

# sound.views

the newsletter of the Puget Sound Chapter of STC

www.stc-psc.org

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## Globalizing Technical Communication

By Robert Reynolds

Leah Guren is the owner/operator of Cow TC ([www.cowtc.com](http://www.cowtc.com)). She has been active in the field of technical communication since 1980 as a writer, manager, and consultant. She now devotes her time to consulting and teaching courses and seminars in technical communication, primarily in Israel, Europe, and the United States. Her clients include some of the top high-tech and biotech companies internationally, including Intel, IBM, Microsoft, Johnson & Johnson, RAD, Cisco, Given Imaging, and Rambam Medical Center. Leah is an internationally-recognized speaker in the field of technical communication and is an Associate Fellow in STC (Society for Technical Communication). She can be reached at [leah@cowtc.com](mailto:leah@cowtc.com).

### How did you end up working in the global market?

I live outside of North America, and I have clients all over. I guess I have been part of the global market for more than 20 years without really thinking about it. I have clients here in Israel, of course, and in the US, but also in Switzerland, the UK, France, Germany, the Netherlands, India, Slovenia, and a few more places.

### What's a typical day like?

I do mostly training and consulting, so I spend a lot of time preparing course material, correcting homework, and researching specific topics. I may have multiple online class sessions in one day. On some days, I may do training on-site. I travel for conferences (there are four key technical communicator (TC) conferences that I present at most years). Right now, I'm also spending a few days a week on-site with one local client, doing product documentation. It all sounds quite chaotic, but I actually enjoy the variety. My dog appreciates the days when I'm working out of my office!

### What role do you play in your discipline?

Trainer and consultant more than anything else. There are so many writers who have fallen into this profession with no formal training. They are smart, capable people, but they never learned how to really THINK like a TC. Therefore, I believe that one of the most effective uses of my time is to teach fundamental concepts of TC theory and application.

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## about sound.views

*Sound Views* is published for members of the Puget Sound Chapter of the Society for Technical Communication.

### Managing Editor

Mary Turpin  
[newsletter@stc-psc.org](mailto:newsletter@stc-psc.org)

### Editorial Staff

Prabita Chandran  
 David Kowalsky  
 Robert Reynolds

### Submissions

All members are welcome to submit articles, comments, and letters. Articles must address topics of interest to technical communicators, especially to those in the Puget Sound region of Washington.

Send articles in Word (doc), Rich-Text Format (RTF), or ASCII (txt) formats to the Managing Editor. Accompanying graphics or photos should be provided as separate files.

The editorial staff reserves the right to edit letters and articles for length and clarity.

The submission deadline for the next issue of *Sound Views* is January 31, 2012.

### Reprints

You may reprint original material appearing in *Sound Views* as long as you acknowledge the source and send a copy of the reprint to the Managing Editor.

For more information about the Puget Sound Chapter of STC, visit the website at [www.stc-psc.org](http://www.stc-psc.org).

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### Skills

**Is there any training you'd suggest for someone who wants to tap into the "global" market?**

Absolutely.

1. First, become aware. I find that most Europeans are far more aware about issues of localization and cross-cultural communication than their American colleagues. Start by learning basic things: units of measurements, times and dates, and recognizing and removing American-centric idiom. A good resource for this is *The Global English Style Guide: Writing Clear, Translatable Documentation for a Global Market*, by John Kohl.
2. Learn the basics of L10N (localization) and I18N (internationalization).
3. Learn about Controlled English (aka Simplified English), but remember this is not the same thing as the Plain English directive in the US, although I enthusiastically support both!
4. Develop better graphics skills; try to simplify text and reduce the word count through better graphics.
5. Learn another language.

### What languages?

Well, you are not going to become fluent in Chinese or learn Spanish at a level where you could write docs in it or translate to it. Learning a language is just one way to become more aware of linguistic pitfalls. People who study other languages develop a better understanding of their own language's grammar. They start to realize that they have been making dangerous assumptions about context and meaning. This is all about awareness.

### What are the implications of not supporting localization and internationalization?

People forget that even if you have a purely local market, you may have users who are not mother-tongue English speakers. So right away, you are making your documentation less accessible to a group of your users. Then, when your company does start doing business in other markets, the localization costs will be far higher if you have not followed basic best practices in your documents. Even something as simple as keeping text

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## chapter contacts

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## Editor's Corner

By Mary Turpin

Each new year brings changes, and this one is no different. After three years as Puget Sound Chapter Newsletter Manager, this issue of *Sound Views* will be my last.

I'm pleased to announce that effective January 2012, *Layne Maheu* is taking over as Newsletter Manager.

Layne is a recent graduate of the Technical Communications Certificate Program at Bellevue College, is the Volunteer Coordinator of the Puget Sound Chapter of the STC. He is the author of the novel, *Song of the Crow*, 2006, Unbridled Books, and his short fiction has appeared in *Ascent*, *Northwest Review*, *Mississippi Review*, and others. He's taught classes in the structuring of fiction at the Richard Hugo House and at the Center for the Sustainable Book Arts on Vashon Island.

The October–December 2011 issue of *Sound Views* includes a review of the book, *Read This Before Our Next Meeting*, by Al Pittampalti, a recap of the November chapter meeting, and an interview with Leah Guren about global technical communication.

The chapter is always looking for volunteers to assist with writing for the newsletter, whether you'd like to help for the year or just for a single issue. Writing for the newsletter is great way to gain additional writing experience. I encourage you to contribute newsletter articles, suggestions, or ideas you have for improving *Sound Views*. Some ideas for articles include career or educational experiences, a review of a software tool, or a review of a relevant book.

Starting in January, 2012 you can reach Layne at [newsletter@stc-psc.org](mailto:newsletter@stc-psc.org).

## Puget Sound STC is on Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn

Puget Sound STC Facebook Group:

[www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=21641844730](http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=21641844730)

Puget Sound STC Twitter:

[twitter.com/STCPugetSound](http://twitter.com/STCPugetSound)

Puget Sound STC LinkedIn Group:

[www.linkedin.com/groups?gid=2009451](http://www.linkedin.com/groups?gid=2009451)

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labels at a separate level from the actual graphic file can save your company a lot of money.

**What tools, if any, do you use?**

I don't do localization projects, so I don't use any specific CAT (computer-aided translation) application or translation memory tools. The best "tool" I use is an awareness of the target audience and the ability to ask the right questions at the right stage of any project.

**Is localization a part of your work?**

Yes and no. One of my clients sent a book out to translation (18 languages) and THEN decided that they needed to make technical changes. I got to apply those changes to the FrameMaker files. Yes, in 18 languages, including character sets that I can't even read. As terrifying as that sounds, it is a fairly common thing. So while I myself don't do translation or localization, I do often find myself fixing and tweaking files for clients.

**Global Outlook**

**How has the currently economic situation affected you?**

I'm very busy right now, so I haven't been directly hit.

**What are some examples of things you need to watch out for, as far as terminology and cultural references?**

There is a lot of bad info out there. I've seen slide shows or presentations with some really idiotic

rules (colors to avoid, things not to do). People are not that stupid or trivial. When it comes to technical product documentation, the real risk is that people won't understand or will misinterpret the instructions, not that they will say, "Egad! They used a picture of a dog!" and take offense. Users are not stupid. So just focus on clear, unambiguous text, clear layout and design, good graphics, and follow best practices for writing for translation. If you can use at least modified Controlled English, you'll be helping the users a lot more than if you just worry about colors and typefaces.

**Are there geopolitical issues to be aware of as well in the TC industry?**

Yes, I think so. Communication is a core necessity for any business. We (TCs) should be at the heart of every organization. Also, technology products are being developed internationally with geographically-diverse teams. TCs are the logical people to hold this all together, to help groups communicate well, and to create the best possible documentation for all users.

*Robert E. Reynolds is now in his fifth year as a technical writer (and second as a DITA processor) after wearing hats as a software tester and landscape designer/ environmental planner. He currently works at EDIFECS in Bellevue, Washington, and he can be reached at [rer22@cornell.edu](mailto:rer22@cornell.edu).*

## About Puget Sound STC Chapter Meetings

Chapter meetings are from 6:00-8:15 PM, usually the third Tuesday of the month, except June, July, August, and December. From 6:00 to 7:00 you can enjoy a light buffet, network, and hear about chapter activities and job announcements. From 7:00 to 8:15, an industry leader or expert in our field presents.

Check the chapter Web site ([www.stc-psc.org](http://www.stc-psc.org)) this summer for updates on information about the September chapter meeting and other fall events. You can keep in touch with the Puget Sound chapter by following us on Twitter ([twitter.com/STCPugetSound](https://twitter.com/STCPugetSound)).

## Book Review: *Read This Before Our Next Meeting*

By David Kowalsky

If you don't complain about workplace meetings, you probably know someone that does. Just like "[Death by PowerPoint](#)" (the popular criticism of slide-based presentations), there is now also "Death by Meeting." Al Pittampalti, founder of The Modern Meeting Company, isn't just another guy complaining about how much he doesn't like meetings; he's actually trying to do something about it by writing *Read This Before Our Next Meeting*.

*Read This* is not your average business book with all the traditional book features (chapters, table of contents, and index), but at only sixty-six pages, it is short enough to get by without them. Pittampalti does not take long to state the problem:

1. We have too many meetings.
2. We have too many bad meetings.

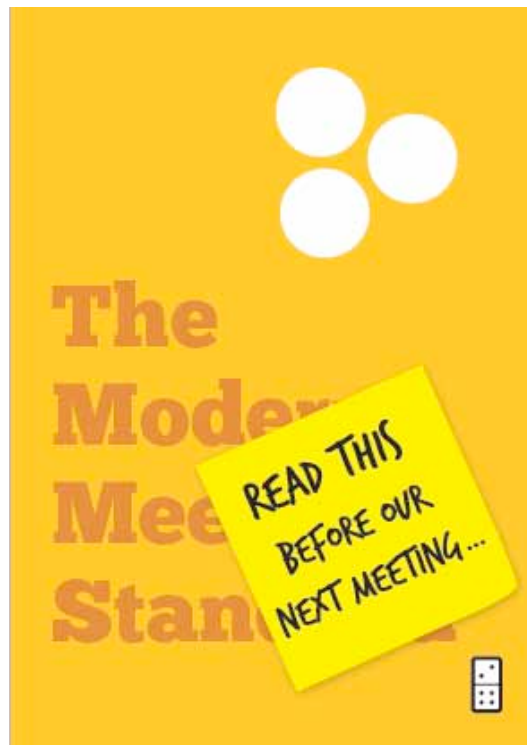
and then goes on to talk about "the two most serious dangers of our current meeting system":

1. Traditional meetings create a culture of compromise.
2. Traditional meetings kill our sense of urgency.

The book doesn't drag on and on about the problems with meetings; within twenty pages Pittampalti introduces his new kind of meeting—The Modern Meeting Standard—a tool that "exists for only one reason: to support decisions (17)."

The rest of the book explains each of the "Seven Principles of Modern Meetings" (see the list below) and ends with a frequently asked questions section.

1. Meet only to support a decision that has already been made.
2. Move fast. End on schedule.
3. Limit the number of attendees
4. Reject the unprepared
5. Produce committed action plans
6. Refuse to be informational. Read the memo, it's mandatory
7. Work with brainstorm, not against them.



*Read This* takes as much of the drudgery out of reading a book on a work-related topic as it possibly can. It is part of the initial slate of books of "The Domino Project," which among other things, are designed to be short and approachable by the majority of the population that doesn't ordinarily seek out books as a source for information.

Pittampalti is serious in the text, but manages to still show a lighter side by making fun of meetings by including "Meeting Bingo" in the inside of the dust jacket. Of course there is no guarantee that *Read This* is going to win over a manager

who holds bad meetings and is resistant to change. But the book is at least an excellent starting point to get ideas to share with others, which if followed, could very well finally end having bad meetings.

*David Kowalsky is a technical writer for NEC Corporation of America and a senior member of STC's Puget Sound Chapter. He can be reached at [david.kowalsky@necam.com](mailto:david.kowalsky@necam.com).*

## Recap of the November STC Puget Sound Chapter Meeting: A Tale of Two Blogs

By Layne Maheu

At November's chapter meeting, Garret Romaine, an STC Fellow from the Willamette Valley Chapter, treated us to the success story of two blogs:

"It's not just, 'If you build it, they will come.' You have to maintain it, sustain it, promote it, sell it, flog it, pump it."

All good advice to any blogger willing to take the traffic to the next level. Garret is largely responsible for two blogs, both very different, and both showcasing different forms of success and value achieved by blogging.

His first example—a blog for the Special Libraries Association Future Ready initiative—was a project with a one-year goal: to have a new blog post every day for that year. The hope was that a blog with constant content would increase the online presence of the Future Ready initiative, further its brand name, and become "a real communication conduit for its members." What really worked were all the LinkedIn, Twitter, and Facebook plug-ins. "They [the librarians] wanted to be seen as future ready. If you're trying to pull something like this off, if you're calling a blog Future Ready, you have to be future ready."

Here are the fabulous totals at year's end:

- 400,00 unique visits
- Over 4,000,000 million hits
- 3,000,000 files checked out
- An offer to buy the site
- Speaking engagement opportunities

Posting each day was key to the site's success. People knew they would see something fresh with every visit. Though constantly prompting members for new blog material posed obvious challenges; Labor Day had Garret coming out with a limerick, and Fourth of July received a haiku.

The second blog comes from Garret's lifelong labor of love. He is what's known in remote circles as a rockhound.

That's rock collector—to you and me.

His interest in rocks goes back to his grandfather, who was a mining attorney back in Eastern Oregon. In lieu of payment, his grandfather sometimes received five-percent of a mine. As a boy on family outings, Garret explored those old caves and started an interest in rocks that took him through two degrees—geography and geology—and has him trekking to this day through all kinds of terrain, to the coast and to the mountains, searching gravel bars, beds of agate. He can wax philosophic about two types of fellow rockhounds:

"Gold prospectors, around the evening campfire, are not likely to give up their sweet spots. But rockhounds are. You should go to Saddle Mountain for the petrified wood, and they'll give you explicit directions, or draw it on a napkin, and they really want to share."

So does Garret.

Branching his love of rocks into his blog, magazine articles, guidebooks, YouTube videos, and Tweets, all helps to further his interest. The pure fun of it comes through as he speaks. The blog keeps his interest fresh. While out in the field, he discovers fellow rockhounds who follow his blog. It establishes his platform as an expert, and helps him land contracts to write guidebooks. Though he still earns most of his income as a technical writer, he echoes Joseph Campbell's follow your bliss, and rockhounding is definitely something he will take with him into retirement.

In both blogs, Garret's approach to gathering a larger audience does not emphasize Search Engine

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Optimizers or a glitzy website, but rather a clear, abiding interest in the subject matter, and constant, regular postings to the site. This approach goes to show that you do not need a high-profile topic to generate hits. In fact, with these two blogs, one can hardly imagine more esoteric, non-flashy topics: the specialized librarian and the rock collector.

This also goes to show you the beauties of the Internet: that no matter how obscure your field of interest, like minds can find each other. The experience can be a career-builder, a life-changer, or just a genuine way to reach out, through the blogosphere.

Visit these two blogs:

Garret Romaine's personal writing blog  
[www.writingdocs.blogspot.com](http://www.writingdocs.blogspot.com)

Special Library Association Future Ready 365  
[futureready365.sla.org](http://futureready365.sla.org)

*Layne Maheu, a recent graduate of the Technical Communications Certificate Program at Bellevue College, is the Volunteer Coordinator of the Puget Sound Chapter of the STC. He is the author of the novel, Song of the Crow, 2006, Unbridled Books, and his short fiction has appeared in Ascent, Northwest Review, Mississippi Review and others. He's taught classes in the structuring of fiction at the Richard Hugo House and at the Center for the Sustainable Book Arts on Vashon Island.*

## Puget Sound STC to Host Monthly Webinars

Sherri Edwards' webinars are interactive sessions for a limited number of participants. You can expect personal attention, open discussion, and opportunities to ask questions regarding specific topic-related areas of interest.

### Webinar: Goal Setting - Getting Focused

Date: January 10th  
 Time: 6:00 PM

Do you feel powerless over your personal life? Your work? Your career? Too much to think about and don't know where to begin? Goal setting is a tactical process to build on outcomes you want

Register at: [resourcemaximizer011012.eventbrite.com](http://resourcemaximizer011012.eventbrite.com)

### Webinar: Managing Multiple Commitments without dropping the ball

Date: February 7th  
 Time: 6:00 PM

Are you tiring yourself out trying to keep up with all of your priorities? Dreading you have too much to do and not enough time to do it? Striving for balance between work commitments and "having a life"? This workshop will show you how to:

Register at: [resourcemaximizer020712.eventbrite.com](http://resourcemaximizer020712.eventbrite.com)

For more information about webinars, see [www.stc-psc.org/webinars.php](http://www.stc-psc.org/webinars.php).