screen readers when converted to PDF because the image may have no associated alt text.
- Use conversion software that creates an accessible PDF. Adobe® Acrobat™ Professional can create an accessible PDF file, and accessibility features have been added with each new release of Acrobat. Ensure that Acrobat settings create a tagged document that is enabled for access by screen readers. Check the document for accessibility in Adobe Acrobat Professional using a Full Check. Specify the language for the document in Acrobat, and fix any flow issues identified. Using styles and adding alternative text in Word will go a long way to making an accessible document.

Conclusion

Web accessibility is not an exact science, and there is no way to make Web content 100% accessible to everyone. I hope this article gives you some food for thought, ideas for discussion, and perhaps even for debate. If you would like to discuss Web accessibility in more depth, you can reach me by email (bcasaly@comcast.net). If you are interested in delving further into this topic, a Special Interest Group meeting might be the right setting for a demonstration and discussion.

This article was originally published in the Boston Broadside newsletter for the Boston STC Chapter. Barbara Casaly is a contractor/consultant who specialized in Web accessibility while employed by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. She contributed to the information in the Mass.Gov Accessibility Guidance section, <http://www.mass.gov/accessibility>.

2008 STC Snake River Chapter Election

from Ryan Martin, Current STC Snake River Chapter President

The annual STC election will be held in April, 2008, and only members who have paid their dues by February 28, 2008, will be eligible to vote.

An option on the dues renewal forms and new membership applications for 2008 allows members to receive their ballots via e-mail. In March, members who selected this option will be e-mailed voting instructions. Members who did not select this option will receive their ballots by first-class mail.

Be sure to renew your membership to have a say in STC's future!

Here is the list of the admin council members for next year:

Elected Positions

President – Russell Willerton

1st Vice-President (Programs) – Amaya Berriochoa

2nd Vice-President (Membership) - Vacant

Treasurer – Angela Fleishmann

Secretary – Teresa Sherman

Inherited Position

Immediate Past President – Ryan Martin

Appointed Positions

Public Relations Manager - Vacant

Newsletter Editor – Adrienne Martin

Web Content Manager – (Tentative) Jeff Carter

Employment Liaison - Darla Scott

We will hold the elections in May. We will send the ballots and collect the votes electronically again like last year. If someone shows interest in running for the office that you want to hold next year, we'll add your name to the ballot. Contact Ryan Martin at rtmartin@cablone.net for more information.



ABOUT THE SNAKE RIVER CHAPTER



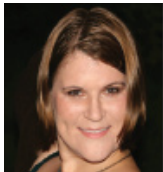
Ryan Martin



Russell Willerton



Darla Scott



Angela Fleischmann



Theresa Sherman

Elected Council Members

President: Ryan Martin (president@stc-src.org)

1st Vice President/Programs: Russell Willerton (programs@stc-src.org)

2nd Vice President/Membership: Theresa Sherman (membership@stc-src.org)

Secretary: Angela Fleischmann (secretary@stc-src.org)

Treasurer: Sherry Hamilton (treasurer@stc-src.org)

Immediate Past President: Kit Brown (pastpresident@stc-src.org)

Appointed Council Members

Web Content Manager: Jeff Carter (webmaster@stc-src.org)

Newsletter Editor: Adrienne Martin (newsletter@stc-src.org)

Employment Liaison: Darla Scott (employment@stc-src.org)

ABOUT THE SIDEBAR NEWSLETTER



Adrienne Martin
Newsletter Editor

The Sidebar is the official publication of the Snake River Chapter (SRC) of the Society for Technical Communication (STC). Issues are published monthly from September to May. The design and layout of this newsletter are ©2007 STC.

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The Sidebar invites writers to submit articles that they wish to be considered for publication. We welcome contributions, book and product reviews, letters, and articles that are relevant to the field of technical communication. Content is due the 26th of every month. Your text may be edited to conform to the style guidelines and space restrictions of the newsletter.

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