

Prioritise your tasks

Improve your way of working and become more efficient



Communicator

The Institute of Scientific and Technical Communicators
Autumn 2016



Create compliant manuals for the US

Implement Swagger with API docs

Write a winning proposal

Misunderstandings around women in techcomm



President's view

As I write this, the sun has just broken through the downpour for the first time today and a very busy blackbird is snatching insects from the back lawn and stuffing them into the mouths of its fully grown - but still dependent - youngsters. I can almost hear her, "Come on, you lot! We probably don't have long... open wide!" It's a bit how I feel about the President's View articles - I get a few chances a year to share my thoughts with you, and I'm desperately trying to make them useful and relevant without the benefit of a crystal ball to know how the 'weather' is going to be by the time you're reading them. So, as has become the norm, here are 'snatches' from my current thought processes.

Reflections on referendums

I don't think many people can have missed the extremely significant referendum that took place in June. I'm not going to mention which way the vote went, or discuss arguments in favour of one way or the other. Instead, I'm going to focus on process and turnout.

Effectively, the referendum was a very large opinion poll, but with two fundamental differences. It was not a representative sample: everyone eligible was invited (they received polling cards if they'd registered) and encouraged to have their say, and checks were made to ensure that people could only vote once. Of course, quite a few people didn't vote at all: some couldn't, some declined for personal or political reasons, and I expect some simply couldn't see the point.

I asked in a recent email which of us used the Oxford University Press resources, and I'd like to thank the four people who responded (you know

who you are). This bothered me: at face value, only four people are using any of the titles at what would be a reasonable cost if more were using them, but is significant when the numbers are so small. However, are we right to assume that because no-one else has been in touch that we can stop our subscription to all but the specific titles mentioned by those who replied? My guess is that if we did, there would be an outcry.

We use a tool called SurveyMonkey (www.surveymonkey.co.uk) to carry out surveys of our members and the wider technical communication community from time-to-time. I'm going to use it to get some hard numbers - but as with the referendum, if people don't vote, we'll have to assume they don't mind either way.

Election fever

Still on the theme of voting, every corporate member (Member and Fellow) has a say in the way in which the ISTC is run.

Each year at the AGM, we elect new council members and re-elect those whose term of office end-date is approaching. The AGM is held during the Wednesday lunchtime session of TCUK, which means that the attendance is relatively low (only those attending the conference are likely to attend the AGM, unless it happens to be on someone's doorstep). Note that you can attend the AGM without attending the conference - that is not a problem.

We have always offered proxy votes to people unable to attend, but the numbers taking up this option has always been small, and dwindling in recent years. With a proxy vote, you can nominate someone else to vote on your behalf, either by discussing with that person what your vote should be or allowing the proxy to use his or her discretion. (The ISTC doesn't record what a voter has asked a proxy to vote - that would be closer to a postal vote.)

Unlike an opinion poll, for a vote in an election (even an ISTC election), we need to know that only those eligible to vote have done so, and that they have only voted once. Unless it has features I'm unaware of this probably makes a tool such as SurveyMonkey unsuitable for the purpose, and we have investigated using specialised voting software.

At the time of writing this, I don't know whether we will be using this software or not, but if we do, we will need significant numbers voting to justify the cost.

It would help if we knew why people weren't voting: maybe a few reminders would help? Or a bit more information about who you're voting for? Or maybe you're just happy with the way things are going?

Standing for election

We are always on the lookout for new people to join the ISTC Council. Unfortunately, the deadline for nominations for this year has passed, but if you want to get involved, get in touch. We can co-opt you onto the Council in the interim, and you can stand for election next year. To find out more, contact an existing member of the Council or go to www.istc.org.uk/about-the-istc/governance

TCUK 2016

I'm booked in for TCUK and hope to see you there. I'm at the stage now where I'm visiting the website and trying to decide what would be most useful to me, what would be most interesting, and rejoicing when the two coincide. For me, it's looking like a particularly good programme this year, so I'm a little spoilt for choice. 



TCUK 2016
13-15 September,
 Wyboston Lakes, Bedfordshire
<http://technicalcommunicationuk.com>

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