Communicator

The Institute of Scientific and Technical Communicators

Winter 2012

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Getting on the wagon

Recognising that you are a technical communicator is the first step to success. Andrew Peck **explains the process.**

There's a lot to be said for being quiet, unobtrusive and not drawing attention to oneself and I envy those who successfully adopt that strategy. I am not so much a diplomat as 'one of the reasons why diplomats were invented'. In light of this, I volunteered to write for *Communicator*.

I won't be offering pearls of wisdom about the production of technical documentation. Far more learned colleagues do that with great effect elsewhere in this journal. Instead, I'm putting my experiences and personal journey towards a career as a technical communicator on display. For the learned colleagues already mentioned, it may cause them to reminisce. For other junior technical communicators it may provide some solace that they are not alone, and that someone is empathising at a distance. So, without further ado…

How did I get here?

Starting a new career can be like waking up after one of those years that starts as a series of nights out, and ends with an impaired liver.

I have sampled widely from the buffet of higher education (separate degrees in Theology, Molecular Science and an MA in English Language Teaching are some of the highlights). I have also lived in a variety of exotic locales (exotic in terms of the food poisoning on offer, not the dancers) learning new cultures and languages in order to survive. However, in most of these roles, I eventually found myself as the person good with the computers and words.

Hi, my name's Andrew, and I'm a technical communicator

I started working as a technical communicator in July 2012 and I first had to learn how to explain my job to other people. Clearly Stated, my employer, specialises in software documentation and the delivery of writing training courses. Most software types know what a technical communicator is, more or less, but I've fielded questions from others over whether the book I'm writing is set in space! Explaining what I do is great practice for the rest of my role as a technical communicator. After all, if I couldn't explain what I do for a living, I'd not be much use at explaining how to operate Application X in order to achieve world domination.

I go to meetings…

I attended TCUK this year, which was a fascinating experience. Hopefully, some of you will remember me from the conference: I was going for cheerfully enthusiastic and trying to soak up as much as possible. It was nice to meet some of those I'll be interacting with over the next few years, and to realise that 'technical communicators' are a varied and quite eclectic bunch whose interests range from accessible forms for the proletariat through to the gritty underbelly of DITA and structured documentation.

… and I'm getting help!

The ISTC has talked to me about mentoring, and I am gradually building a professional network through my Twitter account and other means. I've always valued education, and after much deliberation, I've decided to take Sheffield Hallam's MA in Technical Communication. This will enable me to develop both as an author and as a professional. The beauty of postgraduate study is that it allows, and intends, the student to take ownership of their own learning and development, in addition to providing a qualification that employers respect.

What does this mean for me?

I am genuinely excited by what tomorrow's technology will offer technical communicators for the delivery of technical communication (and I say communication, because this could include audio, video and text). I feel that an MA is not just going to give me skills for being a technical communicator now, but give me the wherewithal to develop the skills I'll need as a technical communicator 20 years from now.

So, there we go. My first few months in technical communications, together with 'what happens next'. Over the course of the year I'll keep you up to date with my progress as a professional technical communicator. **C**

Get involved
Since TCUK12, I've helped to start the A-Z of Technical Communications wiki.
Members of the ISTC can get involved at www.istc.org.uk/get-involved

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Further reading
Robins, L (2012) 'Mentoring scheme for Junior members' *Communicator*, Summer 2012: 7