

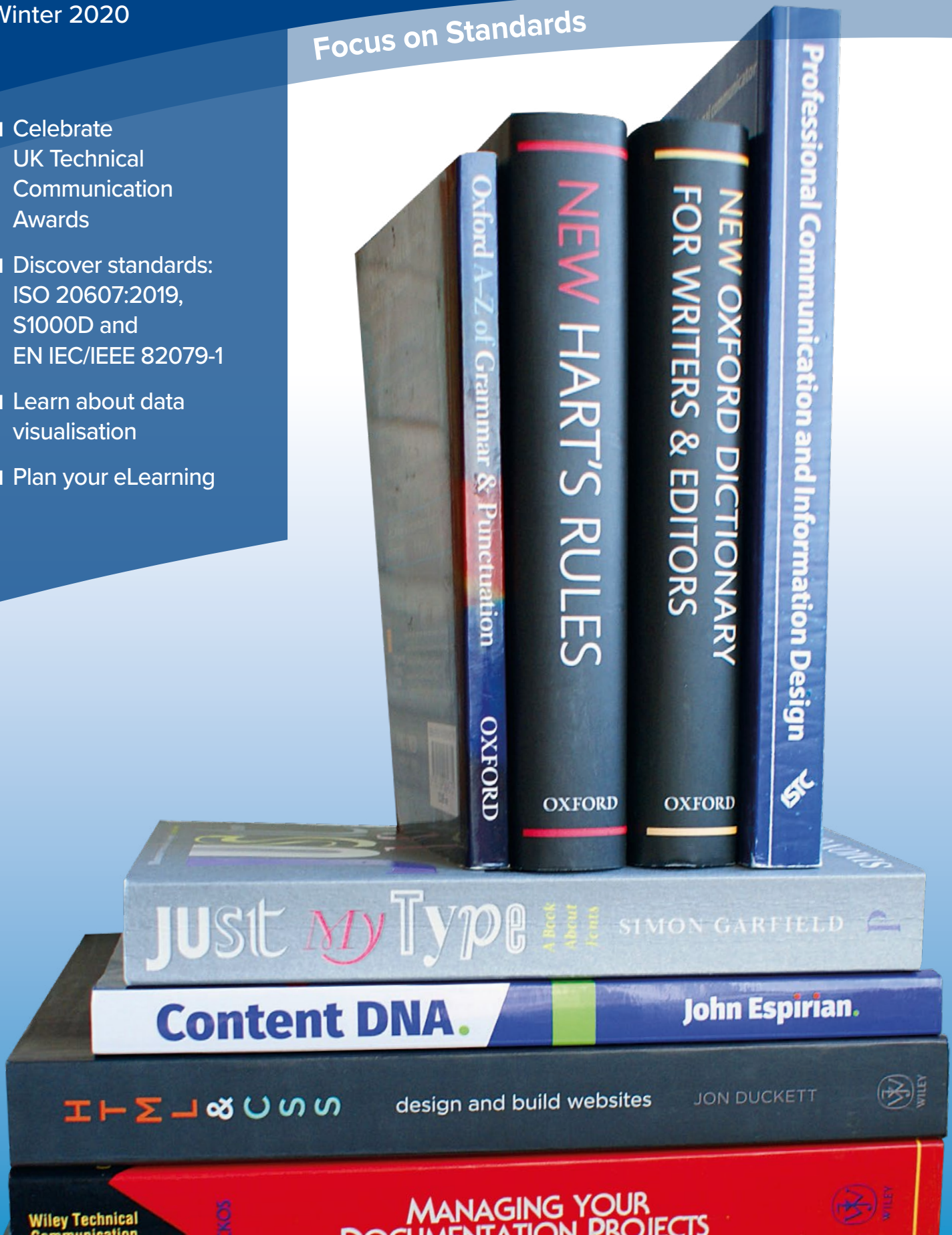
Communicator

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Docs for boats

Will Evans provides some insight of working for an Oxfordshire based boat builders.



What with being a busy engineering and manufacturing firm, the office is generally a hive of activity by the time I arrive for an 8 am start. Logging into Microsoft Teams is generally the first task. Use of Teams was not initially widespread throughout the organisation, but what with recent social distancing measures requiring a large percentage of the workforce working from home, its adoption increased quite rapidly. This demanded a steep learning curve for all and in a short space of time. We predominately use Teams for all internal communication leaving much of the external communication via email. Teams can be a great tool in that you can keep many people informed about project progress or collaborate on ideas without creating that intimidating inbox waiting to be opened for you each morning. Teams can also easily become a slightly less useful tool, in that if not adequately managed, can become cluttered with too many channels making it difficult to find that document or a conversation you had a few weeks ago with a colleague.

As we have a busy production line and tight build timescales, any attempt made to create a plan for myself for the day can easily break down before the first hour is over. This is due to production staff's regular ad-hoc requests for documentation and technical information. This can be anything from a work instruction, engineering drawing, to checking the placement of a component in CAD assembly models. I, therefore,

tend to keep my schedule somewhat fluid for the day, and only schedule blocks of time towards the afternoon for deeper work.

With the urgent engineering support tasks addressed, I then look to working on some of the longer lead items of work such as authoring content for owner's manuals. As our boats are luxury products, we prefer to provide our owner's manuals as a high-quality colour print booklet. Whilst also providing the facility for customers to download a digital version in PDF from our main website if required. Thankfully, an external graphic designer handles much of the heavy lifting in terms of graphic design, page layout and translation within InDesign. This leaves me to concentrate on writing easy to read, technically correct content. Having experience with using InDesign myself does, however, facilitate ease of exchanging written content and illustrations. A pre-printed colour print owner's manual certainly does not come without its downsides. Products change and develop over time, both in visual appearance and how they are operated. And so, with this, the documentation needs to keep up-to-date and reflect these changes. With this requirement to keep docs up-to-date, and a purchasing department keen to order large quantities to retain volume pricing, ensuring the owner's manual directly reflects the product it is shipped with can be a real balancing act! A working knowledge and understanding of relevant ISO standards also plays a key part in this area of the role. For instance, ISO 10240 Small Craft — Owner's manual, specifies requirements for the information which should be included in a manual to enable safe operation of a small boat. I have found standards such as this provide an ideal document outline should you be starting a document from scratch.

Another key part of my role is the production of internal work instructions. These involve going out onto the production floor and watching SME's, engineers in this case, complete a stage of production. This could be

anything from laminating glass mat to produce the hull of the boat to installing a GPS navigation system on the driver's helm. During this time, I will be looking to gather as much content as possible. Either by jotting down each assembly step and part numbers used, photographing each stage, or even recording a short video for more complex tasks. Upon returning to my desk I outline the key components of the task before reading through my notes and writing out each detailed step for the final document. Again, I use InDesign due to its flexibility and power in creating structured textual layouts incorporating many images, diagrams, or illustrations.

Much, if not all, of this written content is unstructured, predominately due to the needs of the business not currently requiring this. Although, with the increase in requests and overall volume of documentation, I hope to change this soon. To increase my knowledge and skills in structured authoring and technical writing, I generally try to spend a few evenings a week reading a book on DITA/XML standards or just practising writing in Simplified Technical English. Signing up for the ISTC Mentoring Scheme has provided an invaluable opportunity to discuss industry matters with more experienced authors and gain feedback on STE writing tasks as mentioned above.

I try to get things wrapped up and leave the office by 5 pm. This ensures I have enough time in the evening to get some exercise such as a walk as well as get some downtime in preparation for another day. ■

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