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From the Boston Chapter President

By Steve Greffenius
STC-Boston Chapter President



We're already nearing the midpoint of STC's year, which runs from July 1 to June 30. In sports, halftime calls for rest, pep talks, analysis of the first half, and planning for the

second. We can try to do all those things over the next few weeks, time permitting. Here are a few thoughts to get started:

Rest - I hope you enjoyed the holidays with your friends and family!

Chapter President, Page 2

Web Accessibility and Technical Writing

By Barbara Casaly

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.

Assistive Technology

Assistive technology (AT) is available to help make Websites more perceivable and operable. Wikipedia describes assistive technology as follows:

Web Accessibility, Page 2

Mini-Pep Talk - If you've thought about volunteering but haven't taken that initial step, now's the time. Time to act and don't look back!

Looking Back - The last six months have seen a lot of success in team building and planning. We have a lot to accomplish. The foundation's in place.

Looking Forward - To execute our plans, we need your help. Please join our team and reap the rewards of leadership, new friends, and generous giving. Contribute your ideas and energy you can afford. You'll make a difference you can see, and receive rewards beyond measure.

As you think about how to get involved, please come to one of our programs at the Hilton Garden Inn in Burlington. For details, see the Chapter's calendar of events at <http://www.stcboston.org/php/calendar.php>.

When you're at the program, introduce yourself to me and to other people you meet there. Hand out your business card. Give people an opportunity to get acquainted with you. They'll appreciate it.

As always, feel free to comment on this article or anything else related to our Chapter's direction. Please write to me at sgreffenius@gmail.com, or call me at 781-223-1396.

Wanted: Managing Editor for the Boston Broadside

With only three editions left (March, May and July) in the current STC year, it's time to start looking for someone to take over the Managing Editor's desk here at the *Broadside*.

If you are interested or know someone who might be, please contact Managing Editor Bryan Davis at: boston.broadside@gmail.com. Working on the newsletter and with its staff is a great way to give back to the STC and offers a tremendous networking opportunity.

“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.
- 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.

Writing Your Own Tools and Utilities

By Bill Gruener

The November program presenter, Fred Wersan, a sole writer at MAK Technologies in Cambridge, MA, uses tools every day. Wersan states that these tools make his job easier: button bars and buttons for automating both frequent and not-so-frequent tasks in FrameMaker. These tools are short scripts written in FrameScript, but Wersan is quick to state that there are other tool-creating utilities such as Macro Express (<http://www.wintools.com/automation.htm>).

Why Write Your Own Tools?

Wersan said writing your own tools is sometimes necessary because commercial applications don't always do everything you want them to and third party plug-ins don't necessarily fill in the gaps.

In addition to customizing, writing your own tools also reduces repetitive and sometimes boring work procedures or tasks that you perform every day. Creating your own tools provides quick response to a local (your) need and extends your skills. It also adds value to you and your work and offers you a sense of accomplishment.

General Guidelines for Creating a Tool or Utility

Wersan suggested that candidates for scripts often include procedures that require a repeatable set of keystrokes, a repeatable mix of keystrokes and mouse movements, a long string of characters that can be replaced by a short string, or a string replacement.

Procedures that require mostly mouse-based movements and those assessing the state of an application or reading the contents of windows or dialog boxes do make good scripts, he said.

For tough scripting situations, Wersan suggested using a specialized scripting program such as FrameScript (for Frame only) or Visual Basic (for many applications on the market).

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.

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>.

The Broadside Needs Your Input!

We're always looking for contributions from our readers. If you want to submit an article for publication, send it to Managing Editor Bryan Davis at: boston.broadside@gmail.com.

The following is the publishing and deadline schedule for upcoming issues:

- **March** - Deadline is **Feb. 22**
- **May** - Deadline is **April 25**
- **July** - Deadline is **June 27**

In general, the *Broadside* is published on the second or third week of the month.

Remember, the *Boston Broadside* is for our readers and by our readers, so it's what **you** make of it. Thanks!



Macros

Wersan said creating macros are an excellent way to bundle together formatting or scripting steps into a single process. Good tasks for macros include indexing (inverting entries and adding formatting codes) and text formatting.

Macros are very useful because they repeat a series of common menu commands / keystrokes, Wersan said. With Macros, you can manipulate menus and dialog boxes, control mouse movements and include variables and logic.

When recording a macro, Wersan noted that you should always be aware of timing issues and errors and type a series of commands in a macro editor.

Scripting

Scripting is another useful tool, Wersan said, because you can create button bars for common tasks, control panels for running applications or special scripts, automate UI tasks, create GUIs on top of console-based applications, or automate testing utilities and application configurations.

To create scripts, Wersan suggested using AutoIt, the easiest, most economical tool on the market, which uses a simple scripting language to handle:

- Variables
- Conditional logic
- Loops
- Functions and function libraries
- GUI library

Finally, Wersan said one of the biggest mistakes that you can make when creating a new tool is to do so on a tight deadline. He suggested experimenting with and developing tools during down times when you have the time to learn and correct mistakes.

For more information, Wersan suggested the following resources:

- Macro Express: <http://www.win-tools.com/automation.htm>
- AutoIt: <http://www.autoitscript.com>
- FrameScript: <http://www.frame-script.com/>
- Leximation: <http://www.leximation.com/toolsearch>

2008 Program and Workshop Schedule

The following is the program and workshop schedule for the 2008:

Programs

Date	Program Topic
February 27	STACIES
March 19	Marketing Communications
April 16	Module Writing and Reusability
May 21	Online Showcase
June 11 or 18	End-of-Year Celebration

Workshops

Date	Program Topic
February 2	Usability
April 5	Structured Authoring

Plan to Attend the STACIES on February 27

The STACIES isn't just any awards show! It's your awards show. This event represents the winning entries of the competition sponsored by your professional organization. You want to plan to be at the Garden Hilton in Burlington on February 27th because there are many important opportunities you don't want to miss:

- see the winning entries and pick up ideas
- talk to creators of these entries
- learn about tools used to create winning online entries and why they were chosen
- meet the volunteer judges who evaluated these entries and talk to them about the experience
- hear the comments of someone who has entered and judged in competitions sponsored by two different chapters (you do want to be planning now for next year)
- hear the truly talented and hilarious BossTunes, who create renditions of songs just for us

And, finally, to have fun! This is a great evening and the committee works hard to make it enjoyable for everyone who attends, not just those receiving awards. Since we spend so much of our time creating the kind of work that is being celebrated on this evening, how can you consider staying away? These are the best examples of our work for this year.

We look forward to seeing you on the 27th. Check the chapter website for additional information and to register: www.stcboston.org.

The logo for 'THE STACIES' is rendered in a bold, 3D, metallic font. The letters are thick and have a yellow-to-orange gradient, giving them a three-dimensional appearance as if they are floating above a reflective surface. The background is dark, making the bright, metallic letters stand out prominently.

Chapter Membership Report

By Virginia Adams
Membership Committee Manager

We would like to welcome the following people who joined the Boston Chapter in October and November 2007:

Total STC Members: 14,831

Total Boston Members: 673

New Community Members (2):

- Stephen Doe
- Sarah J. Clark

Members Transferring in (3):

- Trudi Reisner
- Michael J. Rossi
- Marcella C. Carby-Samuels



New member reception held

By Virginia Adams
Membership Committee Manager

On November 14, the Chapter held a new member reception to welcome new and transferred members. The participants had the opportunity to meet the Chapter leadership to find out more about the offerings and to ask questions. On hand to greet the new members were Steven Greffenius, president; Pam Sarantos, first vice president; Kara LeTrieze and Virginia Adams, membership committee; Ellen Lidington, Chapter Webmaster; and Ed Marshall, SIG representative. After the reception, the new members were invited to attend the program as guests of the chapter.



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Society for Technical Communication

www.stc.org

Boston Chapter

www.stcboston.org

Working with a Content Management System

By Arun Jain

Content Management Systems (CMS) have been hot lately. They have become a featured topic in many conferences, including one from the Gilbane Group that is focused solely on content management. The Technical Editing SIG discussed CMS at their December meeting with Neil Perlin leading the discussion. STC-Boston Chapter President Steve Greffenius also shared his experiences in working with a CMS at his new job.

What Is a CMS?

It depends on who you ask. Wikipedia describes it as “a system used to manage the content of a Web site.” But a CMS also manages non-Web content such as printed documents, etc., although managing Web content seems to be the most common use of CMS today.

In the context of technical content, a CMS helps create, manage, and publish many small pieces of content. Essentially, a CMS has the following components:

- Input end or editor
- Storage end
- Extraction and publishing end

In many ways, it is similar to a version control system (VCS), such as ClearCase. Just like a VCS, a CMS is a large repository of content. It provides functionality such as version control, access to historical documents, diffing or automatic comparison, flow control, process control, and workflow control.

Why Has CMS Become a Hot Issue?

In the Web environment, CMS has been widely used for some time. It is now starting to gain acceptance for managing technical content. Shortened product lifecycles, global reach, and ever-expanding delivery formats have vastly increased the available technical content. Add to this the constantly expanding security and compliance requirements, and suddenly keeping track of content on an FTP site is no longer enough. This is where a CMS comes in. It manages the overall process of creating, storing, extracting, publishing, and tracking enterprise-wide content.

As content creation migrates from creating “books” to managing small content chunks (for example, DITA), the number of items grows exponentially. Effectively managing these items requires help from some type of CMS.

Top Reasons for Deploying a CMS

Content management systems vary widely in their scope and capabilities. Enterprises deploy a CMS for many different reasons, including:

- Effective content distribution
- Efficient content reuse
- Single sourcing (effective single sourcing requires the use of metadata – more about this a little later)
- Keeping track of all content, especially if you have a large number of documents
- Managing content chunks if you use an architecture such as DITA



Cost of a CMS Deployment

At the very high end are products such as Documentum that may cost upwards of \$500,000 to buy outright and a similar amount to customize. Most deployments would cost in the tens of thousands of dollars.

Implementation of a CMS also requires a fair bit of design and consulting work up front. For smaller deployments, there is a service from PubNow (www.pubnow.com) that offers a hosted CMS service on a per user/per month basis.

Cost justifying a CMS sometimes proves difficult in a corporate environment. The justification could be built from a variety of angles; in one case, the justification came from the sales department. A business case for a CMS can require ROI calculations, sometimes for as many as five years. Ann Rockley's book, *Managing Enterprise Content*, is a helpful tool to develop a business case for a CMS.

Things to Watch for in a CMS Deployment

As with any new technology deployment, there are things to watch for when implementing a CMS. First, there is a time and money commitment for the initial purchase as well as design, training, and consulting considerations. A CMS will be most effective if its usage is enforced; for example, use of standard templates, so it's important to make sure your organization has the discipline to follow through. You will need time, patience, and resources from many other company departments; thus getting the necessary commitments from other departments is essential in the success of deploying a CMS.

If you plan to deploy a CMS to support a DITA implementation, all DITA-related costs come into play and there is a significant cost to set up DITA initially. For effective search capabilities, you would need to add metadata to your content. This may sometimes trigger a larger effort to develop and work on your ontology. There also is the open question of editing in a DITA environment. Finally, the implementation of a good search engine is an all important issue for an effective CMS deployment.

Resources

Finding good CMS resources presents a problem of having too many, rather than too few, choices. Depending on your perspective, you may have a different view of what a CMS is or what it does. The challenge is to identify the right material that is relevant for managing technical content. Some good resources include:

- Wikipedia at: www.wikipedia.org
- CMS Matrix at: www.cmsmatrix.org
- [Content Management Bible](#), by Bob Boiko
- The Content Wrangler at: www.thecontentwrangler.com

Experience from the Trenches

STC-Boston Chapter President Steve Greffenius noted that he recently took a full-time job managing the CMS implementation at SigmaTel, a fabless chip company with a very large documentation library. The documentation is published on Microsoft Office SharePoint for global use.

The job is essentially managing content for SigmaTel and requires very little writing or editing. In fact, Greffenius said he finds very little time to even learn about the product and technology.

SigmaTel uses the CMS to access, share, and publish the library of SigmaTel documents and this is what Greffenius manages on an everyday basis. SigmaTel does not use CMS for original content creation, which is done using FrameMaker or Word.

Greffenius said he finds that SharePoint is effective for streamlining company processes and for organizing content. But he found that several tasks that seem simple using other tools are difficult using SharePoint. For example, files are difficult to back up in SharePoint. Another task, inserting a dynamic watermark in documents (which is relatively simple in Adobe Acrobat), proved rather difficult with SharePoint.

How Do Editing Skills Transition to Managing a CMS?

Greffenius said he found that his editing experience has provided him with the skills to effectively implement a CMS and to manage the company's content. Although the job requires no copyediting, some of the skills learned as an editor are easily transferable. For example, as an editor, you learn a lot about change management, version control, and document processing. These skills relate well in a CMS world, although in a slightly different context.

Arun Jain is the Founder and President of Bay State Documentation (www.BayStateDocs.com), a Boston-area company that provides technical documentation services. He can be reached at ajain@BayStateDocs.com.

The Broadside Staff

The *Boston Broadside* is published six times throughout the calendar year and would not be possible without the hard work of dedicated volunteers. Many thanks to the following people for their contributions:

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Bryan Davis
Steve Greffenius
Bill Gruener
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Thank you, everyone!

.....

Write for the Broadside

The *Boston Broadside* encourages Chapter members to share their skills, thoughts, and ideas with other professionals in the Chapter.

If you would like to write for an upcoming issue of the *Boston Broadside*, send e-mail to: boston.broadside@gmail.com

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