

TECHNI

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WINTER 2008



The Technology Workshop, Inc. Newsletter

We Need it Yesterday!!!



ANATOMY OF A SUCCESSFUL PROJECT

How quickly can you write an operator's manual for us?

We are used to getting phone calls like this! Many times, preparation of an operator's manual, service guide, or training manual is one of the last things that takes place in the product development timeline. Since the content of these documents depends entirely on the form and function of the final product, project planners and developers are reluctant to start documentation too early for the following reasons:

- **Cost.** Believe it or not, one of the biggest factors in the cost of a documentation project is its elapsed time. Makes sense once you realize that one or more writers are usually assigned at least part-time for the duration of the documentation project.
- **Waste.** The longer a project lasts, the more likely it is that the product will change, requiring that perfectly good documents that were prepared earlier will have to be updated or even redone.
- **Resource nibbling.** The earlier that a documentation project is started, the more time that developers will have to devote to writers, explaining the product, its features, and its use.

Several years ago, we received just such a "We Need it Yesterday" phone call from Maher Terminals LLC, the operator of large shipping terminals in Port Elizabeth, New Jersey and other locations. Maher was introducing a broad range of new software products designed to support the maritime and transport industries.

Believe it or not, one of the biggest factors in the cost of a documentation project is its elapsed time.

Within one day of the phone call, a three-member team from Technology Workshop visited Maher, where we observed a nearly final version of their new product line.

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Greetings from TWI... ❄️❄️❄️

Hello! Whenever we tell someone what we do for a living, it is not unusual to receive a wide-eyed stare and a comment such as "Oh my gosh, that must be boring!" Usually, we don't bring it up unless someone asks.

Well, it isn't boring. All of us are detail-oriented people, and we believe that each component of a product, including the documentation, must be outstanding for the product to be successful. We see the operator's manual (or the service manual, training program, product lifecycle documentation, and validation documentation) as important and very visible parts of the final product, and we enjoy seeing them in use. Finally, we very much enjoy working with each of you, and we find it most satisfying to help you launch a vital new system.

We also enjoy working with a variety of clients. Each year, we are delighted to hear from new clients (see the next page!) and we are always thrilled when one of our long-standing clients calls us with another project. A great big "thank you" to our long-time clients for your continued business and also to our new clients for joining us. We will have a great time!

We wish each and every one of you a very peaceful and relaxing holiday season, and we look forward to working with you in 2008.

Alan Runck
President, Technology Workshop, Inc.

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New Client Spotlight

Some recent new clients have helped us diversify into some new product lines and services:

- **Command Financial Press, Inc.**, in New York City, developed the Command Automated Publishing System (CAPS) to automate preparation of financial documents. We prepared the user manuals for the prospectus module (PCAPS) and more recently the shareholder reports module (SCAPS).
- Swimming instructions? No, we are not yet that diversified, but we are working with Jan Emler, founder and president of **Emler Swim School** to create a Site Director Manual for her five aquatic facilities in northern Texas. Award-winning classes at Emler Swim School range from acclimating babies to water to training teenage competitive swimmers.
- **LifeNet Health Inc.**, based in Virginia Beach, VA, is a leader in the engineering of bioimplants and is a leading organ and tissue donation agency. We are assisting LifeNet by preparing their software lifecycle documents and disaster recovery procedures.
- **MediCepts, Inc.** is right down the street from our Florida office. MediCepts developed a non-invasive passive motion system for treating neck and low back pain. We wrote operation and service manuals for the device, and we prepared interactive online training procedures for their field service personnel.
- **9 Months Up, 9 Months Down, LLC** (Long Island, NY) developed a speedometer/computer that is designed for installation on a stroller. Visit their Web site, www.strollometer.com, to read about their invention, and browse to the *How it Fits* page to see some of our work.

- **Stiefel Laboratories, Inc.** has specialized in prescription and over-the-counter dermatology products for over 150 years. We have been writing requirements documents, installation qualifications, and operational qualification protocols for Stiefel.
- **Telemetrys Inc.** is the worldwide leader in broadcast, educational, industrial, and military camera control systems. They recently installed an operational television camera control system for NASA at the Kennedy Space Center, and we wrote the operations and maintenance manuals and the acceptance testing procedures for the system.

Hello, New Rochelle

Two years ago, we moved our office to New Rochelle, NY, located on the north shore of the Long Island Sound. We are now 20 miles northeast of New York City, and this has proven to be an ideal location, with great access to I-95, trains, and LaGuardia.

We are up on the second floor of a nice quiet building (see below) with great neighbors. Stop in and say hello!



INFORMATION



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Technology Workshop, Inc. is a team of technical writers, engineers, and artists. We write user's manuals, online help, and service manuals. We also create Web-based training programs, and we write product requirements documents and validation protocols.

We will do an exceptional and cost-effective job for you. Give us a milestone and we will meet it!

VOICES FROM THE WORKSHOP

Joyce Brendle



The 30-mile trek to the old Nanuet office, definitely! In winter, it often took 1½ hours to get there when roads were icy or the Tappan Zee Bridge was backed up.

I understand you once won a rather exciting race with a cart full of groceries. Tell us about it:

I consider myself a good sailor and kayaker, but have yet to live down an event that almost curtailed a vacation, not to mention my life. Right after Dan and I were married, we chartered a sailboat in the San Juan Islands (between Washington State and Vancouver Island, BC), for a week of sailing the pristine waters.

I was in charge of provisions, and purchased food and an ample amount of wine and beer, which I loaded into a cart for transport down a gangplank to the boat. It was low tide so the ramp was steep.

For some stupid reason, I started off *pulling the cart behind me*, but quickly realized it was too heavy to manage. I took off running with the

cart burning rubber behind me! I barely beat the cart down the ramp.

My new husband watched with horror and bewilderment, but when the cart came to an abrupt stop upon hitting the dock, he was relieved to see that not one of the bottles of wine were broken! The rest of the trip—and the start to our marriage—was smooth sailing.

Joyce began technical writing for the State of New York, preparing standard operating procedures. She has since written documentation and marketing materials for a host of industries, including investment banking, advertising, database management software for the PC, and health insurance. She joined Technology Workshop as a technical specialist in 2001, writing documentation, help systems, presentations, and validation protocols. She and her husband Dan have a son and a daughter.

What did you do before joining TWI in 2001?

I was a writer and account executive at a small ad agency. Because of the agency's size, each of us had many roles. I did everything from writing copy, participating in client meetings and placing ads, to stuffing envelopes.

You work full time, are raising two teenagers, and were recently the president of your neighborhood association. What do you do in your spare time?

I enjoy cooking, jewelry making, and crocheting. My daughter is a senior in high school and hopes to attend an art college. My son is a sophomore in college. I have to make appointments just to see them.

Now that the kids have their own activities, my husband Dan and I are planning to get back into sailing and hope to buy a J-22 soon.

Would you rather camp at Lake George or go snowboarding?

While my family likes both camping and snowboarding, I'll choose snowboarding, well, skiing actually, as long as the temperature is above 25 degrees.

What was your favorite assignment at TWI?

I have really enjoyed two recent assignments, with Maher Terminals and with Command Financial Press. Both allowed me to learn about new environments.

In order to write operator's manuals for Maher Terminals, I

had to learn about the logistics and rules for loading container ships. And, thanks to my work at Command Financial, I now understand how a financial prospectus is put together.

What was your least favorite assignment (no names please)?

"I enjoy the challenge of figuring out how each client's industry works."

Tech Writing Bloopers!

Here are some errors that we made (and that we corrected!) which made us chuckle!

Freudian Slip

Anal Runck

Alan slipped up while signing a letter.

Get a life!

Click the Start button. The fun begins.
It should have said, The run begins.

Oops!

The product's initials were GDDM.

Spell-Check told us to change it to G-- damn instead!

Unsanitary Documentation

lick Enter.

Instead of **click** Enter, we accidentally dropped the c! How often do you clean your keyboard?

Pooing Procedures

In describing a blood screening process, we should have written Pooling Procedures. Yuk!

Stimulating project? Hmm...

Fill in the bland.

Our work might not always be exciting, but these clients probably wouldn't have appreciated us calling their procedure **bland**.

SUCCESSFUL PROJECTS

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1)

Having taken fast and furious notes, we spent the next 24 hours back at our office, learning everything we could about Maher, their product line, and transport software in general.

Forty-eight hours later, we delivered a fixed-price proposal that outlined our plan and timeline to prepare the user documentation for their five new applications and summarized the content for each manual.

Maher called the next day informing us that even though we were bidding against another technical writing organization with years of experience in the maritime industry, our proposal blew them out of the water. We didn't let Maher down, and they are still among our favorite clients today.

Here's how we do it:

The Investigation

We start by learning about the clients, their product line, and their industry. We learn as much as we can by reviewing client documents, doing online research, and

examining the product (if it's available).

The Proposal

Next, we prepare a written proposal that spells out what we will deliver, the delivery date, and the project cost. The more detailed the proposal, the less likely there will be any misunderstandings.

We start by learning about the clients, their product line, and their industry.

Our proposals usually include a preliminary table of contents, which may be as brief as chapter headings, or may get down into headings and sub-headings, depending upon the information that is available.

The Work

Writing begins when the proposal is approved. We work in Microsoft Word, Adobe FrameMaker, Quark, RoboHelp, or whatever application suits the client's requirements.

We're happy to work with a style and layout clients have standardized on, and include existing logos and graphics, or we'll develop a new format as the project demands.

The Delivery

Proof, proof, proof. Online review and spell check do not ensure that a document is ready for delivery. We learned long ago that each document must be printed, and then headers, footers, page breaks, fonts, and cross-references must be verified. We use a long checklist to ensure that each document is correct.

Projects generally require more than one draft. We can work with reviewer comments in the form of scribbled notes, tracked changes in MS Word, Adobe Framemaker revisions marked with change bars, comments on PDF documents, on-site reviews, or whatever makes sense to our client.

The Follow-Up

Our proposal always includes a time for unlimited revisions after the final product delivery. We also follow up to make sure that expectations of our client were met, and we maintain copies of all documents in case future updates are required.

Give us a milestone and we will meet it!



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