CyberText Consulting Pty Ltd
Making technical information understandable

Newsletter

Issue #4: September 2002

Welcome!

Welcome to the fourth issue of the quarterly CyberText Newsletter.

Our aim is to help make you more proficient by sharing some productivity hints and tips, and to let you know about some of our services. If you'd like me to address a particular aspect of productivity, let me know.

You have received this newsletter because you are one of our current or previous clients, or because you're a friend/colleague. If you don't want to receive notification of any further issues let me know and I'll remove you from the mailing list.

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I can't live without…

The internet contains a wealth of information—here are some general dictionary sites that I can't live without.

- http://www.m-w.com
- http://www.yourdictionary.com
- http://www.dictionary.com
- http://dictionary.cambridge.org
- http://www.onelook.com—check out their "Browse Dictionaries" list too!
- http://www.glossarist.com—a superb collection of glossaries on almost any subject you can think of.

Word: Synonyms and Antonyms

Looking for the right word? Trying to avoid repetition? Can't think of the opposite word? Don't have your *Roget's* handy, and you're not connected to the internet? Then check out Word's Thesaurus feature, Mr Gates' answer to *Roget's Thesaurus*.

Select a word in your document, then press **SHIFT+F7** to open the Thesaurus window, or you can call it up from the menu where it is cunningly hidden under **Tools > Language > Thesaurus** (yeah, it's easy to find once you know it's there!)

The word you selected is in the **Looked Up** field, with similar meanings and their word form (noun, verb etc.) below it, and synonyms and antonyms on the right. (If you're using a version of Word prior to Word 2002, antonyms have **(Ant.)** next to them.)

So now you've found a synonym or antonym, but it's not quite what you were looking for. You can double-click on any of the items in any of the lists to display that word as the **Looked Up** word. This screen shot shows the result for **dark (Antonym)**:

Continue double-clicking possible words until you find the one that's just right, then click **Replace**. You can always go back to where you were by clicking **Previous**.

Selecting Text in a PDF document

Did you know that you can copy text from a PDF document displayed in Acrobat Reader? Most people think you can't unless you purchase full Acrobat, so here's how. Click then select the text to copy from the PDF file. Once selected, press **CTRL+C** to copy it to the clipboard where it's ready for pasting into another application (such as Word). That's it! You will lose some formatting and tables, but you will get the text. **Next issue**: Copying images from a PDF file

Microsoft Wish List

Did you know that you can write to Microsoft to make a suggestion on how you would like your favourite program to work better in the future? Send an email to **mswish@microsoft.com**, with the product name in the subject line.

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Word: Jumping to another place

Microsoft Word allows you to quickly jump to another place in your document without scrolling. This is especially useful if you work with long documents.

Many of you may already know that the **Go To** function (press **F5** or select **Edit > Go to** from the menu), allows you to skip to a particular page. But you can also use it to skip to a section, a line, a bookmark, a comment, an endnote or footnote, a field, a table, a graphic, an equation, an object, and even a heading. For example, if the document had been reviewed by a number of people, you could quickly go to the comments from a particular reviewer, by selecting **Comment** from the Go To tab, then selecting the reviewer's name from the list.

Don't forget the **Previous** and **Next** buttons either, and the **+** and **-** keys—if you know your document well, these can move you forward or backward the required number of 'objects' (for example, select **Section** then type **+5** to go to the fifth section in the document).

Beat the Phone System!

From *New Scientist* , 23 February 2002:

"Doesn't it drive you insane when a company answers the phone with one of those horrid, time-consuming, automated systems? Press 1 for this, 2 for that, 3 for the other. And then press 1 for something else, 2 for something different, and so on, until you end up saddled with something completely different from what you were looking for, with no easy option to go back and listen to the options again.

Feedback has been told of a trick that can often defeat this electronic hoop jumping. Just go on pressing 0 like a machine gun. And, hey presto, a real live human being comes on the line.

"Yes, it can work, but don't tell too many people," a telecoms expert begged us. But we've decided only good can come from passing on the tip. If it does not work on the switchboard you are calling, nothing is lost. If it does work, the company that installed the wretched, humiliating system may finally have to accept that it is driving customers to distraction. "

Stanford Guidelines for Web Credibility

For the past few years, a team of researchers at Stanford University has been involved in the Web Credibility Project. They have now issued their top ten guidelines for building the credibility of a website. In summary, these guidelines are:

1. Make it easy to verify the accuracy of the information on your site.
2. Show that there's a real organization behind your site.
3. Highlight the expertise in your organization and in the content and services you provide.
4. Show that honest and trustworthy people stand behind your site.
5. Make it easy to contact you.
6. Design your site so it looks professional (or is appropriate for your purpose).
7. Make your site easy to use -- and useful.
8. Update your site's content often (at least show it's been reviewed recently).
9. Use restraint with any promotional content (e.g., ads, offers).
10. Avoid errors of all types, no matter how small they seem. (Typographical errors and broken links hurt a site's credibility more than most people imagine.)

For full details, see:

- http://www.webcredibility.org
- http://www.webcredibility.org/guidelines/index.html

(Thanks to Frank Smith for alerting me to this study)

Clear instructions

From an earlier version of a nameless software manual (US):

> "The Secondary Type can used to set up Should-Be Where Person/Organization or/and To Person/Organization parameters."

Clear as mud!!

Contributions to "Clear Instructions" welcome! If you find a terrific or horrendous piece of technical writing, send the details to info@cybertext.com.au

News! Late in September I will be attending two training courses: "JavaScript for Writers" and "Hypertext Document Design", part of the *Tri-Nations Seminars for Technical Writers* being presented by Tony Self (Aust.) and Dave Gash (US). These courses are being held in Perth which is terrific, as there is usually very little for tech writers here. Should be great—I've attended some courses and conferences where Tony has presented before and he's very knowledgeable and lots of fun! Dave has a similar reputation, so I hope to learn a lot in the two days. Details: < http://www.hyperwrite.com/trination>

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