cyberText Newsletter

Making technical information understandable

Issue #19: Jun 2006

Welcome!

Welcome to the 19th issue of the quarterly CyberText newsletter. As usual, there are lots of tips and snippets of information that I hope will make your life easier, and some news about conferences I attended recently.

Rhonda Bracey
rhonda.bracey@cybertext.com.au

Meeting Across Time-zones?

Do you work with colleagues scattered around the world, or need to communicate with friends and family at an acceptable hour for all? Then check out this website: http://www.timeanddate.com/worldclock/meeting.html. You select up to four cities, then the online software tries to find a convenient time for everyone. A colour-coded table of times shows you which are the best times.

I entered Perth, Boston, and San Diego and found that the most likely times that were mutually suitable were between 7 and 9am Perth time. Pretty neat.

(Thanks to Stuart for this tip!)

Word 2003 Tips

- **Turn off Reading Layout View**: Does Reading Layout view drive you mad? Well, you can turn it off once and for all. To stop reading layout view from opening automatically when you receive a Word document via email, go to **Tools > Options**, then the **General** tab. Clear the **Allow starting in Reading Layout** check box. That's it!

- **"Page 2" throughout your Table of Contents?** If you get this everywhere in the TOC of a long Word document, here's the reason/solution: http://support.microsoft.com/kb/912940/en-us

Outlook 2003: Activities

Did you know that Outlook keeps track of all communications and other activities you've had with a contact? When you open a contact's details, the **General** tab is the one you view. But there are four other tabs: Details, Activities, Certificates, and All Fields.

If you select the **Activities** tab, Outlook will search for and list all the activities you've had with that person (such as emails, tasks, appointments). You can narrow the search to just emails, for example. When an activity is found, Outlook displays its subject and the folder it is in. You can then double-click on an activity to open it.

Note: If you have a large Outlook file, it may take a few seconds or even a minute or two for the activities to be found. It's worth the wait—especially if you're looking for that vital email you sent to someone months ago.

Tips for Using Colour

I found this on one of the discussion lists I used to subscribe to and kept it as a reminder. Now it's time to share:

"...speaking as a former designer, the best advice I could give would be to design your flyer in black and white first, then add the color. Inexperienced designers often mistake color for good design, or use color to disguise bad design. Doing good design in black and white first, and then adding color logically and judiciously, will ensure that you don't make either mistake.

Tips on using color:

- **Color makes things stand out.** Therefore, use it for things that you want to stand out: headings, subheads, bullet points, callouts. Or put it behind things you want to stand out: sidebars, reversed-out headings (light text on a dark background). Don't use it for body text except in special circumstances. Use it to draw your reader's eye where you want them to go.

- **Use color logically and hierarchically.** Every heading at the same level should have the same color. Repeated graphic elements, such as lines, rules, bullets, sidebars, etc. should have similar color treatments. Don't sprinkle color randomly throughout your document.

- **Have a color scheme.** Choose a limited palette (typically 2-3 dominant colors for a print piece) based on what you want to accomplish with the piece, or based on the mood you want to set. If you want to create an engergetic piece, use bright colors. If you want to create authority, use darker colors. If you want to create a more spiritual feeling, use pale colors and pastels. Use an identifiable color scheme, such as complementary colors (colors on opposite sides of the color wheel) or analogous colors (colors next to each other on the color wheel). For each main color, choose a tint (lighter shade) and shade (darker shade) to use for emphasis, screens, and reverse-outs.

- **Use color judiciously.** Don't color everything in sight; only use color where it actually does something. Unless you're a visual artist, you don't need four-color design. It's more difficult to manage, and one to three colors usually looks more professional.

- **Use light and warm colors to pop; cool and dark colors to recede.** This helps draw your reader's eye to where you want it to go."

(adapted from a post by Nicole Creed to the *InfoGuru Marketing Yahoo Group*; Sept 2004)

Travel Tips

- Check the performance of your airline, flight, even airport security wait times at: http://flightstats.com

- Find out the best seats to book on your airline's aircraft at: http://www.seatguru.com

- Combat the "can't sleep" demon on long flights with an MP3 player. As well as music, you can download talking books (from sites such as http://www.audible.com) or podcasts. [You can get through at least 15 chapters of a Bill Bryson book while winging your way from the US to Australia!]

2006 Conferences

During April and May I spoke at two conferences some two weeks—and a lot of miles—apart. Altogether I was away from paid work for five weeks: a total of three weeks were vacation time with friends and family, and the other two weeks were spent at the conferences... and in airports and aircraft.

In April, I spoke at the WritersUA Conference in Palm Springs, California (topic: "Customizing HTML outputs using AuthorIT") and in May at the AODC Conference in Cairns, Queensland (topic: "Reviewing screen-based content"). From the verbal feedback I received after the presentations, both sessions went well. Presentation slides and handouts from each session are available from the CyberText website.

Along the way, my husband and I went to Tasmania for the first Fremantle Dockers game of the 2006 season in Launceston (we won't talk about that!), visited friends and relations in California, spent a week with family in Michigan, and spent a week in Palm Cove (far north Queensland) doing all the touristy things with a friend who was over from the US for the AODC Conference.

I wrote a blog of my travels and have put my photos up:

- Blog: http://sandgroper14.wordpress.com (go to the April and early May entries)
- Photos: http://community.webshots.com/user/sandgroper7/3

Firefox: Dictionary Extension

If you use Firefox (http://www.mozilla.com) as your web browser, then you can download a very small (20kb) plug-in that lets you see the dictionary meaning of any word on a web page.

Download from: https://addons.mozilla.org/firefox/1171/

Book recommendations

Two work-related books this time...

- Lynne Truss' best-selling *Eats Shoots and Leaves: The Zero Tolerance Approach to Punctuation*. Truss has something to say about all the glaring (and not so glaring) punctuation errors that abound in modern life. And if you feel like joining her movement for the correct use of punctuation, the book even includes punctuation stickers (large black apostrophes, commas, semi-colons, and the like) that you can surreptitiously place on signs, menus, etc.
- *The Zen of CSS Design* by Dave Shea and Molly Holzschlag. Their book analyses some of the beautiful designs found on the CSS Zen Garden website (http://www.csszengarden.com). They explain the philosophy behind the website and why the chosen designs 'work'. A beautiful book in its own right, and very useful for those involved in web design as it details how particular effects were achieved using only CSS.

Writing Tips for Non-Writers...

(Full details: See *Writing Tips for Non-Writers Who Don't Want to Work at Writing* at http://www.scalzi.com/whatever/004023.html)

- Speak what you write
- Punctuate, damn you
- With sentences, shorter is better than longer
- Learn to friggin' spell
- Don't use words you don't really know
- Grammar matters...
- Front-load your point (get to the point early)
- Try to write well every single time you write
- Read people who write well
- When in doubt, simplify
- Speak what you write

Addictive website

Do you like words? Think you have a good understanding of the origin of common words we use today? Then test yourself—and drive yourself just a little crazy—on this website: http://www.etymologic.com

Retool your computer

PC running a little slow these days? Does Windows take forever to start up? Internet connection sluggish? Do you have less free hard drive space than you think you should?

Check out System Mechanic, a multi-purpose program that scours your PC, even those dark corners of your Program Files and Windows directories that few of us are brave enough to enter. It cleans out temporary files, orphaned files and Registry values from long-ago-uninstalled programs, fixes performance leaks, audits security settings and sets them to values that are truly protective, defrags your hard drive, and a myriad of other tasks. Regular scans can be scheduled, and the program tells you what it's done.

System Mechanic is available in standard and professional versions ($50 and $70 USD respectively) from: http://www.iolo.com.

(Thanks to Whitney for this article)

News

New client: City of Subiaco (editing and rewriting fact sheets for distribution to small businesses).

STC Members: My very good friend and world-renowned Help guru and colleague, Char James-Tanny, was elected Secretary of the Society for Technical Communication. Congratulations Char!