cyberText Newsletter

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Making technical information understandable

Welcome!

Welcome to the 17th issue of our quarterly newsletter.

As usual, there are lots of tips and snippets of information that I hope will make a difference.

As the festive (silly?) season approaches, it's time to take a few moments to reflect on the past year and look towards the future. My wish for 2006 is a kinder and more peaceful world than we've experienced lately.

May all your wishes for the coming year come to fruition.

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Eyeball your portion sizes

From Whitney: "I don't have the patience to stand and weigh my [food] portions, and have always wished that I knew how to "eyeball" portion sizes (I'd rather spend my money on a good book than on a food scale). So I was pleased to find this neat table online:"

http://www.kraftfoods.com/kf/HealthyLiving/articles/rulesofthumb.htm

Word 2003: Table Column Widths

Here are some quick and easy keyboard+mouse combinations to stop Word resizing all your table columns when you just want to change one (don't you just hate how Word wants to think for you?):

- **Resize one column only**: Hold down SHIFT as you move a column. All columns to the right will maintain their previous width.
- **Resize one column and keep all others in proportion**: Hold down CTRL as you move a column. All columns to the right will maintain their proportional width to each other.

Sick of trying to get your columns to line up to an exact measurement on the ruler? Hold down ALT as you move a column - the real ruler measurements are shown. You can use SHIFT and CTRL (as above) with ALT too. Of course, if you really want exact column widths, set them on the **Cell** tab found under the **Table > Table Properties** menu.

Now here's one that drives most of us crazy - wide tables that go off the page in Page Layout view. Yes, you can switch to Normal view and fiddle around with the columns to get them back on the page, but you'll have a lot of fiddling to do... and will endure a smidge of frustration. Here's a quick tip to get your table back in line with the page: Select the table that's gone off the visible 'page', then select **Table > AutoFit > AutoFit to Window** from the menu. Voila! Instant table resizing!

Finally, **AutoFit** has another handy option. If you've added or deleted columns, you'll probably have uneven columns in your table. To make them all the same width, drag the far right column to as wide as you want the table, select the whole table, then select **Distribute Columns Evenly** from the **Table > AutoFit** menu.

Captivating demos

In my work with Fractal Technologies, I've been making tutorial movies using Macromedia's *Captivate*. It's an excellent program, easy to use, and it doesn't capture every frame, which means you don't get the 'dancing mouse' effect that early software demo movies used to have. Audio can be added later (you don't have to try and sync it all while you're recording the screen actions). You can see examples of these movies at:

- http://www.fractaltechnologies.com/index.php?c=65
- http://www.fractaltechnologies.com/index.php?c=67

Most of these movies are less than 5 minutes, so they're short sharp bites of information on how to do specific tasks. A great way to teach someone how to do something using 'show and tell'!

Avoiding "on hold" hell

You make a call to speak to someone at a large company, and get endless "If you want us to take all your money, press 6" automated messages. Well, if you live in North America, there's a "Find-a-human" chart that helps you navigate out of automated phone system hell for more than 100 US companies. It tells you the exact numbers to dial and phrases to say to reach an actual person - first time!

You can find the chart here:

http://paulenglish.com/ivr/

Need to email in plain text?

Many older listservs (email discussion lists) don't deal well with HTML or Word formatting readily available in mail programs such as Microsoft *Outlook*.

You can set all your mail to be sent out as plain text, but what if you like HTML email and only a few lists require plain text? Well, you can have the best of both worlds by specifying that certain recipients (your list's posting address, for example) only get plain text. In Outlook 2002 and 2003, here's what you do:

Open the Contact 'card' for the list's address, then double-click on the email address to open the Email Properties window.

Select **Send Plain Text Only** from the **Internet Format** drop-down list, then click **OK**. Save the contact details.

From now on, whenever you send an email to this address, it will be sent in plain text.

Quick way to change font sizes

If you use a wheel mouse, you can zoom in and out making the fonts on a web page, Word document, Outlook email, etc., larger or smaller, just by holding down the CTRL key as you roll the wheel toward you (zoom in) or away from you (zoom out). (**Note**: This may not work on web sites that used fixed font sizes.)

Outlook 2003: More keyboard shortcuts

Calendar. Do you need to reschedule an appointment and want to compare days with nonadjacent dates? Or perhaps you want to schedule something on a Friday, but you want to find a Friday in a quiet week. To show nonadjacent days in the calendar, hold down the CTRL key as you click on various dates in the Date Navigator (a fancy word for the mini calendar in the task pane).

Email. You can quickly jump to an email message from a particular sender. First, sort the emails by the sender's name (**Arranged By: From**), then click on any message in the list to put the cursor focus on the list. Now press the letter you want and you should jump to the first entry with that letter (e.g. press T to go to the first T entry). Even better, quickly type the first few letters (e.g. TE) and you'll jump to the first entry that starts with 'te'. But you have to be quick - if you pause too long between letters, Outlook will treat the second letter as a new search (in the example, you'd jump to the first T entry then the first E entry). This trick works with most sort orders, including Subject.

Book recommendation

Many of you may have already read the *Fish!* story, or seen the documentary about the Pike Place fishmongers in Seattle who use play in the workplace to have a great time and to engage their customers - and, by the way, to sell lots of fish.

Although published in 2002, I only recently read one of the companion books - *Fish! Tales: Real-Life Stories to Help You Transform Your Workplace and Your Life* (by Stephen C. Lundin, Harry Paul, John Christensen, and Philip Strand).

The four key points of the *Fish!* philosophy are:

- **Play**. Have fun and create energy at home or at the office.
- **Make their day.** How can you engage fellow employees, customers and make each other's day?
- **Be present**. How can you make sure you are fully available and aware during conversations with people?
- **Choose your attitude.** Each day you choose how you are going to act or which "side of the bed" you wake up on. The choice is yours and the way you act affects others.

This book reiterates the *Fish!* philosophy, but with real-world examples of companies - large and small - that have incorporated the *Fish!* way of life. For each area, Lundin et al detail how one company did it, then offer small vignettes (*Fish!* bait?) of what others have done. Each detailed section is no more than 10 or so pages, and they fit 3 or 4 vignettes to a page, so this is an easy book to dip into when you have a spare moment.

Email limit blues?

Do you need to email a large file to someone but your ISP or company has a limit on how much you can send? Well, if you have your own website, you can FTP the file to a private area, then tell the recipient where it is.

But what if you don't have your own website? Then try one the free services such as http://www.yousendit.com/ or http://www.dropload.com/

- **YouSendIt**. no registration required; upload your file to their server, they send an email to the recipient telling them where it is, then the recipient dowloads the file; 1gb file limit; automatic deletion occurs after 7 days or 25 downloads whichever is soonest.
- **DropLoad**: requires registration; upload your file, your recipient gets an email telling them how/where to access it, then they download it; 100mb limit per file; automatic deletion after 7 days.

Eco-friendly super white paper?

No, it's not an oxymoron! You CAN get very white, archival-quality, photocopier/printer/fax paper that is eco-friendly and cheap - in fact, the price is much cheaper than many of the 'name' brands.

If you're in Perth, Western Australia, go to http://www.papersense.biz for a great deal! They'll even deliver your paper for free if you order 5 or more boxes.

(If you think this is a plug, you're right! One of the owners has been a friend of mine for nearly 20 years. Previously, she worked in the plantation timber industry; now she's involved in the end product, not the trees.)

News

WritersUA: Yes! I've been accepted to speak in 2006...

STC Australia Chapter: I was in charge of judging the Technical Publications category in the annual competition this year. We had a record number of entries across all categories, and the quality was impressive. Some of last year's entries went on to win big at International level, and with the quality of this year's entries, I can see quite a few again competing with the world's best.

New client: Recently I did some work for the Office of Native Title, turning legal-speak into plain English.

Telecommuting here I come...: We have taken a life-changing step of purchasing just over an acre of land in Western Australia's glorious south west, with the goal to build and move there within 3 to 5 years. So I'll get a chance to learn first hand about the pros and cons of long distance telecommuting.

2006 Conferences: I have two conferences fairly close together again next year - WritersUA in Palm Springs, California in April and AODC in Cairns, Queensland in early May. More next newsletter...

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