Communicator

The Institute of Scientific and Technical Communicators

Winter 2011

Why internationalisation is an opportunity

Using FrameMaker for a complex book

Interacting with theatre scripts

Creating video for user assistance

The UK Technical Communication Awards 2011

The Instructional Class this year was won by Alison Peck with her
Guide to ROSEGold, **a new Interflora order management system.**

Timing was on my side for the Technical Communication Awards this year. I had just started working on the *Guide to ROSEGold* when I began to see reminders about the awards, and I mentioned them to the project team at our initial meeting. Asking for permission to enter the guide that early in the process meant that I was not desperately trying to obtain authorisation as the deadline approached, removing some of the pressure.

The guide is a standard user guide, which makes extensive use of screenshots and captions to provide information to an audience who are – as might be expected from their jobs as florists – extremely visual in their communication style. This theme was built on for the 'information' screens within the application, which did not fall into a particular task but instead provided an overview with links to different elements. Describing these procedurally was impossible – annotating a populated screenshot was a much more effective way of explaining what the florists could see. I was very pleased that these sections of the guide were noted and liked by the judges.

Developing this guide was a collaborative affair, with feedback from the project team and testing department as well as – most importantly – a small group of florists drawn from those who were moving to the new system.

The layout that was chosen for the guide – with the majority of the text on the left and the images on the right – plus the desire to use aesthetically pleasing arrows and other highlighting elements (borders and tinted boxes) encouraged me to create the document in InDesign, an application I had only tried before for very small personal projects. Since then I have used the expertise I gained, on other projects.

Overall, I was very pleased with the result, as were the project team at Interflora. I felt I had something that I was happy to enter into the competition.

Since winning the award, Phase 2 of the ROSEGold project has completed, including an update of the documentation to incorporate a number of new features.

Entering for the first time

In common, I expect, with many technical communicators, I find it difficult to enter the ISTC Technical Communication Awards. This is not because of any difficulty with the entry process, or the support received from the Awards team (which was straightforward and encouraging, respectively). It is because much of my work is not in the public domain, and obtaining permission to enter it can be problematic, to say the least. Some clients are concerned about commercial confidentiality, and (depending on the sector) it can be difficult to find someone who is authorised to make that decision.

As I have already stated, the timing this year was ideal for me. I have learnt from this, and have already incorporated a simple question to my 'project briefing' document, reminding me to ask a potential client if it might be possible in principle to submit an entry based on the work, even if only a short extract could be used. Asking the question early on in the process may help me to get a few more positive answers.

What does winning mean to me?

The Technical Communication UK Awards are confirmation from my peers that my work is of a good standard. From a personal perspective, that means a lot. Knowing that the judges themselves are experienced technical communicators makes the comments and feedback extremely valuable to me.

From a commercial perspective, as a freelance technical communicator this is something I can put on my website as an undisputable fact. Something that gives a clear indication to prospective clients that I can deliver.

Finally, I feel motivated to continue to learn and improve. Who knows, if the timing is right I may enter again another year.

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- The project team at Interflora: Nicole Moore, Josie Thurston, Kate Baxter and many others, who answered my questions and guided me through the system.
- Martin Block, for his inspiring talk at TCUK 2010. See Block, M (2011) 'More pictures, fewer words', *Communicator*, Spring 2011:35
- Doc-to-Help, the award sponsors, who also kindly presented me with a licence for the Doc-to-Help product. **C**

Alison Peck receiving the award from Doc-to-Help, who sponsored the class.

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